

THE LEADER'S "DANGER"

Text: Malachi 1- 4

Subject: Signals From God To Awaken Our Expectations!

Introduction

1. Malachi means "Messenger of Jehovah"
2. Malachi writes after the Temple has been reconstructed (in the 4th century B.C.)
3. Malachi writes to the Jews (who have returned from captivity) and to the priests (or spiritual leaders who serve the Lord).
4. Malachi's words are relevant in the little province of Judah (and just as relevant in our lives today).
5. Zerubbabel and Joshua have died.
6. Haggai and Zechariah had encouraged the people to look forward.
7. Malachi's message would prepare God's people for great ministry under Ezra and Nehemiah.
8. This message was desperately needed and it came in perfect timing.

Question: Why did God speak these words through Malachi (at this time)?

Answer: Because...

1. The Temple was completed – but God's presence had not returned to fill it with His glory (like Ezekiel promised in Ezekiel 43).
2. The miracle days of Elijah and Elisha had passed.

(But most of all)

3. The ministry was in danger because spiritual leaders and followers were serving without passion, fire, enthusiasm and deep affection.

In other words

- ♦ Worship had degenerated into mere routine (a going through the motions).
- ♦ Spiritual leaders (the priests) became discouraged after the Temple rebuilding!
- ♦ There was a danger threatening leadership and laity alike.

Question: What are the "**flashing lights**" to get our attention?

Question: What are the "**warning signs**" from the Lord Himself?

Question: What are the "**danger signals**" to alert us that God is about to do something?

(Danger Signals That Awaken Our Expectations)

Signal #1: When Grace Turns Into Law (Malachi 1:2)

(And we begin to question God's love toward us)

"I have loved you saith the Lord, yet you say, wherein have you loved us?"

Question: What's the revelation here?

Answer: Israel has become cynical and says "*Wherein have you loved us Lord?*"

Question: Why does Israel say this?

Answer: Because Israel doesn't understand God's providence and overruling

plan – which made it possible to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple in the first place.

(In fact, in v.2)

“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? Saith the Lord, yet I loved Jacob.”

(In other words)

- ◆ By natural right, Esau had the advantage of being the elder.
- ◆ But Jacob schemed his brother Esau out of his birthright.
- ◆ Yet, the Lord says here, *“Even though Jacob was a schemer, yet I still loved Jacob”*

In other words

- ◆ Even though Jacob’s name means cheater, fraud, contender and deceiver (and)
- ◆ Even though Jacob was stubborn and resistant for 20 years (and)
- ◆ Even though Jacob wrestled with God and was full of himself (and)
- ◆ Even though Jacob didn’t deserve God’s patience, and grace and anointing and name change from Jacob - to Israel.

“Yet, I loved Jacob” (v. 2) - (Which simply means...)

- “...Quit thinking that I am against you because of your past.”
- “...Quit thinking that I am against you because of your inconsistencies.”
- “...Quit thinking that I am against you because of your pain, hardships, dents and detours.”
- “...Quit questioning My love because your plans didn’t work out and My ways are past finding out.”
- “...Quit doubting My sovereignty and quit comparing yourself to other people.”
- “...Quit wondering if I’m going to answer your prayers, provide what you need and finish what I started.”

(And if you’ve been knocked down, remember)

- ◆ Every **set-back** is a **set-up** for a **comeback!** (So quit questioning my love for you.)

Signal #2 When Joy Turns Into Weariness (1:7-14)

(And we offer God less than our best)

(v. 7) *“You offer polluted bread upon my altar.”*

(v. 8) *“You offer the lame and sick, or less than your best.”*

(v.10) *“Better to shut the doors to the Temple than offer half-hearted service.”*

(v. 12) *“The table of the Lord is polluted.”*

(v. 13) *“You said also, what a weariness this is.”*

Question: What’s the danger here?

Answer: The danger is to become weary in well doing and offer God less than our best!

“You have said, what a weariness this is” (v. 13) means:

- ◆ Those serving God let the fire go out of their heart.
- ◆ Ritual and professionalism produced boredom and a maintenance mentality.
- ◆ The joy of ministry had turned into weariness (which results in no sacrifice, no support, no gratefulness, no vision and no multiplication).

Question: Have you become weary in well-doing?

Question: Has your joy-bucket got a leak in it?

Question: Are you complaining more than complimenting?

Question: Have you lost your awe of God in secret prayer?

Question: Does your attitude attract people to fall in love with Jesus?

(How is joy restored?)

- ◆ Focus on what **God** wants, instead of what **you** want.

(And)

- ◆ Focus on what you **have**, instead of what you **don't have!**

(In other words)

- ◆ If you focus on your wants (**enough will never be enough**)

(Remember Augustine's words)

- ◆ **"God is most glorified when we are most satisfied in Him".**

(Remember)

- ◆ If I'm not content with what I **have** – I'll not be content with what I **want!**

It's a fact

1. That doctors have proven that continual stress causes the chemical balance in your brain to go haywire.
2. Toxic thoughts and emotions like resentment, unforgiveness and self-hatred undermine your immune system (and turn joy into weariness).
3. Your immune system is neurologically sensitive to your thought life.
4. Toxic thinking interferes with your body's natural healing process.
5. Wrong thinking triggers responses in your hypothalamus (in your brain) which then releases specific chemicals.
6. These chemicals flood your body and cause all kinds of negative feelings and emotions:

- ◆ Fatigue

- ◆ Lethargy

- ◆ Exhaustion

- ◆ Headaches

- ◆ Insomnia

- ◆ Phobias

- ◆ Anxiety

- ◆ Panic attacks

- ◆ Depression

Question: What's the answer to this stress and weariness?

Answer: Dr. Aaron Beck says that toxic emotions arise from three harmful thoughts that people entertain: (Three myths)

1. "I must do well."
2. "You must treat me well."
3. "The world must be easy."

(Really?)

Question: Why are these toxic and harmful? Because...

1. **No one does well all the time!** (We're all imperfect)
2. **Everyone is mistreated sometime!** (Which protects us from unrealistic expectations)

3. **Life is not always easy or fair!** (Because we live in a fallen world of pain and sin)

What promotes your joy (vs. weariness)?

1. Prayer, quiet time, meditation of Scripture
2. Eating healthy, exercising and proper sleep
3. Playing, having fun and relaxing
4. Humor releases chemicals that boost the immune system
5. Forgiveness – which releases toxic thoughts of anger, shame, regret and guilt

Signal #3: When Busy Turns Into Too Busy (2:13-16)

(And we neglect those closest to us)

(v. 13) *“You cover the altar with tears and groanings yet the Lord pays no attention to your offerings. You say, how come? Because the Lord says, you have dealt treacherously with your companion, the wife of your covenant.”*

(v. 15) *“Take heed to your spirit, how you deal with your wife.”*

(v. 16) *“Take heed to your spirit and remain true to your wife.”*

Question: What is Malachi saying?

Answer: He is warning us of a danger (what is it?)

- ◆ Neglecting the sacredness of the marriage vow!
- ◆ Allowing unresolved anger to grow, grow and grow!
- ◆ Saying “yes” to everybody else’s requests, but putting your spouse second in line.
- ◆ Refusing to take days off, vacation weeks and spend time together.

Question: Is this that important to God?

Answer: (Ch 2: v.13) **“God regardeth not your tears and offerings anymore”**
(which means)

- ◆ God rejects the gift when the heart of the giver is out of order!

In other words

- ◆ I can’t have access to God if I’m refusing access to my wife and kids.

In other words

- ◆ Turmoil at home between husband and wife weakens the witness of God’s power to heal and make well and restore broken people.

In other words

- ◆ Tears and offerings are okay (but they’re not okay unless I address the deeper practical matters of married life!).

Question: How many of you are married?

Question: How many of you are “Happily Married”?

Illustration: One lady said, when I was first married I was looking for the IDEAL, then my marriage turned into an ORDEAL, now I’m looking for a NEW DEAL.

Illustration: One man said, “My wife’s an angel; she’s always up in the air harping about something.”

Illustration: A Sunday school teacher asked her 8 year old kids, “What did Jesus say about marriage?” An 8 year old read Luke 23:34 “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Illustration: Deer season – Laura

Fact: Marriage problems are as old as:

- ◆ Abraham and Sarah
- ◆ Isaac and Rebekah
- ◆ Mr. and Mrs. Job

Fact: There is no perfect marriage because there are no perfect people

Fact: It takes two for a marriage to work, it only takes one for it not to work.

Fact: Today it takes more work to obtain a drivers license than a marriage license.

The three “S’s” My Wife Must Have (from me her husband)

1. **Security** – where Laura knows that she can be heard at anytime (without me condemning or judging).
2. **Safety** - where Laura can “be herself” without fear of rejection.
3. **Support** – where Laura knows I care, I’m listening and I’ll always be there no matter what.

◆ Husbands, when your wife doesn’t want to talk with you, it’s because she doesn’t **feel safe**, feels like you **don’t care** or believes you **won’t understand**.

The Three “A’s” Every Husband Needs (from his wife)

1. **Admiration** – which is respect and honor
2. **Affirmation** – which is letting him know that you believe in him and you are with him
3. **Appreciation** – which is expressing your gratefulness for his efforts to support, protect and listen to you.

◆ Wives, your husband is **empowered** and **engaged** and **motivated** when he knows **you are grateful!**

Signal #4: When Rest Turns Into Resentment (2:17)

(And we lose our merciful spirit)

“You have wearied the Lord with your words, yet you say, wherein have we wearied him? When you say, everyone that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and where is the God of judgment?”

Question: What’s the issue here?

Answer: The issue is, there was a complaining and murmuring among the people

Question: Why were people discontent and sour?

1. What the people thought should be quickly judged by God (wasn’t taking place).
2. People were upset with how gracious and merciful God was being with other people.
3. There was an impatient spirit because God wasn’t working on their timetable.

4. There was tunnel vision: people were indignant because their view of things was not the same as God's view of things.

In other words

◆ People were upset because their expectations were not satisfied by God.

In other words

◆ Because we can only see through a glass darkly – we can fail to discern why God is patient with other people – people who we feel God should judge!

In other words

◆ We become emotionally and spiritually toxic when we play God and...

...we think that we always know what's best!

...we think that we are right – others are wrong!

...we think that God is missing some things!

...we think that God is slow to act and needs to hurry up.

...we think that something is evil (when it might be good).

...we think that something is good (when it might be evil).

In other words

◆ We weary ourselves and tempt the Lord when we repeat v. 17 "Where is the God of judgment?"

Which reveals...

◆ A lack of faith in the integrity and justice and wisdom and timing of the Lord.

◆ A lack of faith that leaves you agitated – and tempted to take matters into your own hands.

◆ A lack of faith that produces inward disturbance and forfeits your joy and peace.

◆ A lack of faith that allows the strongholds of anger, resentment, bitterness and poison to produce toxic emotions.

Signal #5: When Stewardship Turns Into Ownership (3:8-10)

(And we keep what we should give)

"Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. But you say, 'Wherein have I robbed thee?' In tithes and offerings."

Question: What's the danger here?

Answer: When we become tightfisted (and act as owners instead of stewards)

◆ It's not about money – it's about faith and obedience!

Reasons Why I Love to Give

1. Giving reflects the nature of God! (Jn 3:16)
2. Giving brings joy beyond measure! (Acts 20:35)
3. Giving proves God's power in your life! (Mal 3:10)
4. Giving brings blessing in abundance! (Lk 6:38)
5. Giving bears fruit for eternity! (Matt 6:20)
6. Giving is sowing seed for a future harvest! (II Cor 9:6)
7. Giving enlarges my heart with God! (Matt 6:21)
8. Giving helps meet needs of other people! (Romans 12:13)

(And remember)

9. Loving never empties the heart and giving never empties the purse.
10. We shovel it out, God shovels it in, and His shovel is bigger than our shovel.

(Never forget)

◆ Making money is how you make a **living** – giving it away is how you make a **life!**

Signal #6: When Zeal Turns Into Indifference (3:13, 14)

(And we think that our labor for the Lord is in vain)

“You have said terrible things about me, saith the Lord. But you say, how have we spoken against you? You have said, it is vain to serve God and what is it that we have obeyed his commands and are sorry for our sins?” (V. 13, 14)

Question: What’s the greatest of all dangers?

Answer: People murmured against God, saying:

1. “There is no profit in serving God and our labor is all in vain.” (and)
2. “There is no profit in obeying the Word.”
3. “There is no profit in being sorry for our sins.”

Question: What’s the deception here?

Answer: Entertaining the foolish thought – that there is no difference between living for the Lord (or living in sin for yourself!)

Just think how foolish this thought is:

(Before I was a Christian)

1. I had no power over sinful habits!
2. I had no joy of a clear conscience!
3. I had no fellowship with the living Jesus!
4. I had no hope of life after death!

(Yet, now as a Christian)

1. I have power to say “no” to sin!
2. I have joy because I’ve been forgiven!
3. I have communion with the Lord in prayer!
4. I have hope beyond the grave (and no fear of death and separation from God).

In other words

◆ **Living for God and being sorry for my sinfulness brings the greatest joy known to the human heart!!**

Conclusion

What’s the message of the Lord (through Malachi?)

1. If you question God’s love toward you, or
2. If your joy has turned to weariness, or

3. If there is turmoil behind closed doors, or
4. If you think that God has not been fair with you, or
5. If you've lost the blessing in giving, or
6. If you feel that your labor is in vain in serving God.

Here is God's word to your heart:

1. In Malachi 3:7 "***Return unto me and I will return unto you.***" (Which means you can't return unless you have first gone away!)

Question: Why return and move forward?

Answer: Because Mal 4:2 says "The Lord arises with healing in His wings."

(And)

- ◆ You cannot be healed without coming to the doctor!
- ◆ You cannot be changed without going to the changer!
- ◆ You cannot be restored without returning to the Restorer!

Do you hear Malachi 3:7, "*Return unto Me, and I will return unto you*"?

AMEN!
Bill Kirk