

Malachi: A Virtual Tour

Selected Scriptures

April 19, 2009

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As you know, I definitely am a believer that slower is better when it comes to moving through the Scripture, and so our normal studies both through Ephesians in the morning and Mark at night are a little on the slower side. So occasionally, it's my desire a couple of times a year to sort of step back and go through an entire book of the Bible in one sweep, a sort of virtual tour on one-message-scale size, a view of a book at about 30,000 feet as we fly over it and see its contents. Tonight, I want to do that with you. I want us to look at the last book in the Old Testament, the book of Malachi.

Malachi is one of the Minor Prophets. Now understand that the Major Prophets were those prophecies that required an entire scroll to themselves. The Minor Prophets were not small people. Nor were they insignificant people and insignificant writings. Rather, they're called Minor Prophets because there were twelve of them that were very short and could all fit together on a single scroll. Malachi is one of those Minor Prophets.

Now, I want to give you just a little context for when he ministered. I'm not going to go through this in detail. But basically, you'll remember that there was the Babylonian exile, that period of time in Israel's history when the city of Jerusalem and environs were destroyed in 586 and the people of God carried off captive. When God allowed, when Cyrus came to power in 538 he began to repatriate the peoples that had been captured by Babylon. When he took over (the Persians captured Babylon) he began to repatriate the people they had taken captive including the Jews. And there were three returns to Jerusalem. There was the first return described in Ezra 1-6 under Zerubbabel and Joshua. There was a second return under Ezra, described in Ezra 7-10, a number of years later as you can see. And then there was a third return described regarding Nehemiah when he returned.

Now again, just to give you a little context, this is the same thing with a little different view. You notice the first stage occurs (Ezra 1-6) under Zerubbabel. It covers about a 20-year period of

time, and the temple is rebuilt. About 50,000 Jews return at that time. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah ministered during that time, during the rebuilding of the temple under Zerubbabel. Then there was about a 58-year gap. During that gap is when the events of Esther occurred.

Then came the second stage of the return of the Jews from Babylon (what had been Babylon) described in Ezra 7-10. This return was under Ezra, and it was about a year's time. And at this point instead of the temple being rebuilt (It had been rebuilt at this point.) worship was restored. And only about 2,000 Jews went back at this time.

Then there was another interval of about 13 years, and then the final and third stage under Nehemiah, described in the book that bears his name. And that covered a period of time of about 12 years, and, of course, the walls were built up and the city of Jerusalem was fortified under Nehemiah. The prophet who prophesied during that time was a man named Malachi.

Most date Malachi's writings to when Nehemiah returned to Babylon, which would be between Nehemiah 12 and 13. So Malachi writes at the very end of Old Testament history. He's the last writer of the Old Testament. That introduces 400 silent years. The very next divine message is when the angel shows up to announce the birth of John the Baptist 400 years later. Just to put that in perspective, it would be as if God had shown up in 1600 A.D. and He were just coming again to speak now. There was a huge gap of time.

Now it's impossible for us to really do, but I want you to try to put yourself in the position of a Jewish person living in those times. You had been taken captive, your homeland had been destroyed, and now you have returned to your own land. And as generations pass, it's not like you thought. When they looked at the prophecies of the Old Testament—not understanding that there was going to be yet future things described in those prophecies—when they looked at them, they expected there's going to be a fruitful land, there's going to be a large population (according

to Isaiah 54), the nation would rise in power and reputation under the glorious reign of a new David (according to Jeremiah 23), and all the nations would come and serve them (Isaiah 54).

That's what they expected, but that's not what they got. Here's expectation versus reality. Instead, what was happening in Israel after they returned was exactly the opposite of all that. There was a terrible drought that they were suffering. The population was a mere fraction of what it'd been before. Remember, only about 52,000 Jews returned from the captivity. They were a weak and fledgling nation. And they actually were under the control and domination of Persia. There was a Persian governor on the throne when Malachi writes.

What resulted? What always happens when expectation and reality are different? The people were discouraged. They were disillusioned. They began to doubt God and His promises. And as always happens when God doesn't meet our expectations and we face difficult times, we begin to question His character. And that's exactly what happened in that day.

Now this book is very appropriate for our day for a couple of reasons. The setting of Malachi is very similar to our setting today. God had worked miraculously in the past, but not during Malachi's time. There were no miracles. There was nothing major happening. The Word of God was taught. The nation sort of crawled on. But nothing of the magnitude of Moses and the miracles under Elijah, and (in our case) nothing of the magnitude of the miracles that occurred in the first century under the ministry of Jesus and the Apostles. There were no obvious indications of God's sovereignty. God is at this point not working miraculously, but He's working hand in glove where His providence can't be seen. And they were merely waiting for the next event. In Malachi's time, they were waiting for the first coming of the Messiah. In our time, we're waiting for the second coming of the Messiah. So very appropriate. We can face some of these very same challenges.

Now the book is organized along a series of questions of the people. Chapter 1:2, “How have You loved us?” Chapter 1:6-7, “How have we [the priests] despised Your name?” Chapter 2:14, “For what reason?” In other words, why doesn’t God accept our sacrifices? Chapter 2:17, “How have we wearied Him?” Chapter 3:7-8, “How shall we return?” And chapter 3:13, “What have we spoken against You?”

Now what’s going on here? The book is organized around those questions. In every case, this is the pattern: you have God indicting Israel; you have Israel giving some lame response, some lame defense; and then God sets the record straight. That’s true in every case. Let me show you how that works. Look at the first one, Malachi 1:2. God makes an indictment or a statement: “‘I have loved you,’ says the Lord.” And then you have the people’s defense: “But you say, ‘How have you loved us?’” And then you have God’s explanation. Yahweh presents His evidence.

Essentially, this kind of arrangement, this kind of argument comes from the context of a courtroom. And Israel is the accused, and Yahweh the God of Israel is the prosecuting attorney. And each of these exchanges betrays what the people are thinking about God. As we study them, I’m afraid we’ll see ourselves all too clearly. And God’s response to their slanderous thinking of Him will help correct our own thinking as well. Their sinful practices were the result of wrong thinking about their God and (as we learned this morning) so are ours. So let’s begin.

Malachi 1:1, “The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.” “Malachi” simply means “my messenger.” The longer form is *Malakhiah*, which means “the messenger of Yahweh.” And some 20 times in 55 verses we read something like this: thus says Yahweh of hosts. So Malachi is simply the messenger of God. He’s simply telling the people what God wants them to hear. And notice it’s called an “oracle.” You’ll notice the marginal reading, literally, it’s “burden.” In other words, it’s a word from God, but it’s not a good word. It’s a word from God, but it’s not good news because of the people’s thinking about Him. Remember their circumstances, and you’ll understand.

So let's look at these questions, this series of questions of God's character. The first question is the question of God's love. Look at verse 2: "'I have loved you,' says the Lord. But you say, 'How have You loved us?'" In other words, they're questioning the genuineness of God's love for them. Look at our circumstances! How could you love us, God? Look at what's going in our lives! God's answer is I've demonstrated My love to you by election, by choosing you.

Look at His response, verse 2:

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob [I have loved you.]; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." Though Edom [Those are the descendants of Esau.] [though Edom] says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the Lord of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever." Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

What's going on here? Remember, Paul uses this very statement from Malachi in Romans 9. He quotes this text to argue divine election. God is saying to them, you don't think I love you? Let Me tell you how I demonstrated My love: I chose you. You see, there were these two men, twin brothers carried in the same womb at the same time. And one of them received the blessing of God, and one did not. One received a special portion of God's love; the other didn't. Esau was hated by God, and Jacob was loved. As R.C. Sproul writes in his book, *Chosen by God*,

The divine hatred here is not malicious. It involves a withholding of favor. God is for those whom He loves. He simply turns His face against those wicked people who are not the objects of His special redemptive favor. Those whom He

loves receive His mercy. Those whom He hates receive His justice. No one is treated unfairly.

Look at the different way God dealt with Edom versus Israel, verse 4: “People... whom the Lord is indignant forever.”

You ever doubt God’s love for you? You ever look at your circumstances, like the children of Israel did, and say how could God truly love me? That’s really what the people were saying. Look at what I’m going through! How could God love me? Don’t look at your circumstances, God says, remember that I have set My love on you by choosing you and making you My own. If you ever doubt God’s love, remember that He chose you in eternity past to be His own. And whatever difficult circumstances we may be facing now are merely an intermediate step to the glory He has planned. As Paul puts it, for our light affliction works for us an eternal weight of glory. Don’t forget that God has demonstrated His love by setting it upon you, by choosing you, not because you were special, but because He chose you.

There’s a second question that comes up of God. The second section, the question of God’s greatness, begins in 1:6 and runs through 2:9. The question of God’s greatness. Notice verse 6: “A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?” says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name.” There’s the indictment. He’s talking to the priests now. You despise My name. You don’t honor Me. You don’t respect Me. “But you say, ‘How have we despised Your name?’” God’s answer comes twofold. First of all, by contempt for His worship. Look at verse 7:

“You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, ‘How have we defiled You?’ In that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is to be despised.’ But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame

and [the] sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts.

What was going on here is the people of Israel were offering blemished sacrifices that they wouldn't even have given to the Persian governor. Verse 14 says they were offering females instead of males. And so verse 9 is kind of sarcasm: do you really think God will be gracious with you while you treat Him with such disrespect? Verse 10, God even wants somebody to shut the temple door, lock the temple door. Don't let this happen, because worship has become just an empty ritual. Look at verse 13: "You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!'" Worship for them had become just an empty ritual. It is tiresome.

They had also questioned God's greatness by being careless with the Truth. Now remember, these are the priests. They had shown contempt for God's worship by offering blemished sacrifices, and they had shown contempt for God's greatness by carelessness with His Truth. Look at 2:5-6. God sets forth the covenant He made either with Phinehas or with Aaron (we're not sure which), and He says, "He [feared] Me and... true instruction was in his mouth."

And now God comes to the second way the priests have failed to fear Him, have failed to acknowledge His greatness. The priests were the ones responsible to teach the Law of God to the people, according to Leviticus 10. Notice what they did instead. Chapter 2:7, "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." They were supposed to be the teachers, the preachers. Verse 8, "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way [you have failed to live the Truth]; [more than that] you have caused many to stumble by the instruction." You have failed to teach the Truth. You have failed to live the Truth, you have failed to teach the Truth, and in so doing you have shown contempt for My greatness, for My honor. You haven't respected Me.

Go back to 2:1-4, because here God promises judgment in graphic terms if the priests don't straighten up and take God seriously. Look at verse 3: "Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, [And this is graphic language in the Hebrew text.] and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it." You know what God says? God says, you bring Me these blemished animals, you don't respect Me by not honoring My greatness, I'm going to take the entrails of those animals (the waste in those animals' bowels that was supposed to be taken outside the camp and burned), instead of taking it outside the camp, I'm gonna take that refuse and I'm gonna smear it all over your face. God says you better take Me seriously.

Do we show contempt for God? Do we fail to honor Him? Do we doubt His greatness? Listen, we live in a day when few Christians really fear God, and it shows up in the same ways it showed up in Malachi's time: half-hearted, deficient worship and carelessness with the Truth of God. When our worship is half-hearted, when we are reckless in how we handle the Scriptures, we are not honoring and showing respect for God, for His greatness. And God takes that, as you can see here, very seriously.

The third question is a question of God's righteousness in 2:10-16. And this third question is why doesn't the Lord accept our worship? Now the question in this paragraph is in the middle of the paragraph. Look at 2:13. God says, "This is another thing you do [here's another indictment]: you cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and with groaning, because He no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. Yet you say, 'For what reason?'" So the question is why doesn't the Lord accept our worship? God's answer: because you, in your unrighteousness, have violated your covenant with Me. Look at 2:10:

"Do we not all have one father? Has not one God created us? Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers? Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed

in Israel and in Jerusalem; for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves.”

Their unrighteousness, their violation of the covenant was really an affront to the righteousness of God.

Now how did they demonstrate this? Two ways. The first was they married pagan wives. Look at the end of verse 11. How have they profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which He loves? They have “married the daughter of a foreign god.” It’s talking about intermarriage. They had intermarried with nearby peoples who worshipped idols. God had warned them in Deuteronomy 7, when you go into the land don’t do that, because if you intermarry, if you let your sons and daughters intermarry they’re going to learn to worship idols. Don’t do it, but that’s exactly what had happened here.

Now, why were they free to marry foreign wives? Well, that brings up the second way they had violated the covenant. They had violated their marital covenant by divorce when there were no grounds for divorce. Look at verse 14: “Yet you say, ‘For what reason?’ [Why doesn’t God accept our worship?] Because the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, against whom you have dealt treacherously, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.” Wow! That shows the high place God gives marriage: your companion, your wife by covenant.

Verse 15 is a very difficult verse. It probably refers back to the original creation in Genesis 2:24. And I think in this case perhaps the NIV translation is best. Let me read it to you. Listen carefully. “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 [and] your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.”

Verse 16 makes it clear that God hates divorce. God hates divorce, and He will not tolerate it except with two exceptions. And the New Testament makes it clear: when there is sexual sin, (Matthew 5, Matthew 19), and when there is abandonment by an unbeliever (1 Corinthians 7). But God hates it, and He only allows it in those cases for the benefit of the innocent party.

So what's going on here? These people had sinned and they still expected God to accept their spiritual activities. Why won't God accept our worship? In reality, by doing this they were questioning God's righteousness. Folks, it's the same for us. When we sin in our human relationships, when we sin in our marriages and in our families and then expect God to accept our spiritual activities, we question His righteousness. That's why—you remember what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount? If you're coming to bring your sacrifice, you're going to come and offer something to God and you remember that you have sinned, that somebody has something against you, leave your sacrifice and go be reconciled. And then come and present your sacrifice, because it is an affront to God to bring Him your spiritual worship while there are unresolved issues and unrighteousness in your relationships. First Peter 3:7 makes it clear. It says to men, listen, you better treat your wives carefully and with honor and with dignity so that your prayers will not be hindered. God doesn't take it lightly when we are unrighteous in our relationships. He will not accept our spiritual activities, and to think He will is to question His righteousness, which is exactly what these people were doing.

There's a fourth question. It's the question of God's justice. It begins in 2:17 and runs down through 3:6. The question is how have we wearied Him? Look at verse 17: "You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, 'How have we wearied Him?' In that you say, 'Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and He delights in them,' or, 'Where is the God of justice?'" God's answer, let Me tell you how you've wearied Me. You've wearied Me by questioning My rule of the moral universe. We understand that God rules the created universe, and nothing happens outside of His control. But when bad things happen and they're prompted by other people, it's easy for us to doubt that God is really in charge.

Basically, these people were saying one of two things must be true. Look at verse 17 again: “You say, ‘Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.’” In other words, God delights in those who do evil. Or the second option, “Where is the God of justice?” God isn’t involved in this situation. What were they really questioning about God? They were saying either God isn’t good (He delights in evil) or He isn’t powerful. Why isn’t He acting? Their real beef was God hasn’t treated us fairly. You ever been tempted to say that? You ever been tempted to think that? It’s not fair! Why me?

God’s answer comes as the divine apologetic of His justice. It comes in 3:1-6. A divine apologetic for His justice. Malachi underscores three realities about God’s justice. Number one, God’s justice will come. Verse 1 of chapter 3:

“Behold, I’m going to send My messenger, and He will clear 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. “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.”

You know what God is saying? Justice will come; in fact, I have already appointed My messenger, Messiah, to set everything right. Jesus Christ will one day make everything right. These things were partially fulfilled at His first coming. They will be completed at His second coming.

There’s a second point in this divine apologetic for God’s justice. Not only will God’s justice come, but when it comes it will be impartial. Look at verse 5: “Then I will draw near to you for judgment.” Underscore “you.” This isn’t what they wanted. They were saying it’s not fair, those people are getting away with stuff. And God says when I come I’m going to deal with *you*.

“And I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,’ says the Lord of hosts.” God says, you want justice? When it comes, you need to know, it will be just, it will be impartial. I will draw near to *you*.

But then, thank God, Malachi adds, God’s justice is always tempered with His grace. Look at verse 6: “For I, the Lord, do not change; therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed,” or have not come to an end. God says, because I am unchangeable, because I have made promises that I intend to keep, you aren’t consumed, I haven’t crushed you and swept you away. God’s justice is tempered with grace. You know what God is saying? Be grateful I haven’t given you justice. Be grateful I haven’t treated you fairly. Because if I treated you fairly, you would be consumed in an instant.

Let me ask you, do you ever find yourself thinking or saying, “It just isn’t fair.” You know what you’re really doing? You’re doing what these people were doing. You’re questioning the moral governance of God. You’re questioning the rule of God, either His goodness or His power. God wants you to know justice will come. He will set everything right. He’s already appointed a Man in whom He will judge the world in righteousness, and He furnished proof to all men, Paul tells the Athenians, by having raised Him from the dead. We look around us, don’t we? And it’s hard to say, “Where is God? Why doesn’t He deal with this? How could this go on? How could this person get away with treating this other person this way?” And those are normal responses, but we must always turn our hearts toward God and remember God is a God of justice, and justice will one day come. Not a single sin will ever go unpunished. For us, our sins were punished on Christ. For those who won’t receive Him, every single sin is being recorded and will be punished.

Years ago there was a famous preacher in the Southern Baptist Convention, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention out of Louisiana. His name was R.G. Lee. He preached a sermon called “Payday Someday.” It was on the story of Ahab and Jezebel and the murder of Naboth for his vineyard. He said it took 20 years for God’s justice to catch up with Jezebel, but it did. And he said this in that famous sermon. He says, “The judgments of God often have leaden feet and travel very slowly, but they always have iron hands and they crush completely.” God is a God of justice. Justice will be done.

That brings us to the fifth question. It’s a question of God’s forgiveness, found in 3:7-12. Look at verse 7: “‘From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me [God says], and I will return to you,’ says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’” The question is how shall we return when we have sinned against You? God’s answer is by genuine repentance.

And in verses 8-9, God identifies one of their sins. They had robbed God by not paying their tithes. By the way, this is another message for another time, but this is talking about the temple taxes that were needed to fund the theocracy. These monies paid for the Levites, it paid for the national religious festivals, it paid for help for the poor. These were their taxes in Israel. All Israelites were required to pay them. And above and beyond that they gave freewill offerings, which is what we are commanded to do as Christians in the New Testament.

So they weren’t obeying God. God had commanded them to fund all of that system, and they weren’t paying their taxes. They weren’t doing what God had commanded. So He picks that as an example. He says you’ve done that, so what do you do? Verse 10, God describes what true repentance looks like: “‘Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.’” Folks, this isn’t talking about tithing, faith promise, anything else you want to put in there. This is God describing to

these people what true repentance looks like. They said how do we return? And God says OK, let Me give you an example. You haven't paid the taxes I've required you to pay to fund the system I put in place to picture My Son who's coming. Here's what repentance looks like. Bring the whole tithe in. Pay everything I've commanded you to pay. Verses 11-12, when they return, God will return in blessing.

Folks, our stubborn hearts—we sin, OK? It's a reality. As Christians, we sin. But our stubborn hearts are such—Tell me if you've ever experienced this.—that when we sin, instead of rushing right away into our Father's presence and saying, “God, I sinned. Forgive me for Christ's sake, and give me the power and grace to obey You and not to do that again,” instead, we sort of pull back. How shall we return? is our question. “God doesn't want me”—or whatever form it takes in your life. We blame God. God says, you turn from your sin, and I will forgive. And that's always God's response. You can come back to God for His forgiveness by repentance. They questioned that, and God said that's how you come back.

The final question is a question of God's faithfulness. It's found in 3:13-4:3. God's faithfulness. Notice verse 13. It's a question. What have we spoken against You? Verse 13, “Your words have been arrogant against Me,” says the Lord. ‘Yet you say, “[But] what have we spoken against You?” You have said.’” Here's God's answer. God's answer is the final chapter is yet to be written. Look at what they say, verse 14: “You have said, ‘It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before the Lord of hosts?’” “It is vain to serve God.” God has not been faithful to His people or His promises. And God's answer to them is you need to trust Me, because the final chapter has not been written. Notice in verse 17, “on the day”; chapter 4:1, “the day is coming”; chapter 4:3, “on the day.” God says the final chapter isn't written. It's not vain to serve Me.

He goes on to say in verses 16-18 that the righteous will be rewarded. Look at verse 16: “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord gave attention and heard it, and a

book of remembrance was written before Him for those who fear the Lord and who esteem His name.” This is like the records of notable deeds that the earthly kings kept. God says I’m keeping record. God hasn’t forgotten those who fear Him. And in the end, verse 18, everything will be revealed: “So you will again distinguish between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and the one who does not serve Him.” God says listen, you doubt My faithfulness? You think it’s vain to serve Me because you haven’t seen the reward here in this life? Listen, the reward is coming, God says. I’ve kept the records. I have a book of remembrance. I know those who fear Me. I know those who esteem Me, and I will settle up. Verse 17, “‘They will be Mine,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘on the day that I prepare My own possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his own son who serves him.’” The righteous will be rewarded. Folks, you may not see it in this life. You may look around and think, boy, it is tempting to think it’s vain to serve God, all these other people are prospering. God says the final chapter hasn’t been written. The righteous will be rewarded.

Secondly, the wicked will be destroyed. Chapter 4:1, “‘For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze,’ says the Lord of hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch.’” They’ll be utterly consumed, utterly destroyed. There are two kinds of fire in Malachi. In 3:1 it’s a refining fire for His own. Here it’s a destroying fire that sweeps away and destroys everything in its path. Listen folks, it’s not vain to serve God. You may not see it in this life, but God wants you to know the righteous will be rewarded and the wicked will be destroyed.

And thirdly, the righteous will triumph in the Son of Righteousness. Look at verse 2: “But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip around like calves from the stall.” The “sun of righteousness” here is the Messiah. “Healing in [His] wings” speaks of His healing the sickness of the soul that is inextricably linked with sin. That expression stall-fed calves? For us who aren’t in an agricultural society that’s hard to picture, but picture it like this. When calves have been

confined in a stall for an extended period of time, when they're turned loose into the light of day and the sunlight, they leap for joy. It speaks of a joyful response.

God says the final chapter's not written. It's not vain to serve Me. I am faithful to My promises. The day is coming when the righteous will be rewarded. I've got a book. I'm writing it all down. I will remember those that fear Me. You can count on it, and you can count on the fact that every evildoer will be destroyed like chaff burned up. And the righteous will triumph in the Son of God, in the Messiah, the Son of Righteousness.

The people had sinned against God by thinking wrongly about Him, and He corrects their thinking. And then He draws His counsel to a close with some very straightforward comments and commands. Here's the Lord's application in verses 4-6, here at the end. Basically, He says the Day of the Lord is coming, how should you prepare? Two ways. Obey My law, verse 4: "Remember the Law of Moses My servant." That doesn't mean don't forget it. "Remember" means remember to do it. Obey My Law and respond to My messenger. "I am going to send you [verse 5] Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord." There's the promise. That was partially fulfilled in John the Baptist (according to Luke 1) at Christ's first coming. But it will be completely fulfilled in a prophet who will come before Christ's second coming. The prophet will either be Elijah, or he'll be like Elijah. And his purpose, verse 6, to "restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers." We're talking about thoroughgoing repentance. The alternative of that, when he comes, is a curse. Notice the last word of the Old Testament: "So that I will not come and smite the land with a curse." That word "curse" was used of devoting things or persons irrevocably to God for total destruction, like the cities of Canaan were under the curse. People of Malachi's time had become embittered at God because of their difficult circumstances. As a result they questioned God's character. They questioned His love. They questioned His greatness. They questioned His righteousness. They questioned His justice, His forgiveness and His faithfulness. And Malachi sets their thinking straight.

What does this mean for us? Very quickly. Number one, it means we can be confident of God's love, because He has sovereignly chosen us from eternity for Himself. If you ever doubt His love, remember that He had a plan in eternity to love you. There's no greater demonstration of the love of God than that. Secondly, it means that God's greatness is unfathomable and demands that we treat Him with fear and honor and respect, especially in our worship and in how we treat His Holy Word. Thirdly, it means that God is righteous, and He expects His people to deal righteously with others. No spiritual activity pleases God if our human relationships are stained with unconfessed, unrepentant sin. It means, number four, that God sovereignly rules the moral universe and will in His time right all injustice. We must never mistake His patience as a lack of goodness or a lack of power. Payday will come, payday someday. Number five, God is always ready to receive back to Himself any of His sinning children who are willing to repent and obey. And number six, God always keeps His covenants, and He will never forget the one who fears Him. He will reward the righteous, and He will punish the wicked. What powerful lessons to end the Old Testament. But it speaks not only to Malachi's time, it speaks to our time and lives as well. Let's pray together.

Father, thank You for Malachi. Thank You for his message. Thank You for the truths that we see. Forgive us, O God, for questioning Your character. Forgive us for thinking less of You than You deserve. Lord, use even our study tonight to set our thinking straight. We thank You, O God, for who You are. In Jesus' name, amen.