

## **The Burden of the Word of the Lord in Malachi** (The last book of the Old Testament Scriptures)

### **Meeting 1 – Introduction**

The way God spoke to His people in Malachi, the last book of the Holy Scriptures in the Old Testament, is very similar to how He spoke to His people in the last book of the New Testament. His speaking to His churches in Revelation 1 to 3 is not doctrinal. That shows that God is not concerned for teachings and doctrines, but rather cares for our spiritual condition – what we are. He cares for the condition of the churches. Today He will not ask how much you know the Bible or whether you can recite the Bible. He will ask, “Is your condition according to what you know? Do you live Me day by day? How much reality do you have?” Are we alive? Do we hear His speaking and obey Him every day?

We have heard much about the matter of oneness, but there is no oneness, just division and fighting. We talk about having life, but when we open our mouths, it is about doctrines, teachings and interpretations of the Bible. We each have our own views, and if we disagree, we go our own way. Do we live Christ in the family life together? We talk about being first fruits in our daily living, but this week in preparing for the conference, did you really have a desire in your heart to be a first fruit? Are you aspiring in your daily living in every situation to gain Christ? So, the Lord is not concerned about how much you know. Of course, it is good to know the truth – it is better than knowing nothing; but what is your relationship with Him?

In Revelation, the church of the Laodiceans thought they were so rich. In what were they rich –the knowledge of the Bible or money? The Lord owns everything in this universe, He does not need money. It must be that they were rich in knowledge of the Bible. Consider the arrangement of the seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3. Philadelphia is the ultimate, most wonderful church, I would have put it as the last church. But the Lord did not do that, instead He put the church in Laodicea at the very end. Why did He do that? Because you may have begun as the church in Philadelphia full of brotherly love once upon a time, maybe last year, 5 years or even 10 years ago. The Lord may have given you an open door then, but what about now? The danger is that in the end, you will be like Laodicea. It is not so easy to maintain such a healthy, wonderful, living, spiritual condition. Church history proves this point.

In the beginning, when the church in Ephesus started, it was wonderful. Ephesus means desirable. Paul's epistle to the church in Ephesus was wonderful. Yet in Revelation, the Lord said: *"...I have this against you, that you have left your first love...repent...or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand..."* (Rev. 2:4-5). To remove the lampstand means that you are no longer qualified to be or do the duties of the church. For example, if you are an optometrist, but your license is taken away by the government, then you are breaking the law by continuing to practice and may end up in prison. It does not matter what you do or claim yourself to be as, if you do not have the license – or the lampstand – that is not what you are. If the Lord removes the lampstand, you are no longer the church. At the end of the Bible, the Lord is not concerned about whether you are standing on the ground; He is concerned about your condition: *"You have a name that you are alive, but you are dead"* (Rev. 3:1). It is not what we say we are or what we think we are, but it is God's judgment. What He says counts. We all need to recognize our condition.

In Malachi, as in Revelation, the Lord had many things to say to His people that were not about doctrines. He told them they were fallen, corrupted, and unholy. They destroyed the priesthood, and He would not even accept their offerings. He was concerned about their condition, especially the condition of the priesthood. In Revelation, the description of the Son of Man walking in the midst of the golden lampstands is not the same as the Son of Man described in the four gospels. Now, He is the One who is risen to the throne, entering the heavenly tabernacle not made with hands. He is the great heavenly High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek. Because He is such a Man walking among the golden lampstands, it is evident that the church IS a holy and royal priesthood - otherwise, the High Priest would not be serving there!

That is why in Malachi, the Lord is speaking so strongly to the priesthood because it is the most important thing among God's people. God's people are supposed to be a kingdom of priests, but if the priesthood is corrupted, then the whole nation will be corrupted. Just as when the Lord came to this earth the first time, the chief priests, elders, scribes, and Pharisees were all corrupted. The result was that the whole nation was corrupted that they even crucified the King!

As you read the 4 chapters in Malachi, do not just learn the doctrine. Pray over it and check with yourself: "Lord, are You talking about me?" If you want to practice the priesthood, then the book of Malachi is for you. The main group of people the Lord is addressing in this book is the priesthood.

### ***Malachi – “My Messenger”***

It is not known whether “Malachi” is the name of the prophet, or whether the prophet’s name is unknown, but whoever wrote the book is the messenger of the Lord. Malachi means “My messenger”, ambassador, a sent one. In the Septuagint it is “Angelos” – angel – or messenger. What is a messenger? A messenger is someone who delivers the message given by the sender – not his own message. It is not an easy job, because a messenger must be faithful. If a messenger read the message and thinks, “I disagree and don’t like this message. I’m going to change it,” then he is a cheat! He is unfaithful and is no longer a faithful messenger. So, to be a faithful messenger is to be one who speaks the message that the Lord wants to give His people. A good messenger must know the Sender. If you do not know the One above, and the message He wants to give His people, what message will you tell His people? You must know the Lord, what is in His heart, and what He wants to say to His people. You have to be a seeking one; your heart must be pure. Your mind must be renewed. He needs to be speaking to you.

That is why in Revelation, the Lord did not speak to the churches but to the messengers of the seven churches. The messengers, if they are faithful, will say what the Lord is speaking to them. They should be the stars in His right hand, under the authority of the Lord. In the midst of darkness, the stars should shine and give His people the direction of what the Lord wants. Unfortunately, if they are not in His right hand, they will do their own thing and eventually become the Lord, just like the pope. Obviously, the messengers in Revelation were not faithful, because the churches did not follow Him. With time the word “elders” was changed to “responsible brothers” or “leading brothers”. The term “leading one” is misleading, because it makes the person leading think,

they are somebody, and the rest are nobodies following the leading one who is misleading everybody. If you have a “responsible brother”, does that mean only one person is responsible, and the rest are not responsible? And what if the “responsible” or “leading” one is wrong? In His church, we are all serving brothers because we are servants. We only have one leader. We follow the Lamb wherever He goes. He is our only leader, Master: *“One is your Master”* (Matt. 23:8,10). In the church life, there is only one head – Christ is the head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). You and I do not get to decide anything. We must ask Him. The Lord needs faithful messengers.

When we receive His speaking, then as messengers, we must be faithful to speak what He is speaking. Do not add any or take away any word, but be a faithful messenger. Even if people do not want to listen, we must still be faithful to speak. The Lord gave His message to Ezekiel to speak to His people, even though He knew His people were a stiff-necked people (Ezek. 2:3-5). If Ezekiel would not speak, then their sins would be upon his head (Ezek. 3:17-21). So, be faithful to speak what God is speaking, whether people want to hear Him or not. It is not your decision whether people like it or not. Usually what God speaks, nobody wants to hear. Know what He is speaking; be a faithful messenger! Do not change the Lord’s message. Speak faithfully what He is speaking.

Malachi 1:1 says: *“The burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.”* It is a wonderful word because it is God’s message to that particular time. We must believe that God is speaking in every age to accomplish His will in that age, not 10, 50, or 500 years ago. What is God speaking, His message, today? What God spoke by His messenger, Malachi, was the last word spoken for a long period of time before the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. God did not speak again until John the Baptist. That is why at the end of the book of Malachi, God said that He will send His

messenger – referring to John the Baptist (Mal. 3:1). When John the Baptist came, they did not want to listen to him because everything was crooked at that time. Today everything is so crooked as well. It is difficult to find anything straight and truthful today. In this country today, the mainstream media are speaking lies and are not messengers of the truth – it should not be called “news” but “lies”. But with us, we need to know what God is doing. In speaking God’s message to His people and to family members, speak the truth in love; then there is no need to fight about who is wrong or right. If you are faithful to speak the truth in love, then the Holy Spirit will back you up. There is power in that way of speaking. The truth is very powerful. The Lord said, *“And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:32), free from darkness, lies, and so much bondage. Today the Lord needs such messengers. People will say, “I don’t believe you...I heard something else.” Tell them, “What you heard was not the truth, but what I am telling you is the truth.”

Therefore, the Lord must sanctify our lips because *“out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks”* (Matt. 12:34). The Lord must give us a pure heart; our mind must be renewed. We need to have an ear to hear what the Spirit is speaking NOW, not what He spoke forty or fifty years ago. This is important, because we are living in this present, very special situation. We have been talking about the practice of the priesthood for over four years. Many people do not like it. We talk about the true worship, the special worship that God wants from His people. There are many other types of worship like bowing down or singing. Some think calling “Abba Father” is worship, but that is sonship. God tells us that the real worship is in spirit and with the reality of the offerings that we bring to the Father (John 4:23-24). This is the worship that God desires. Peter said very clearly that the church is a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to the Father through Jesus Christ (1 Pet. 2:5). God

spoke this word. People may not like to hear it, but the priesthood is very special to God. As we go through the book of Malachi, you will understand that the service of the priesthood is very different from doing any other work or service for God. May you be inspired to be His messenger to your family members and friends. Do not just go and talk to them, but pray for them much before the golden incense altar. You are His messenger!

### ***The LORD God Started by Expressing His Love to His People***

The condition of the priesthood was terrible and fallen, especially after His people returned from Babylon to Jerusalem. Read Ezra and Nehemiah. Their coming back to Jerusalem was, on the one hand, wonderful because they laid down the foundation and started to offer up sacrifices to God. But on the other hand, there was so much mixture. Many of them had heathen wives and had brought idols with them. It was a mixture of all kinds of things. With time, it did not get better. It is always easier for the condition to go downwards, than it is to go upwards. So, at the time of the first coming of the Lord, their spiritual condition was so terrible that John the Baptist called them a generation of vipers. John the Baptist must have been very courageous to say that. He did not say that to criminals, but to the scribes, Pharisees and to those in high positions who came to be baptized: *"Brood of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"* (Matt. 3:7). That was the condition of His people before the Lord's first coming. That means that even the word in Malachi did not change them. Their condition had not changed for the better at all!

Yet even though His people were in such a condition Malachi 1:2 says, *"I have loved you," says the Lord.*" He did not say, "I'm not sure if I love you anymore," but He reminded them of His love from the very beginning. This should remind us of what the Lord told the church in Ephesus: *"You have left your first love"* (Rev.

2:4), which means that the Lord **still** cares about their love. How is your love for the Lord? He will ask you: Do you love Me? Just like when the resurrected Lord asked Peter: *"Do you love Me?"* It must have been difficult for Peter to answer because he was embarrassed since he had just denied the Lord three times; he answered, *"You know that I love You"* (John 21:15-17). The Lord asked him again a second and a third time. When the Lord asks you today, it seems easy to say, "Yes, Lord. I love You"; but then you go away and do many things that offend Him. When He tells you to stop doing something, you keep doing it. Then the Lord will ask again: "Do you love Me?" At the end of the day, you will say: "O Lord, You know." We are quick to say, "Yes, Lord. I love You." Our love cannot just be a declaration with our mouth. The Lord said, *"These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me"* (Isa. 29:13; Matt. 15:8). Our love for Him must ever be increasing and be expressed in our daily living.

The Lord began with telling His people, *"I have loved you,"* meaning, "I have never stopped loving you." The Lord's love is always absolute. That does not mean it is always increasing; rather it means that once He loves, He loves you to the end: *"Having loved His own...He loved them to the end"* (John 13:1). Even on the cross, He did not change His mind. So, for the Lord to say *"I have loved you"* is a very powerful word. Nothing is more powerful to touch a person's heart than the love of God. God loves you. This love is amazing. Children must know that their parents love them. The parents correct the children because they need it, but it is all out of love. Children "love" their friends who plays with them, but who is going to take care of them when they are sick? Will they buy you new clothes and food every day? Such "love" is not like the true love of the parents. The love of God is the most powerful thing: *"For God so loved the world"* (John 3:16). That is why His love on the cross is very powerful. When we



preach the gospel, we should not just convince people that He is their Savior because He died for them; much more we must bring God's love to them. *"For the love of God constrains us...that those who live should no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again"* (2 Cor. 5:14-15). This love is a constraining love. If you do not touch this love, it is hard for you to give up anything, because you love those things more than you love God.

The way God started, *"I have loved you,"* is very important. Touch God's love. Never leave the best love. The first time the Lord touched my heart was really amazing! The Bible became my pillow. I loved His word and loved to spend time with Him. When He called me, it was like I was in the clouds. His love filled my heart. With such a love, you are ready to give up everything. Nothing else is important for you anymore. Once God's love has touched our heart, it changes everything. But if our heart is hardened, and He cannot touch us with His love, then nothing can touch or change us. So, this is a powerful word from the Lord. It is His love that causes us to turn to Him.

He did not love His people because they were such a great people. They were a stiff-necked people – we also are stiff-necked! He did not choose us because we are so good and wonderful. We are nothing. Yet even before the foundation of the world, He chose us to be without blemish before Him in love (Eph. 1:4). It is very hard to fathom this love.

If you are a priest, the most important thing you need to know is love. We must do things for the Lord out of our love for Him and out of His love for us. If this love is no longer there, it will be very burdensome to prepare for the feasts: "Oh no, it is Sunday again and I have to prepare. What am I going to do?" If you love Him, you will say, "Praise the Lord, it will be feasting time!" Learn! This

is not a doctrine. If you have this love for Him, nothing is impossible. Paul said that **nothing** shall separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, not problems, death, life persecutions, or sufferings (Rom. 8:35-39). This is why again we come to the church in Ephesus – He said, “I did not leave my love for You, why did you leave your first love, My bride?” He desires a glorious church, His bride! But they left the first love, and once you leave the best love, He is no longer #1 in your life. Pretty soon, He will not even be #2 and will mean nothing to you. So, we must keep the first and the greatest commandment: *“You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength”* (Mark 12:30). A hymn says, “What shall I give Thee, Master...Not just a part or half of my heart, I will give all to Thee.” To love with all your heart means to love with all your soul. The main part is your soul is your mind, because if you love Him with all your mind, you will not forget Him! You will think about Him in every situation: “Lord, what do You want me to do? What do You say?” Then you must love Him with all your strength. And the second commandment, like the first is this: *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mark 12:31). The most important thing in the priesthood is that we need to have the best love for Him. He must be #1. Even in your marriage, He must be #1. He must have the preeminence in all things (Col. 1:18).

*Note: The above content has not been reviewed by the speaker.*