

Subject: *God's Burden for His Blessed People*

Scripture: *Malachi 1:1-14*

The prophet Malachi has a name that means “my messenger.” Like other OT prophets, The prophets were not in a popularity contest to gain the approval of their audience. They lived for one thing only...to deliver God’s message clearly and completely, taking nothing from it and adding nothing to it...just delivering the plain unvarnished truth to the people.

Malachi’s message from God is called “the burden of the word of the Lord,” which reveals the nature of his message. Malachi had a message from God that was direct and heavy, not soft and sweet. God was burdened. Malachi’s heart was burdened. To understand this burden we must understand something about the historical context of the book.

After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, some of the Jews had returned to Jerusalem and their homeland. About 50,000 people returned, but most of the people did not return. The temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem about 515 B.C., and the wall around Jerusalem had been rebuilt. So worship had been reestablished and the people felt secure again. The people were looking forward to the coming Messiah, but time went on and that hadn’t happened. In the meantime the people became complacent and indifferent. They went to the Temple and went through the motions of worship, bringing their sacrifices to the priests, but their heart wasn’t in it. The people were disheartened because things just weren’t the same as they used to be.

But God was the same. He hadn’t changed at all. The main problem was their ingratitude. They were so blessed and they should have been thankful and faithful to God, but they were unthankful and unfaithful. They focused on themselves and their circumstances when they should have focused on God and His blessings. Here’s what happened...the people were blessed but they didn’t realize how blessed they were.

So God confronts and challenges His people through the prophet Malachi. He makes some accusations against the people and they respond with questions like, “What do you mean?” or “How have we been unfaithful?”

1. The people doubted God’s love (Mal. 1:2)

They had no reason to doubt God’s love. He chose them to be His people because He loved them.

2. The people dishonored God’s name (Mal. 1:6-7)

They forgot that God was their Father, their Master, and their King (vs. 13). Other nations would fear God (have respect or reverence for Him), but His own people did not.

3. The people defiled God’s altar (Mal. 1:7-8)

Worship had become a burden instead of a blessing. It was a pain instead of a privilege. And it showed in the way they worshiped. The people brought offerings that cost them nothing. They thought God would be pleased with their half-hearted worship—He wasn’t, and He sent Malachi to tell them so. Malachi 1:10-11, God rebukes the people and tells them that other nations would offer pure offerings to the Lord, but not His own people.

4. The priests disobeyed God's Word and defiled His covenant (Mal. 2:1-16)

The priests had three primary duties: 1) to offer sacrifices and offerings on the altar; 2) to pray for himself and the people; and 3) to teach God's Word to the people.

God called them out for being unfaithful to Him and His calling. They had dishonored God by disobeying His Word and defiling His covenant. God's covenant with Levi is mentioned several times in chapter 2 (vs. 4, 5, 8, 10, and 14). They forgot God's covenant and their responsibility to teach God's Word to the people. They defiled God's covenant and caused the people to sin. God rebuked them for intermarrying with women who worshiped false gods (like Solomon did about 1,000 years earlier). God had commanded the people not to do this (Deut. 7:1-4). They covered the altar with tears (2:13), as a show of repentance. But God saw through it and knew it wasn't real. God knew they had divorced their wives unlawfully (vs. 14-16).

5. The people discredited God's holiness (Mal. 2:17)

They wearied the Lord (2:17) by saying that He didn't care about the conduct of everyone who did evil and they even taunted God, "Where is the God of judgment?" Can you imagine God's people saying that He treats evil like it is good? If He's concerned about sin, then why doesn't He come and judge it?

This is why Malachi's message is called a burden. God was burdened for His blessed people. He had blessed them so much in so many ways, but they didn't care.

They doubted God's love.

They dishonored His name.

They defiled His altar.

The priests disobeyed His Word and defiled His covenant.

The people discredited His holiness.

How can we apply this message from Malachi today?

God is still burdened for His people.

The people who profess to know God and belong to Him are so blessed, but they're not acting like it. Many are ungrateful and unfaithful. Many are indifferent and cold. Many are not motivated to worship and serve.

What is the answer? God will have to awaken us to realize just how good and gracious He is and how blessed we are. God will have to humble us to realize just how great and holy He is and how needy we are. Our greatest need is to realize our need and repent. Our greatest blessing is to realize our blessings and be grateful.