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Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

## Complacency?

### Malachi

This last week we read Malachi and finished Revelation. We read the last book of the O.T. and the last book of the N.T. in the same week. I know they planned it that way, but there is a lot to be learned in this reading sequence. The O.T. ends with Malachi pointing to the “sun of righteousness” coming to bring justice, and the N.T. ends with a plea for the Messiah, Jesus to come again to bring justice to all humanity. Both testaments end with a message of hope and anticipation.

A teacher was once teaching one of the most boring classes you could have to teach. The students would arrive early so they could get the back row seats. Well, one day, two of the worst students came in late and had to take the seats in the front row. The teacher tried to bring order to the classroom, but finally lost it. He went to the board and wrote – APATHY! in one-foot tall letters and he broke the chalk when he added the exclamation point at the end. Not much changed in the classroom, but one of the two students in the front row said to his buddy: He couldn’t even pronounce it ... “A-PayThee?” What’s “a-paythee?” His friend replied: “Who Cares!”

Malachi is a book of warning. Warning against complacency, apathy, indifference, which seems to be a major problem to the church and to the Lord? “APATHY – lack of feeling or emotion or concern” – according to Webster. “COMPLACENCY – satisfaction accompanied by unawareness of actual dangers or deficiencies” – according to Webster.

**Chuck Swindoll and his wife were flying home from Portland to L.A. when the plane took a sudden dip in one direction ... Bomb Threat Story.\***

Warnings – Warnings – Who really heeds the warnings? We think we know so much today. Has anything really changed over time? Malachi warns the people of Israel who had just come out of exile in Babylon about six major things that have been violated over the years. The people had become so complacent that they didn’t even realize they were in violation of the Law and the Prophets of God in their actions. But, God is merciful and offers a chance to repent and get their life in line with God’s plan again.

Complacency doesn’t happen suddenly or even noticeably. Complacency is subtle and happens gradually over a long time, but the net effect is the same – disaster and distance from God. Malachi is the spokesman for God to the people of Israel to give them a chance to turn back to him. We have just read Ezra and Nehemiah. They both proclaim the same message in a story form. The people were made aware of their complacency and begin to repent – one by one. You cannot have spiritual revival out of the blue. It takes God speaking to the heart of each person one at a time. When you recognize the voice of God speaking to you, you have a choice ... **Repent or Ignore** the Lord speaking to you. He will never force Himself on you.

Let's look at the book of Malachi in its entirety – but superficially. Malachi present a series of six disputes (complaints) – God speaks and Israel answers: **“How So?”** Then the Lord gives justification to the claim.

### **The First – “I Love You” says the Lord – (1:2-5) –**

The people respond: **“How So?”** - When all this bad has happened to us. You allowed it!

God begins to tell them that He shows His love by the way that he kept the enemy away from them even though he rose up from among them originally (Esau – Edomites).

“You are arrogant.” “You dishonor Me, disrespect Me.” God opposed all who would rise themselves to take advantage of Israel.

**Complacency – causes us to doubt the love of God and the ability to see His love for us.**

### **Second – Offering Unacceptable Sacrifices to the Lord – 1:6-2:9**

You show contempt for God - - - People: **How So?**

By offering blemished sacrifices that you would never have done before – you wouldn't even offer these to the governors of your land – never mind Me. What has happened?

These offerings you offer are not even fit for a politician of your own time – how much more unacceptable are they to Me. This is not what you once vowed to Me in the beginning. It would be better to close down the temple altogether than to use the temple to offer imperfect offerings to Me. I would rather have nothing.

The covenant was established around you bringing Me the best all the time. You agreed, now this? God is Greatest and deserves the very best we have.

The people have cheapened God's value to the world around them – This dishonors His Name. What worth or value will God have to them if His own people treat Him this way??

**PRIESTS** – are the representatives between God and humanity... However, there is complacency even in the leadership of Israel – the priests. What happened to the value of holiness in the things of God? The priests were expected to speak words of correction and encouragement. They were supposed to recognize and prevent the sacrifice of anything but the best for God. Leaders who don't honor God bring about a curse rather than a blessing. God made a covenant of life and peace for the Levites, but there must be a reverence and awe of Him and His name. Priests were expected to speak words of instruction to the people and be a messenger of God to the people and from the people to God. Apathetic leaders lead people astray and cause confusion and cause many to stumble. God will cause humiliation and for leaders to be despised. If leadership failed, what could be expected of the people?

The people complained because they felt their “deeds” were winning God’s favor (ritual, religious motions), but this is unacceptable. We are human beings, not human doings! It’s about what we are, not what we do that matters to God.

God Responds: **“I am not pleased with you!”**

Malachi prophesies of a future time when there will again be acceptable offerings given with love and devotion and worship He demands. Future people in the far-off lands – Christians?

It was the priest’s responsibility to ensure pure and holy offerings, but they are complaining of defilement! The sacrifice job became too routine to them. It was boring and rote.

Be careful when ministry becomes boring and routine – done without thought, much planning, and without prayer. **CHANGE YOUR WAYS – WARNING!**

Complacency can cause our service to the Lord to become either a job or a burden, or it can become so routine that we lose all reverence in what we are doing.

### **Third – About Intermarriage and Divorce – 2:10-16**

**Mal 2:10-11 - *Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?***

**11 *Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign god.***

**People Respond: How So?**

Complacency led to intermarriage with foreign/pagan women. This is both a physical issue as well as an overall spiritual issue for them as a nation and the people of God. They had agreed to be in covenant with the wife of their youth – God. Israel is the bride – church N.T. God chose them and bound them to Himself – as in a marriage. They are one by faith – One by promise – as in marriage, and separation from that covenant is Divorce. God hates divorce in the physical realm and especially in the spiritual realm.

Complacency changes our perspective and outlook about the covenant we have made with God. Have you been faithful in your marriage to the Lord. He has made us ONE with Him. He expects us to remain ONE with Him and not divorce Him – break the covenant.

**Mal 2:15-16a - *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. 16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD***

**Mal 2:16b - *So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.***

## **Forth – Wearying God with our Words (lip service) – 2:17-3:5**

**Mal 2:17 - *You have wearied the LORD with your words.***

***"How have we wearied him?" you ask. (How So?)***

***By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"***

Complacency causes us to lose faith in the actions and righteousness of God – We lose sight of His justice in the grand scheme of things and focus on the injustice we see around us.

We begin to walk by sight and not by faith – only by what we see and realize in our own eyes, circumstances, and timeframe. BUT – God promises to send a messenger to judge and bring about true justice. Then all will be judged – Israel and the priesthood will be refined in the process and once again be acceptable to God. Judgment will fall hard against all who cause our views to change away from faith in God:

**Sourcerers, adulterers, perjurers, defrauders, oppressors of widows and orphans  
And all who do NOT fear the Lord Almighty! (all forms of injustice).**

## **Fifth – On Returning to Yahweh – 3:6-12**

**Mal 3:6-7 - *"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. 7 Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty.***

***"But you ask, 'How are we to return?' (How So?)***

This is closely related to the previous dispute. God states plainly that they have turned away from God and His decrees – They need to return to Him.

God's answer to their "How So?" shows them that while they complain about the injustices God allows for the evil doers, they are to stop the injustices they are guilty of toward God!

- Withholding the Tithe – (this is what provides food and cares for the needs of the priests and Levites and the poor and the temple upkeep)
- They are not withholding from humans and institutional requests or mandates; they are withholding from God and His means of provision established in the Law.
- They must get back on track with their giving in order to turn the curse back to a blessing that God intended for them to begin with.
- How tightly do you control your finances with respect to giving to the Lord. Pray and get back on track if you need to.
- Tithing sidenote: try it with small things first – bonuses, gifts, unexpected income, side work, etc. Then work up to your regular income. God will bless you.

Complacency can cause us to have a false security in our wealth and cause us to lose reason to support the church of God. We only think of our own needs and use of blessings, and that God is really the One who gave us what we have anyway.

### **Sixth – On Speaking Harshly About Yahweh – 3:13-4:3**

**Mal 3:13 - *"You have said harsh things against me," says the LORD.***

***"Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?'... (How So?)***

This is too hard – Why do we serve the Lord? We are missing out on everything fun and exciting. Why are we living this holy life with all these rules and restrictions when those in the world have everything and are blessed by God? What is the point of all this? The wicked have it all! Why bother?

Complacency causes us to lose sight of why we serve God to begin with and to see God's protection as a burden! BUT – in the end God will make a distinction.

**Mal 3:18 - *And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.***

If Israel fails to repent – she will face the same judgment God imposed upon Edom. It's the same for N.T. people – the church. In Revelation we read that ALL will be judged. It is not about what we think is OK, but what God says is OK. There will be true justice by the hand of the Righteous Judge for all humanity.

**Rev 20:11-15 - *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. 13 The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. 14 Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. 15 If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.***

God will bring about judgment and final justice – it will be black and white – no doubt. This sixth dispute brings everything full circle - - Why serve the Lord? It's Futile? The wicked prosper and the righteous do not. The people of God have lapsed into complacency over time. BUT – Justice – True Justice will prevail, ultimately. The arrogant will be judged. The “Sun of Righteousness will rise.” A promise of Messiah – for the righteous.

The book ends with a final promise – Remember the Law and the Prophets. I will send my prophet Elijah before that great and awesome day of the Lord. Moses and Elijah appeared

on the mount of transfiguration with Jesus. John the Baptist was Elijah who was to come first, according to Jesus (Gospels and Rev 11).

Malachi – reminds God's people that they must take their covenant relationship with Him seriously. A great new day will dawn for them with the coming of Elijah, who will precede the Messiah's coming – the Lord Jesus Christ.

The O.T. ends with the promise of the coming Messiah – it ends in anticipation.

So – the N.T. ends with the promise of the coming again of Messiah/King – Jesus. Both will bring about justice for the faithful people of God and judgment of all who have turned away.

Complacency is a poison that creeps in silently and unnoticed. By the time we realize we have fallen victim to its spell, we usually have drifted quite far from where God wants us and even far from where we once were in our walk with the Lord.

How's your prayer life lately? Are you still on fire for God? Do you still get excited to tell someone about Jesus? Are you slipping in your devotionals? Do you still read the Bible with excitement because you hear the Lord speaking to you and to your circumstances every time you open up the Word? Does God's ways of honesty and moral purity still govern your work ethic and behavior – all the time? Do you still fear the judgment of the Lord in your life? Do you still have that same awe of the reality of God as when you first met Jesus personally? Is the Holy Spirit speaking to any area(s) of your life right now where complacency has crept in and maybe you didn't realize it before?

**Danish Philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, tells a parable of the wild duck ...**