

THE BOOK OF MALACHI - When Spiritual Intimacy Feels Elusive - Pt 8
Sunday, January 15th, 2023, 5:30 p.m.
Pastor Don Horban, Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket, ON

THE KIND OF PEOPLE WHO WEARY GOD

Malachi 2:17- 3:5 - "You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?" [3:1] "Behold, I send my messenger and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.[2] But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.[3] He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.[4] Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.[5] "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts."

This is a passage of Scripture that deals with how God works His way into the hearts of His people. It's about how spiritual change takes place. It's about my involvement in moving **with** or **against** the purifying influences of His Spirit beyond certain easy plateau levels of spirituality.

The process of spiritual purifying involves more than just **words** or the **practice of religion**. Spiritual purification is almost always a costly venture. It will never come to the casual or the content. It almost never falls within the patterns of the routine. Spiritual purifying - or revival (these are the same thing in the Scriptures) shatters routines. It breaks old response patterns. It almost always humbles and shakes everyone in its wake.

This is the idea in our text. When God speaks through the prophet about **"launderer's soap"**(3:2) and the **"refiner's fire"**(3:3). The primary idea is spiritual purification takes place at a deeper level of our lives than the part people see on the surface. Soap, especially very **strong** soap, works into the inner recesses of the stain. And fire, as we all know, changes everything, right to the heart of the structure or fuel it burns.

This is the governing principle of this great passage. It's what gets boiled out of the very center of that piece of silver that makes it pure. It's what gets soaked out of the very threads of that fabric that makes the garment fresh. There's a certain kind of cleaning that's being described here. You can't purify a lump of silver by chipping away little bits and pieces of it from the outside. The silver itself has to be broken down - melted - and reformed with something boiled out of it.

And among the people of God in Malachi's day the Lord says, **"That hasn't happened to very many of you!"** They were doing different things. They were doing nice things. They were doing religious things. But their hearts hadn't been melted down - boiled out - and remade. And until that deep inward reworking by the Spirit of God takes place, religion wearies both God and man..

And that's where our passage starts:

1) **A DESCRIPTION OF A BARREN RELIGION**

Malachi 2:17 - "You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

Those words are somewhat unusual. Being that God is both all powerful and all patient we don't think of Him as being wearied with anything. This is the God who created the universe without expending any amount of energy from Himself at all, saying, ***"You people are wearing me out! I can't stand much more of this!"***

What is the cause of God's weariness? Two sources are mentioned in these verses:

- a) ***They hadn't allowed themselves to be benefitted by God's reproofs*** - They had set their hearts to argue with the Lord. They had forsaken a ***simple listening*** to God's Word. They always had a come-back. You can see the pattern in that **seventeenth verse** - **"You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?"** This is the way they had come to ***set their hearts*** before the Word of God.

I say they had set their hearts. This attitude is more common in all of our hearts than we know. And it becomes a pattern - a way of ***reflexively responding*** to anything we don't want to hear from the Lord because of the cost that real purification - real revival - would entail.

These arguments against God aren't ones a person thinks through in advance. We're aware enough to know it's wrong to talk to God like that out loud. But attitudes arise. These silent thoughts seem to line themselves up almost automatically. They seem to carry a life of their own to still what we know God calls us to in our quest for communion with Him. This is the most profound and deep rooted spiritual warfare. It's like the ***cold war*** spiritual warfare.

This response becomes ***habit forming***. You can see this in the book of Malachi: **Malachi 1:2** - "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" **Malachi 1:6** - "And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' **Malachi 1:7** - "By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?'" **Malachi 2:17** - "You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" **Malachi 3:8** - "Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?'" **Malachi 3:13** - "Your words have been hard against me, says the Lord. But you say, 'How have we spoken against you?'"

So we see this armed stance. They're always ready to talk back, ever ready to defend their guilty consciences. That is the spirit of the age. It is spawned by Satan himself. We call it speaking our mind or sticking up for our rights or having the courage of our own convictions. But that's not it at all.

Just as in the days of Malachi, this self-defensive stance becomes a habit. And the book of Malachi is so insightful because it shows how **religious** people can be trapped by it. It is the death-dealing mind-set with which we quickly learn to face a holy God when He speaks to us about costly change and repentance. It grows into the automatic response to any who would challenge. I'm not even sure I'm right, but I don't want to **appear** I'm not right.

Our age of talk shows, debates, labor squabbles, protests, and the obsessive clamoring for our human rights breeds the antichrist heart of self-expression like a bad religion. People, even in the church, begin to feel that they don't have to receive anything gently or humbly anymore. Not even from our Creator.

And this addiction to a stance of self defense is the exact opposite of that position of childlikeness that Jesus talked about. And we need to think of those words - **"Unless you receive the kingdom like a little child, you can't enter."** So that stance of child-likeness that we are dealing with here makes or breaks us in the life of Jesus.

Remember where we are. The people were wearying the Lord. And this is the first thing that wearied the Lord - an argumentative stance - a defensive clawing to justify their spiritual denseness.

But there was a second way the people were wearying the Lord:

- b) ***The people of God no longer distinguished between right and wrong.*** They continued to be interested in God for His blessing on their lives. They continued in their religious practices. But they didn't apply their religious convictions to the ***moral decisions*** of daily living.

Malachi 2:17 - "You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

We need to understand the setting for these words. They come at the very close of the Old Testament. After these words, God will be prophetically silent for a very long stretch - over four hundred years. After these words from Malachi, the next thing to take place in God's plan is the sending of His Son into the world.

The whole Old Testament was given in preparation for that single event. And here you have God's chosen people, after all His dealings with them, after all His teaching, all His prophets, all of His judgements - and they still don't want to listen to God. They still justify their sin. And after the rousing call to repentance from John the baptist, the Incarnation of Jesus, God the Son, is the next divine event on the horizon. And these chosen people still choose to continue in their sin over pursuing righteousness and holiness.

It wasn't that these people weren't interested in God ***at all***. They were, in a certain sense. That's why it's important to notice the ***two*** issues raised by the prophet in **Malachi 2:17** - ***"You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"***

Look at that second question first. These people were quick to complain when God wasn't blessing their lives. Why wasn't He listening to their prayers? Why didn't His glory dwell in that new temple they built? Why wasn't He prospering them? They were God's covenant people. It just wasn't fair. Where was the God of justice?

In other words, they were keenly aware of God not listening to ***them***, but totally unconcerned that ***they*** weren't listening to God. And they made no mental link between the two. They couldn't connect the dots of their present spiritual condition.

And the point I want to make is this. This is the inevitable spiritual blindness that comes from trying to keep in touch with a God you **know** is holy while persistently organizing your life around your own agenda and desires. You will always end up **numb and senile** to your own sinful condition and **bitter** toward a God who won't change His mind about His commandments. It **always** works out this way.

I said the people ended up **numb and senile** to their own sinful condition. The only remedy to that condition is **repentance**. But there's an urgency to repentance. You can't turn genuine, Spirit-fueled repentance on and off at will. If you ignore a quick and deep repentance for sin your mind will automatically take a different direction. You will **remake another God in your own likeness**.

Look at this in our text - **Malachi 2:17** - "You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, **"Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them."**

We talk a lot about the cost of following Jesus. Let's remind ourselves tonight about the high cost of **not** following Him. If you don't turn in repentance from your sin you only have one other option for self-preservation. You imagine a God who delights in everyone and just wants them all to be happy. You create a God who never judges. This is Christianity on drugs. It may temporarily **feel** good, but it's all a delusion.

And it is very easy to do this. It's easy because God's judgment doesn't always come *immediately* upon the commitment of sin. There's frequently a delay. Sometimes a very long delay. And when nothing seems to be at stake, people quickly think obedience doesn't matter too much to God.

Let me close by reminding all of us of the relevance of this kind of self-deception. True, Malachi's words were recorded a very, very long time ago. It seems like a dusty, archaic past. But let's move the view into a more contemporary mode. In fact, let's look into the future. Let's look, not at where people have been, but at where we're all *going* to be. And what you'll see is this very same deception causing spiritual blindness and eternal loss and damnation:

2 Peter 3:3-10 - "...knowing this first of all, that scoffers will come in the last days with scoffing, following their own sinful desires. [4] They will say, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation." [5] For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, [6] and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. [7] But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.[8] But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. [9] The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. [10] But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed."

I guess we need Malachi's warning after all.