

Holding on to Zeal

Malachi 1:6-14

I. One interesting approach to studying the book of Malachi is to take note of the many contrasts that the book holds:

- A. There is the priesthood, who instead of completing the task of leading God's people, are instead leading them in acts of sin
- B. Then there are the people themselves, who are supposed to be set apart for God, who've simply set themselves apart for themselves
- C. You see God expressing His love for a people who do not return His love:
 - 1. And yet the one of the largest contrasts is how far the scales have tipped regarding their zeal for the Lord:

II. The Prophecy of Malachi takes place after that of Haggai and Zechariah:

- A. Both of these books begin with a similar set of circumstances ***Hag. 1:2-5, Zech. 1:3-4:***
 - 1. In both cases these two prophets are addressing different parts of the population indicting them of having left the service of the Lord
 - 2. In both cases, there is a call to repentance, and a renewal of the zeal from the people, *Hag. 1:14, Zech. 1:6*
 - 3. There was a great deal accomplished during this time, and so it can be a shock to read these books in order, and see what a drastic difference there is in such a small amount of time!
- B. Looking through the book of Malachi shows several ways in which their loss of zeal manifested itself:
 - 1. We will take some time and look at some of these

III. They lost their zeal to give of their very best: *Mal. 1:6-8*

- A. Take note that Israel had not violated the basic command to give:
 - 1. Israel was still giving and I don't read that they were letting it even lapse: They still sacrificed, they still tithed:

B. What Israel had violated was that which was at the heart of their command to give, and what is at the heart of all service commands: *to give of their best*:

1. *So you shall also present an offering to the Lord from your tithes, which you receive from the sons of Israel; and from it you shall give the Lord's offering to Aaron the priest. 'Out of all your gifts you shall present every offering due to the Lord, from all the best of them, the sacred part from them.'*: Num 18:28-29

2. You can read the description of Malachi, and compare it to what is said in Numbers and see right away that they were not giving of their best, and it would have been bad enough if that's where they had stopped;

a) Yet they chose to add "insult to injury" by giving to God of their absolute worst:

(1) Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you. 'When a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord to fulfill a special vow or for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it.... So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am the Lord. "You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel: Leviticus 22:20-21; 31-32a

3. This left the Israelites in a very poor situation: Have you thought about what the Hebrew writer said about the power of the blood of bulls and goats in relation to this passage? **Heb. 10:1-4**

a) Even the very best sacrifices that the people could offer didn't hold the power to bring forgiveness of sins, and yet here the people act as if their worst could be pleasing to the Lord!

b) And a detail that only adds to the grief of these verses is that they didn't even see themselves this way!

C. **Is there** warning here for the Christian to take to heart? *Absolutely!*

1. God's people today can easily fall into this same trap: We know that God expects our best: We know that He desires our hearts, minds, and souls and that He expects to come *first* in our lives:

2. Sometimes we talk about making sure we don't give God our "leftovers". That would be an *upgrade* from what Israel was offering before God:

- a) Sometimes we aren't even giving God our "leftovers": we can offer up the most undesirable, spotted part of our lives, and expect that God is going to be satisfied!
- b) Like Israel, we can be involved in this in a completely clueless manner:
 - (i) We need to check the altar of our hearts and make sure that we are offering unblemished sacrifices:

IV. They lost their zeal to put for effort: Mal 1:13

A. Enthusiasm is the mother of effort, and without it nothing great was ever achieved: - RWE

B. Don't be upset by the results you didn't get with the work you didn't do: - Annon

- 1. This is a concept that we are very familiar with! You will only get out of something what you are willing to put into it:
- 2. Reading verse 13, what does it sound like Israel was willing to invest in their relationship with God?

C. Their attitude had placed them into a continuous cycle of decline with no hope for improvement:

- 1. It is *soooo* tiresome to worship the Lord: But I know that I have to, so I'll show up: I don't feel any better at all: this is *soooo* tiresome...

D. Does this sound like an issue that Christians struggle with today?

- 1. I don't get anything out of our Bible classes:
 - a) *Did you read the scriptures ahead of time? Did you take notes and study? Did you ask questions and participate? Did you follow up after class with things you didn't understand? Were you rested and awake? Were you playing on your phone?*
- 2. I don't get anything out of the worship service:
 - a) *Did you sing from the heart, giving heed to the words? Did you focus on the sacrifice of the Lord and what it means for you? Did you actively pray with the one leading? Did you give with excitement because you've purposed in your heart ahead of time?*
- 3. I don't get anything out of my Church family:
 - a) *Are you having people into your home? Are you seeking out to establish relationships? Are you accepting invitations?*

4. Anytime someone starts a sentence with these words, *I don't get anything out of...*, you can about guarantee that they aren't putting anything in to it:

V. They had lost their zeal to be thankful: Mal. 3:8-15

- A. Their failure to give God the complete tithe communicated two things:
 1. First it communicated an extreme lack of thankfulness: God had brought them out of captivity, restored them to their land, and built back their cities and Temple, and they are withholding portions of their tithes?
 - a) This is a dangerous attitude! Paul states in Romans 1:21 that a failure to give thanks to God will lead to a darkened and foolish heart
 2. But their lack of thanks communicated something else: a lack of faith: They held back a portion because they did not believe that the Lord would provide for them:
 - a) Again, this is a cycle that they themselves had placed themselves in:
 - (i) Their half hearted service and hollow repentance had caused the Lord to withhold from them:
 3. They say in v 14 that it is vain to serve God, and so it was vain worship that they offered Him: (1:10)

VI. The Problem with a loss of Zeal:

- A. All of these problems don't exist when one is zealous for the Lord:
 1. There is no problem with giving the Lord our best when we are full of zeal: We can't imagine anything else!
 2. There is no shortage of effort when we are full of zeal: we won't be able to find enough to do!
 3. Our hearts will be full of thanksgiving when they are full of zeal:
- B. But zeal is a fire, and it must continue to be fed or it will go out: And when that happens, all of these problems and more will begin to appear in our spiritual lives:
- C. Always take every opportunity to stir up the zeal within us!