

INTRODUCTION

This is the final message in the series, "The Major Message of the Minor Prophets." We've discovered over these past eleven messages that God not only relates to individuals, He relates to nations as well.

During this series, I've mentioned how we are facing dangerous and scary times as a nation. We are sliding down a slippery slope of moral depravity. However, I still assert that these are far from the darkest days of our nation. As a student of American history, I believe the worst chapter in our nation's history was the bloody civil war that pitted brother against brother.

But even in the midst of that terrible war, President Lincoln had the insight to understand that the war itself was part of the judgment of God against America. I think Lincoln's second inaugural address, delivered on March 4, 1865, was his finest speech, although it was more like a sermon than just a speech. It was the second shortest inaugural speech ever given by a President—it took about 4 minutes. (The shortest was Washington's second inaugural address, which timed out at barely two minutes).

The War Between the States cost the lives of over 600,000 Americans. The War was winding down and Lee would surrender a month later, and five days after Lee's surrender, Lincoln would be dead. His last major speech reads more like a sermon than a presidential address. You can read it in its entirety if you visit the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, because those words are engraved in stone. He made six Biblical references and quoted Jesus twice.

Here's the section where the President says America was experiencing God's judgment. "The Almighty has His own purposes. 'Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.' (Matthew 18:7) If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'" (Psalm 19:9) In other words, Lincoln stated that if God deemed it proper to simply wipe America off the face of the earth, then that was His Divine right. Thankfully, God had other plans for America, and our nation survived that first civil war.

But now we are facing a second civil war, but this one is not going to be fought with rifles and cannons. It is a moral battle fought with convictions. The issue at stake is fairly simple. Will our nation continue to use Biblical morality as a guide as we have from our founding, or will we toss away God's Word as our moral guide? A key battle in this civil war is the definition of marriage. Over the next few weeks, the Supreme Court will consider two cases dealing with whether same-

sex unions are considered marriage. This is the first time our highest court has ruled on this issue, so regardless of the outcome, it will be significant.

Although the book of Malachi was written over 2,400 years ago, moral conditions were much the same in Jerusalem. Malachi's name means "messenger of God" and Malachi is also the Hebrew word that is translated "angel." Here's how Charles Ryrie describes the setting: "About 100 years had passed since the return of the Jews. The city of Jerusalem and the second Temple had been built, but the initial enthusiasm had worn off. Following a period of revival under Nehemiah, the people and the priests had backslidden and become mechanical in their observance of the Law. Though lax in their worship and delinquent in their tithing, they could not understand why God was dissatisfied with them."

The format of this short prophecy is like a debate between God and the people. God speaks to them and they respond with eight argumentative questions. In this message, I want us to uncover five truths about the character and nature of God.

1. GOD FAVORS THOSE WHO ACCEPT HIS LOVE

Some people think the doctrine of the love of God only appears in the New Testament. They make uninformed statements like, "In the Old Testament, God is a God of wrath, but in the New Testament, He is a God of love." But the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament. In fact in God says in Malachi 3:6, "I the Lord do not change."

God begins His message through Malachi by reassuring the people that He loves them, but they want to argue with Him even about that! "'I have loved you,' says the Lord. 'But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' The Lord says. 'Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.'" (Malachi 1:2-3)

When some people read that, they stumble over the words, "Esau I have hated." They say, "Wait a minute! I thought God loves everyone! I didn't think He could hate anyone." This isn't the only time this statement appears, Paul quotes it in Romans 9.

Two things will clear up your confusion. First, God isn't really speaking about two individuals here; He's talking about two nations. If you keep reading you'll see He is addressing the nation of Edom, who were the descendants of Esau. The descendants of Jacob, the Jews, accepted God's love, and the descendants of Esau were bitter toward God and rejected His love.

And the word "hated" here literally means, "preferred." It's the same use of the word "hate" that Jesus meant when He said in Luke 14:26, "If anyone comes after me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple."

But what we see is that God's love is a matter of His grace, not our worthiness. If you remember the story of Jacob and Esau, they were born as twins. But before they were born, God had told their mother, Rebekah, that the younger one would rule over the older one. Esau was born first

and he was covered with hair, so they named him Hairy—that's what Esau means in Hebrew. But Jacob was born holding on to his brother's heel, so they named him, Grabber—that's what Jacob means.

The culture and custom dictated that Esau receive the birthright and the blessing as the firstborn son. But Jacob grabbed both of those away. He bought the birthright from Esau for a bowl of chili, and then deceived his Father, Isaac into giving him the blessing.

When I read the words, "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated," I don't stumble over the part about God hating Jacob, I stumble over the part about God loving Jacob! How could God love Jacob? He was a crooked, conniving, lying, a scoundrel of a grabber. Yet God loved Him. I receive great encouragement from that because I'm a dirty rotten sinner myself and if God can love a grabber like Jacob, I know He can love a sinner like me!

God loves you. Period. If you accept His love, like Jacob, you will be blessed. But if you are bitter and reject His love, like Esau, you will live a miserable life. God gives you a choice.

2. GOD HATES THE SIN OF DIVORCE

One of the marks of a culture in moral decline is prevalence of divorce. That was a problem in Malachi's time. God speaks clearly about His position on divorce. The Bible says, "Another thing you do: You flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.' You ask, 'Why?' 'It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.' 'I hate divorce,' says the Lord Almighty.'" (Malachi 2:13-16)

God hates divorce because it is a sin; it is the breaking of a vow. Some of you are thinking, "I'm divorced. Does God hate me because I got a divorce?" No, God hates divorce, but He loves people who have gone through the heartbreak of divorce. God hates the sin, but He loves the sinner. We have a hard time making that distinction sometimes, but God doesn't.

Until the 1970s most states in America required that there be a crime or sin present to justify granting a divorce, like adultery or abuse. But in the last five decades, all 50 states and D.C. have adopted what's called "no-fault divorce." That's probably the most obvious oxymoron in the English language. Divorce is always two people's fault. It may be 99% one partner's fault, but instead of no-fault divorce it should be called "share-the-fault divorce."

Since the advent of no-fault divorce the rate of divorce in the U.S. has multiplied. In the 1950s for every seven marriages, there was one divorce. You've heard the statistic that half of marriages end in divorce—that is a false and misleading statement. It is true that for every two new marriages, there is one divorce in the U.S., but that number doesn't take into consideration the 54 million marriages that remain intact. It's more accurate to say that about 30% of men and

women who marry will end up getting a divorce. And today, the median length of a marriage in America is about 11 years.

God hates divorce because He realizes the damage it does. Marriage has always been the building block of a society. Before there was a nation or a church, there was marriage. Divorce hurts a society. Divorce hurts a husband and a wife. Divorce hurts children. Many of you are carrying the invisible scars of divorce. That's why we offer a divorce recovery workshop that is usually full of people who discover again the grace and forgiveness of God.

And through the years, I've discovered that when I talk about the sin of divorce, it is usually forgiven divorced people who are the loudest cheerleaders. They say, "Right on pastor! Tell people to be sure to marry someone that you can spend the rest of your life with. And tell them to fight to preserve their marriage!"

So rather than talking about the damage of divorce, I think we should be talking about the holiness of and sanctity of marriage. Jesus said that every marriage is made in heaven. He said, "What God has joined together, no person should tear apart." Malachi said God is the witness between a husband and a wife. It is God who makes them one.

Henry Ford became one of the richest men in America by making the Model T Ford. When he celebrated his 50th wedding anniversary, he was asked the secret for a long, happy marriage. He said, "It's just the same as in the automobile business. Stick to one model!"

Let's celebrate those who have been married to the wife of their youth. Let's have everyone who has been married fifty years or longer, stand up and let's show them how proud we are of their commitment.

3. GOD IS INSULTED WHEN HE IS ROBBED

The people during Malachi's time had a real problem of not offering God the first and the best. In the first chapter God has this to say about their cheap worship habits. "When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 1:8)

Chances are you've heard this passage from Malachi before. God asks, "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.' But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' 'In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,' says the Lord Almighty, 'and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,' says the Lord Almighty. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the Lord Almighty." (Malachi 3:8-12)

The word "tithe" isn't a religious word. It just means 1/10. It's like the word "half" or "quarter." There's nothing holy about the word—it's the idea behind it. God owns everything; we don't

own a thing. He lets us manage some of His wealth, and He asks us to acknowledge His ownership by giving at least 1/10 of the wealth He gives us back to Him. It's not a matter of legalism and figuring it out to the penny; it's a matter of love.

Don took his four-year-old son to McDonald's so they could just hang out and have some father-son time. Jimmy asked for some French fries. Don loved his son so much that he super-sized the fries and bought him a coke as well.

They sat down and after a short prayer, Jimmy tore into the fries in front of him. Don was smiling at how much a little boy could enjoy such a simple pleasure as hot, crispy French fries.

Don wanted a fry so he reached over to grab one. To his surprise, Jimmy quickly put his arms around the fries making a little fence, and pulled them toward himself and said, "No! These are MINE!"

Don was in shock for a moment and couldn't believe Jimmy's selfish attitude. But instead of reprimanding him, he simply pulled his hand away and sat back and reflected on Jimmy's behavior. The first thing he thought was, "My son doesn't recognize that I am the source of those French fries. At the counter, I was the one who took out my wallet and bought the fries. And here he is talking about HIS fries." He smiled as he continued to ponder Jimmy's attitude. He thought, "And Jimmy doesn't that I'm 6 feet tall and weigh 200 pounds and if I wanted to, I could easily take those fries away from his small hands. And he doesn't know that I really don't NEED his fries. I have enough money to go back to the counter and buy 30 servings of fries, more than he and I could ever eat."

As he thought about it, Don knew the issue wasn't that he wanted to eat a few French fries. He simply wanted his son to invite him into his world by offering to share his blessing, the very blessing that his dad had provided in the first place.

Then Don realized what God was trying to teach him. He smiled as he realized that our heavenly Father supplies every blessing we have. He loves us so much He desires for us to invite Him to sit down with us at our table and share the blessing He has provided. But too often we're like Jimmy and we say, "No, God this is MINE! No. No. No. No. You go get your own!" And we build our own little fences around our blessings and try to keep them to ourselves.

God doesn't need our French fries or our money. But it's an honor and a privilege for us to share our blessings with the One who gave them to us. And when you give back to Him what is already His, He promises to open the windows of heaven and pour out more and more blessings—too much for you to contain. Are you insulting God, or are you honoring Him?

4. GOD CHERISHES THOSE WHO HONOR HIS NAME

Sometimes people wonder if there is any value in gathering together in the name of the Lord. Most Americans don't think it's important to attend worship on Sunday mornings. Even the majority of those whose names are on our church roll don't even choose to gather and worship. Well, for those of you who DO choose to worship on a regular basis, I have great news. The

Bible promises a special blessing to those of us who come together and honor the name of the Lord. The Bible says, "Then those who feared the Lord talked with each, and the Lord listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the Lord and honored his name. 'They will be mine,' says the Lord Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession.'" (Malachi 3:16-17)

According to this scripture, God keeps a written record of those who fear Him and honor His name. It goes on to say God considers those who honor His name as His treasured possession! God says, "They will be mine!" This scripture says God treasures US, not just our act of worship.

What do you treasure most in your home? Sometimes when wildfires rage around our country, people are told to evacuate their homes immediately and they have little time to grab their most treasured possessions. But do you know what they usually grab? They don't grab the big screen TV, or the expensive lamp. They take their photo albums. They take the record of the times they have gathered with friends and family members over holidays and special events.

Wouldn't it be neat to think that God has a heavenly photo album of every time believers gather together to celebrate His greatness and to honor His holy name? He considers us His treasured possession. One, two, three...smile!

5. GOD WILL FINALLY REWARD THE RIGHTEOUS

Throughout the Bible, the question is repeated, "Why do the wicked prosper?" The flip side of that question is, "Why do the righteous suffer?" The Bible teaches that there will be a day of reckoning when the righteous will be rewarded, and the wicked will be punished.

Here's how God describes that day: "'Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,' says the Lord Almighty. 'Not a root or a branch will be left to them. But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.'" (Malachi 4:1-2)

We won't be rewarded for any righteous acts we have done. Our righteousness is as filthy rags. Jesus is our righteousness, and when we stand dressed in His righteousness, we are declared right by God. Jesus is the both sun of righteousness and the SON of righteousness. He came and died and rose with healing in His arms. And because of His life, death, and resurrection, we have been set free.

I love the picture of a calf released from a stall. No animal wants to be penned up, especially a young, rambunctious calf. This is a picture of how Jesus releases us from bondage, and as a result, we leap like a calf. Have you ever seen a calf in a pasture that just leaps for the pure joy of leaping? Jesus spoke these words in Luke 6:22, "Blessed are you when men hate you...rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for because great is your reward in heaven."

When we were in Uganda, I was amazed at the joy and exuberance of those worshippers. They

sing, dance, and even jump for joy. When you combine a Pentecostal church with an African culture, you have a lot of fun. I got so carried away in one of the worship sessions that I started jumping too. Justin Hayes and Stephanie Manzingo looked at me as if they were surprised, but they didn't know that I have a calf in me. And I suspect every believer here has a calf in you and given the right setting, you can jump for joy as well!

CONCLUSION

As I have studied the Bible carefully over the past forty-three years, I'm more convinced than ever that this book was written by God. Although it contains 66 books penned by 40 men over a period of 1,600 years, it has an amazing unity and cohesiveness. It has a single theme: the redemption of sinful humanity. Here's a trivia question for you. What is the last word in the Old Testament. You don't have to wonder. Let's read it. "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse." (Malachi 4:5-6)

400 years later, Jesus said John the Baptist was the Elijah who came to announce the coming of the Lord. But notice the last word: Curse. What a great one-word summary of the Old Testament. Genesis begins in paradise, but because of sin, humanity is under a curse. And the entire story of the Bible is how God sent His only Son to remove the curse of sin.

So when we come to the very last page of the New Testament we read this wonderful words: "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads." (Revelation 22:3-4)

In the beginning of the Old Testament, God created the heavens and the earth, and put us in Paradise. But because of our foolish choices we were kicked out of Paradise and kept from the Tree of Life. The first human tears were shed. But what Adam messed up, Jesus fixed up!

By the end of the New Testament we are told He will create a new heaven and new earth where we'll be invited back into Paradise where the tree of life grows and he will wipe away every tear from our eyes.

This book is all about Jesus. The Old Testament says, "Someone is coming." The Gospels tell us, "Someone has come—His name is Jesus." And Revelation promises us, "Someone is coming again."

My favorite hymn, Man of Sorrows, has a final verse that says, "When He comes, our glorious King; All His ransomed Home to bring. Then anew this song we'll sing, "Hallelujah, Hallelujah, hallelujah, what a Savior!"

OUTLINE

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Last verses in the Old Testament

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Last page of the New Testament

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes