

Malachi-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

Order In The Court. The Chicago Tribune documented Kate Darmody, visiting the White House as a member of the Northwestern University's 2005 national champion Lacrosse team, being photographed with the President... wearing "flip-flops." Comfort took *a priori*. Same for God's people during Malachi's day, and now there's a burden ("*oracle*" or message) from God... a weight pressing down having to do with "weightlessness" (*insincerity, indifference*) among God's people. They are in danger of "*losing touch with the living God.*" (Benson) Sound familiar? As God speaks into their times, so He speaks into ours. Like a prosecuting attorney in court, Malachi's opening argument challenges Israel's doubting, even spurning, the Lord's outrageous, covenant love (1-5). Verdict? Guilty... but. What? You will see a different day with a different heart... one day (Rev.2:1-7). And one day, there will come a different Mediator, because clearly their spiritual mediators (Priests) had failed miserably. That's Attorney Malachi's second argument: compromise and corruption starts at the top (6-14). How? Improper, insincere worship practices. Worship is to please an audience of One. Ok... now you understand what your pastors and ruling elders are doing in crafting a worship service! God's way over against man's way to promote the great name and glory of God alone. Anything less is dishonor and disrespect. Verdict? Wait... says the Lord, for I am not finished with you (ch.2) But "*My name will be feared among the nations.*" (honored, worshipped in awe; 14).

Chapter 2

Saltlessness. Blessing was the priests' business (Deut.6:23-27). "As mediators between God and man... it's why people came to the priests. Were it to fail..." (Douglas Stuart) Mercy to the nations, "My covenant of life and peace"; the whole world salivates. Levi's legacy was "salty," but you, O priests, what of your legacy? Saltless! (1-9; Matt.5:13) True then and true today: what people most need from a pastor is his own holiness; conversely, "walking death can never minister life." But here also is a severe mercy (and graphic) to spiritual leadership. Note the conditional "if": own it, deep humility, sincere repentance and faith, and then get up, take the next step as an instrument in the Redeemer's hands. And it's not just the one in the pulpit but those in the pew: faithless and feckless, in worship to God and in relationship to man... and never forget there's a connection between the two! (10-16) How so? Malachi cites adulterous and broken marriage vows as evidence. There is an expected oneness we're to have in marriage and there is an expected oneness we're to have with God. And you're wondering "why God no longer responds to your prayers? No longer is pleased with your worship?" God knows all and sees all, and the only hope lies in a new salty Priest to mediate God's mercy and grace... a different kind of worship from a different kind of salty people.

Chapter 3

The Refiner's Fire. The Covenant Lord continues to prosecute His case. First, cynicism & a bitter spirit (*resulting from the way one sizes-up the world, our circumstances*), because, after all, we're clean in our own eyes, right? (2:17) Second, gross immorality and the lack of compassion (5). Third, robbery of God's tithe (8-10). Fourth, refusal to serve God, to invest one's life in the things of God, and leading others to do the same (13-15). These are sinful things God hates! *Goodness & justice, you say? Right. Does God even see, care? Where is He?* Actually, right around the corner, says Malachi! This will be confirmed by the "*messenger*" to come (a kind of Elijah figure, which the NT reveals is John the Baptist Lk.1:17). The Lord (Jesus) will see you, but are you sure you want to see Him? Most did not in His first coming, and here there is a conflation of both comings, the first and the last. Malachi describes the Lord's coming(s) as a "*refiner's fire.*" God desires that His people are holy just as He is holy (1 Pet. 1:15-16). Like the impurities in metals, the dross of sin must be removed. But how can one experience His fire as refining

and not consuming? The answer is all-important: to receive the greatest gift, Malachi says – the gift of repentance (6-12). The Lord never changes, but we must! But the Lord is moved (as the compassionate Prodigal's father); that's the good news and a powerful incentive to move toward Him! The life of repentance, the renewal of holy words to one another, and the turning in the fear of the Lord... by His grace He turns us... this is the blessing over the blighting of our church and of our land (16-18). Revival always begins at home.

Chapter 4

The Day of the Lord. The Biblical view of history is not cyclical, it is linear... building to a final climax. While the phrase "*day of the Lord*" is used many times in the Old Testament and carries temporal moments, judgments, historical shadows (one mountain peak over another), the terminus of history is the great Day of Judgement on which the scales of justice will ultimately be balanced (Isa.13:6; Jer.46:10; Joel 2:31; Matt.24-25; 2 Pet.3:10). Note first the description, a picture of the last day (1-3). The central feature is the *sun*, and Malachi reminds us that the rising of the same sun can bring about two very different effects: burning like a furnace and frolicking like young calves; delight to some and to others destruction. And who is the "*sun of righteousness*"? The Lord Jesus Christ, radiating righteousness and ushering in a "*new heaven and a new earth*," (2 Pet.3:13) the home of imperfect people who by God's transforming grace revere His name and "*love His appearing*" (2 Tim.4:8). Not so for the "*arrogant, evildoers*"; they will be burned to the root – "*stubble*." Lest one get tickled that the world will *get what's a comin'*, don't miss the thrust of Malachi's message: it is addressed to Judah... to the professed people of God! Check out Jesus' *Sermon on the Mount* (Matt.7:21-23). The Good News is that the Lord's warnings of the last day are often the tokens of His particular love! Lastly, note the preparation for the last day (4-6). What did God do in order to prepare His people for "*the day*"? He sends. God is a sending God, always reaching out to His people, first by ancient Moses and then a future Elijah (*John the Baptist*). In Moses, the Lord is reminding His people of the purpose of the Covenant (*Law*): not merit but always mercy. *Salvation belongs to the Lord*. In John the Baptist, the Lord calls us to repentance and faith because there is a sense in which the "*last day*" (*Day of the Lord*) was brought forward and broke into history in the coming of Jesus. The effect upon and fruit among those prepared, then and now, is a transforming love. Revival always begins at home.

-Reflecting on Malachi-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in Malachi. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish Malachi before we move forward?

"Get wisdom; get insight; do not forget, and do not turn away from the words of my mouth." Proverbs 4.5

