

## **Tim Coad on Malachi, Sunday 19 October 2014**

Okay. Let's look at Malachi and if you want to follow it in your Bible that's good. If you want to just listen that's good too. It's right at the end of the Old Testament. I'm not going to read the whole lot. I know that some of you have already been reading it. That's good and that's encouraging.

It begins like this: "A prophecy, the Word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi." That's all we know about him. It doesn't say anything else about him at all, nothing at all. "I have loved you, says the Lord." That's as far as I'm going to read now, there will be more to come later on but let's just recap for just a moment where we've been. We've looked at Hosea. In Hosea we've seen a man who lived a message of God's forgiveness. Joel, a man who gave a vision of the future led by God's Holy Spirit and of course was quoted on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2.

We looked at Jonah. Paul Horton gave us a good talk on Jonah. A man who reluctantly discovered God's response to repentance and he was a reluctant prophet wasn't he? He ran away in the wrong direction to start with. Eventually God got him back and he did what God told him to do.

Then a little while ago we looked at Habakkuk, a man who asked questions but who learnt to trust God. God encouraged him to put his faith and trust in Yahweh in God. So today we come to the last one at the end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi.

Malachi is a little bit later on in the history of Israel and Judah and the people have returned from exile. If you know the story of Israel they were exiled in Babylon for a period of time away from their country but eventually if you read the books of the Old Testament you will discover that they came home to their own land, they were able to rebuild the temple and eventually to rebuild the palace for the king as well. This is after the . . . quite a long time after the temple has been rebuilt. It's not as big or as dramatic as the temple was before they left but they have a temple to worship in. It's been rebuilt. But it wasn't an easy life. It was a struggle to exist in the land. A struggle to make ends meet and unfortunately like so many societies even today some people were making a lot of money, some people had next to nothing. That kind of rings a bell doesn't it? That's kind of true in our country. It's kind of true in many countries of the world, the very rich and the very poor. And that was true even in Israel.

But unfortunately one of the most important things that was happening in Israel or one of the saddest things that was happening in and around Jerusalem particularly is that people were losing their enthusiasm for God, let's put it that way. They were no longer worshipping God. They were half hearted about their worship. In fact they were drifting away from God. God had seen them go into exile. You can imagine when they were in Babylon they were crying out to God in prayer to get back to Jerusalem. Get back to their own city. Get back to their own land. God had brought them back. They were home again but now having come home again they were beginning to drift away from worship. They were beginning to worship false Gods and other Gods.

As Sue reminded us earlier on they were bringing damaged goods to their worship, to their sacrifices. They were not obedient to God, they were drifting away again

from God's purposes. They were giving, they weren't giving proper justice in the court. There was injustice in the land. They seemed unaware of their own failings, we'll see that later on because actually in Chapter 1, in the first part of the message God says, "I have loved you, says the Lord." And they say, "How have you loved us?" Immediately they're beginning to question God.

I guess we live in an age where many people are challenging faith and sometimes we could say that we live in an age where maybe the church is not being what it ought to be. That was the problem with Israel. They were not being the people that God had called them to be. They were the people of God, they'd been called to be the people of God. They'd been called to reflect the love of God to the nations and to the people around them. They simply weren't doing it even though God had acted on their behalf. Even though God had brought them back from exile. Even though God had overseen the rebuilding of their temple and the opportunity for worship. Even though God had done all those good things for him they were still drifting away from him and that could be true sometimes couldn't it? Of our own churches. That in spite of God's goodness, in spite of God's love we still may be don't honour Him the way that we should. That's the challenge of Malachi. That's the challenge he brings to the people.

And so the first point really in Chapter 1 is God's love and my response. God's love and my response. I love the beginning of Malachi because the first words out of his mouth, or the first recorded words out of his mouth is, "God says He loves you." That's the first thing that he says. That's quite a dramatic, really quite a dramatic thing to God to begin with. When you think of the people who are not honouring God, not worshipping God properly, not living just lives and God's first message to them is, "I love you. I love my people. I love you."

I was just thinking about this you know, sometimes when my sons or my daughters are on the telephone, sometimes close friends of mine, people that are important to me, sometimes at the end of the conversation there will be these last few words, "Love you. Love you, Dad." And it's at the end of the conversation. Malachi's message is the first thing that God says. This is the context I'm going to set in everything that I'm going to say to you, "I love you." It's not quite like the father that says to the child when he's going to punish the child for his wrong doing, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." [Laughter]. It's not quite like that I don't think.

This is God simply saying, "I love you. You are important to me. You are valuable to me." And I have to say that I think that is the simplest most profound message of the whole Bible. You know you might say well that's very simplistic to say God loves you. I don't know, when I was a teenager we used to go on the tube in London wearing those sticky Arthur Blessitt badges that said, "Smile, God Loves You." Some of us became local vandals and stuck them on the tube and things like that and it said, "Smile, God Loves You" everywhere. I used to think, well, that's very simplistic. The Gospel is not simple but Malachi, the first thing he says to the people is, "God loves you. Now I'm going to have a go at you. I'm going to tell you what's wrong." But set it in this context, "God loves you." That's line one, that's the beginning.

How do the people respond? How would you respond when someone says to you, "I love you," as some of you will know we have a couple in the church, we won't point Alan and Ruth out . . . oh Gosh, I've done it [laughter]. They've only been married a very short time but I'm sure there was a time in your meeting experience, perhaps over a cup of coffee in church, I don't know when those words were said by one or the other. I don't know who said them first but I'm sure somebody did. I jolly well hope so because I married them [laughter]. But, you know it was one of those things. It was important words and it's such a simple and yet such a deep message.

I wonder if . . . I wonder what your response was when you first . . . when somebody said to you, "I love you." I wonder if your response was, "Do you? Do you really? How do I know that? Prove it to me? Go and buy me a nice present, go and do something nice." You know, that's what these people said. They said, "How have you loved us?" And I can imagine God walking around in Heaven, if he does, and going, "After all I've done, I brought them back from exile, I brought them back home, I've done all this, they've rebuilt the temple and now they're saying how have you loved us?" For goodness sake Israel, can't you see? Can't you see that God loves you? It's so simple. Can't you see what God's doing for you?

And it was interesting to me, how do I respond when people say that? We might, I suppose, question them. I think the first time I ever said that to Eunice she said to me, "Do you? What does that mean?" You know it was the first thing to say when we'd be . . . because we didn't see each other very often. Only every couple of weeks and it might have been over the phone but I don't think it was. I think it was probably on a station platform when we were just saying good-bye and I was getting on a train back to London. But the people of Judah and Israel are cynical in response to God. Would you be like that? "How have you loved us?" I think they're kind of making an excuse for their behaviour. They want to get on with doing the wrong stuff. They don't want to listen to what God says. They want to start misbehaving . They want to do their own thing. They are not responding. So they're being slightly cynical towards God's response to them.

Chapter 1 is the dialogue between the people of Israel and God through Malachi about their half hearted response to God. Sue's read some of it to us already. God says, "Look, this is what you are doing. You are bringing the wrong sort of sacrifices. You're bringing damaged animals, blind animals. You've got better but you are looking around your flock and you're saying, "What are we going to give to God? What are we going to give to God? Well that one isn't one we'd want anyway, we'll give that one to God. That's a bit damaged, we'll give that one to God and we'll keep the best for ourselves." That wasn't the attitude that God . . . it wasn't that they . . . it wasn't to do with them being poor and not being able to give to God. They had the things to give to God but they were giving second best. Does that make sense? It was a deliberate choice on their part to give something less than their best.

Now it's quite some challenging verses in the beginning of Malachi because God then responds to them and he says, "I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated." Now that's a tough passage. That's a tough thing for God to say. You need to understand and it comes again later on what God means when he talks about how

he hated Esau. It doesn't mean that Esau had no chance to respond to God. It doesn't mean that God chooses some people to love and to care for and to respond to and others that he doesn't want to know. It doesn't mean that at all. What God is saying is, "I actually chose in my wisdom to work through . . ." 'cause look at Jacob and Esau in the Bible.

If you know anything about Jacob and Esau in the Bible you know that Jacob wasn't exactly top of the tree when it came to honesty was he? In fact he was a liar. In fact he was a cheat. And God says, "Who can I use to perpetrate my people and to . . . I know, I'll use that liar and that cheat." That's amazing really. So God isn't saying, "Look I hate Esau for some random reason." God decided to use Jacob. Esau had the opportunity, too, to respond to God and I think if you read the Bible in some ways we saw Esau also did see God's blessing but it was in a different way.

So God isn't saying he's deliberately chosen to reject Esau for some arbitrary reason. He doesn't say that Esau is lost from any chance of salvation. It's not hate in that sense. It's simply God saying, "Look, this is the history of the people. I've worked though Jacob and I've revealed myself through Jacob." And now he's not just talking about Jacob or Esau, he's referring to them in history but he's also saying, "Look, now sadly, unfortunately what's happened is that the descendants" (that's the word) [input from audience — unclear 11:26] — yeah, that's it. That's a bit long [laughter]. The people coming from Judah and Esau are now at odds with each other and unfortunately there's a battle going on as well. So it's not hate in the sense we use it. It's God saying, "Look, this is how I've worked but you haven't worked with me. You haven't worked with me. You haven't responded and you have failed to honour God, you've failed to do what God has called you to do. You've failed to be what God has called you to be." And in fact, do you know what he says? God says, "You don't even give me the honour, you don't give me the credit," and in Verse 8 . . . there's an interesting bit in Verse 8, He said, "When you offer blind animals for sacrifice is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor." In other words He said, "You don't offer rubbish to the worldly leaders. You don't ring up the Inland Revenue and say I'm only going to pay you half my taxes this month because they'd be down on you like a so and so."

So He said, "You honour them but you don't honour me." This was the kind of corruption that was going on in the world and worshipping had become to them something of a burden when it was meant to be a joy. 'You profane it saying, "The Lord's table is defiled, His food is contemptible," and you say, "What a burden." ' What a burden. Oh no, I'm not getting up this morning. I don't want to have to go to church. I don't want to mix with those rotten and awkward people." And my wife says, "You've got to go. You're the Minister." [Laughter]

But you know this is the kind of thing the people were saying, worship had lost its joy and lost its pleasure. Well of course it had because they were corrupt. They were unjust. They were a rotten lot of people. So this was, if you like, their response to God's love. When you think about it it's a pretty awful response isn't it? Really when God says first of all, "I love you," and continues to love them in spite of everything.

I was reading at Friendship Group a different response to somebody who had discovered God's love and that was the guy who wrote the book of Lamentations, probably Jeremiah and in Lamentations Chapter 3 he says, "I remember my affliction and wandering, the bitterness and the gall. I will remember them and my soul is downcast within me yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope." So here's Jeremiah having a really difficult time, really having a hard time, really having a lot of problems and he says, "Therefore I have hope because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed. His compassions never fail. They are new every morning. Great is your faithfulness." He then went on to write a hymn didn't he? [Laughter] or somebody did.

"I said to myself the Lord is my portion therefore I will wait for Him." Do you see the difference in response. Jeremiah says, "Life's a bummer basically. I've got a problem. I've got a lot of difficulties but I am going to choose to trust Yahweh because I know He loves me, I know He cares for me and I know I might have to wait a while for His actions to come through in my life but I am prepared to wait on Him. I am prepared to trust Him."

What a different reaction to the reaction of the people that Malachi was talking to. Jeremiah chose to trust and chose to wait. The people of Malachi's time unfortunately chose to be unjust. They chose to reject. They chose to be half hearted in their worship.

So the first message in Malachi is quite simple, God loves you. God loves you and He wants you, He longs for you to respond to Him in the best possible way. To respond to Him for thanksgiving, to respond to Him with faith, to respond to Him with trust and then He promises . . . well what He promises we'll come to later.

But the second thing, in Chapter 2, is God's faithfulness and mine which I suppose stems out of this. We looked at God's love and my response, now we look at God's faithfulness and mine. One of the biggest problems in Malachi's time where the priests were a rotten lot as well. They weren't leading the people in the right way. They were meant to be speaking God's words but instead they failed that. They expected to get answers from God even though they weren't responding to God in the right way. There's a verse I think in the letter to James where God says to the people, or the writer says to the people, "You don't get from God because you're not asking" and when you do ask you ask for stuff, for example, I might pray for a really nice motorcar. Ask God to give me the really best things but they're for me." And there's nothing wrong with praying for yourself in one respect. There's nothing wrong with praying for your own health and praying for your own issues but also we're encouraged to pray for others, pray for those around us and we pray for one another. If I pray for you and you pray for me we'll all get what God wants wont we? This was what was going on.

Now there were a lot of challenges because these people were not being faithful and do you know what God says to them. God likens, I know the group that were here before and I know the remarks that you made already about the last time you came and the subject being marriage well of course we've got a tiny hint in Malachi here. Now I had an interesting experience because Malachi Chapter 2 Verse 16 has words in it in the NIV that I read yesterday that has that simple expression, "God

hates divorce.” But in Malachi Chapter 2 Verse 16 in this version of the NIV which is a slightly different version it says it slightly differently. It says, “The man who hates and divorces his wife says the Lord the God of Israel, does violence to the one he should protect.” So what’s God saying?

If God said, “I hate . . . ” what’s God saying to the people? Do you know what he is saying to the people? This is not a passage to preach about marriage on. That’s comforted you hasn’t it? That’s not what it is about. God is saying what I hate is this relationship between us that’s broken down. God hates the fact that . . . God doesn’t like it when relationships . . . of course he doesn’t. Who does? When we’re in a relationship who likes it when a relationship breaks down of any sort? Of course we don’t. God says in the Bible that He hates a lot of things. God says He hates injustice. God says He hates robbery. God hates wrong because they’re not in God’s ultimate system. That doesn’t mean they’re not forgiven, not forgivable. It doesn’t mean they’re not healable.

God is saying, “Look the situation is I hate this. I’m really upset about the fact that you and me are in a divorce situation. We’re split up because you’ve gone away and committed spiritual adultery with another god and other people.” God says, “I’m upset about that but what’s going to happen?” God wants that relationship back. God wants that relationship between Him and the people to be restored if possible. So He’s not talking about whether things go wrong. He’s not talking about that at all. He’s talking about a deliberate walking away by these people from their God. That’s what He’s talking about. Deliberate and conscious decision to walk away from a relationship. That’s what happened in Malachi’s day. They decided they were no longer going to honour and worship God and I guess in a certain way you don’t think about God like this but God’s getting a little bit fed up with the whole thing and He says, “You have wearied the Lord with your words.” Isn’t that a lovely expression? “You have wearied the Lord with your words.” He’s saying, “I’ve had enough of these people, they’re getting on my . . . ” Have you ever said that about anybody? Course you haven’t. You’re Christian people [laughter]. But God says, “I’ve had a bit of enough of this, I’m really wearied, I’m worn out by these people.”

So you see, I hope it’s not bad news so far because the message starts with God loves you and then God says to the people, “Look, you’re like a husband who’s deliberately and chosen to go away with another women, deliberately rejected the wife of his youth. You’ve deliberately rejected me.” That’s what God is saying, “. . . and it upsets me. It makes me sad. In fact it makes me so sad that I’m fed up with you. I’m really weary of you.” You don’t expect God to say stuff like that do you? This is what He’s saying. So is there an answer? Is there an answer?

Well Chapter 3 starts to contain the answer. God’s calling the people back to a relationship with him. He says, “I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me.” Well that’s probably Malachi in the first instance but later on of course it refers to the obvious. It refers to Jesus. He’s beginning to point us towards Jesus. What is he going to do? In Verse 3 he said, “He will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver. He will purify the [20:11] that serve us in the temple and refine them like gold or silver.” I don’t know much about gold or silver but I do know that when you purify

gold it's purified by fire. It separates all the rubbish which is separated and you end up with the gold. God says, "That's what I want to do with you. I want to turn you into the people that you're meant to be. I'm longing to refine you. Look, our relationship has broken up. I'm longing to see it restored. I'm going to be to you like a wash man, like a laundry man." That's an interesting picture, too, isn't it? "I'm going to wash you with spiritual soap." Okay, got any spiritual soap this morning? "I'm going to cleanse you. I'm going to make you new."

"And one of the things I'm going to call for is for you to bring the whole tithe into the store house. One of the things I'm going to ask you to do is to give to me what I'm worth. Give to me what . . ." and God doesn't . . . I mean I prepared a whole sermon elsewhere on them, what it means to tithe and the 10% and all that. That's another issue. Really God is saying, "Give me what I'm worth." He doesn't just mean about money. He means about the good stuff that they have. "Give me the best part of your life." And do you know what God says? Do you hear what God says in Malachi? He says, "If you give me the best part of your life. If you give me the best things you can," He says because He says, "You've been robbing me. You haven't been giving me the good stuff."

They said, "How are we robbing you?" and God goes on to tell them and then he says, "Bring the whole tithe," in other words, "Bring me the best into the store house so there may be food in my house." Test me in this says the Lord God Almighty. God says, "Go on, do it. Just try for a while to bring the best stuff and see what happens because do you know what I'll do? I'll throw open the floodgates of Heaven and pour out so much blessing there will not be room enough to store it." God's not saying, "If you bring me some good stuff I'll give you a little bit of good stuff." God says, "If you bring me the best that you've got, the best of your worship, the best of your love, if you honour me I will open the windows of Heaven and pour out a blessing on you," almost to the point where you will be going, "Gosh we can hardly take it. God is so good. God has proved his love to us."

So that's the kind of God that Malachi had. Malachi is really saying, "God is disappointed with your. God is fed up with you. God has had enough of your half hearted response but do you know what God wants to do? He wants to pour out such a blessing on you that you'll hardly be able to understand it. Even though you've messed up. Even though you've gone off astray. Even though you've been a bit of a liar and a cheat like good old Jacob, all of those things God wants to pour his blessing out on you." So I think Malachi in the end is quite an encouraging message don't you? Because God says, "I long to restore. I long to renew. I long to refresh."

But he begins with this foundation, "I love you. I love my people." I get the impression from all of this that nothing is going to stop him loving them. I have five children. They're not too badly behaved most of the time. Occasionally they got on my nerves. Occasionally, I know one of the people who comes to Friday break, her husband advertised his children for sale on Facebook the other day [laughter]. I don't think he was being serious. I think he'd finally decided he'd had enough. Now I've lost my glasses. On no, they're on my face. Something fell off.

Sometimes we've had enough. Sometimes God gets that way. "I'm just weary of these people." But he's still there willing to pour out his blessing. Willing to renew. Willing to refresh so I wonder if what the people of Malachi did? Well if you read the end of Malachi you'll discover what they did. They said, "The People of God spoke together and the Lord listened and heard." In other words some of them got together in small groups, they went to their house groups. They went around to various places and they sat down and they said, "Have you heard what Malachi's been saying?" Some of them said, "Yeah, he's right isn't he? He's right, we have let God down. We've lost our enthusiasm and worship. What are we going to do about it? We're going to cry out to God and we're going to get restored." God was able to restore those people. It doesn't say, as far as I can understand here, correct me if I'm wrong, that every person in the nation did that. But a number did. They got together and the Lord listened and heard. Now interestingly, I'll just finish with this. I've always like that passage because it doesn't say, "They got together on a Monday night and they had a prayer meeting and they prayed." It just said they talked to one another and the Lord listened and heard. I love that expression because sometimes we sit down . . . sometimes on a Tuesday morning we'll sit in our prayer meeting and we'll talk about what's wrong. We'll talk about the issues and then for five minutes at the end we'll pray and we'll say, "That wasn't very good. We didn't pray much did we?" But of course we did because we shared the issues. We shared our concerns and God sits there too, listening and hearing and understanding and that's the way he's able to restore and able to renew. When we talk together and share together the concerns that we have and then collectively by that means bring them to God. And then God promises a great blessing. So we can expect good stuff from God can't we? We can expect good stuff from God but we need to be prepared to bring him our good stuff day by day. Come to him for the healing and refreshment. When things do break down it's not lost, there is healing available. That's the great message of Malachi.

Thank you.