

The Autopsy of Dead Religion: Ingratitude

Malachi 1:1-5

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Introduction: How many times have you & I been in a grocery or department store & heard a child scream, “But I want it!”? Often the child will continue his pleading, screeching all the louder, “I want it now!” It becomes a test of the wills – that of the selfish child & that of the previously indulgent parent who now (at least for the moment) has said “No!” What is taking place in such an incident? The child’s selfish insistence causes him to forget all the other provisions given to him (or her) up to that point in his life. The child has been given nurture, shelter, food, clothing, & lavished, no doubt, abundantly with more than he would ever need. Yet his ego-centered little will, unmindful of all that he has been given previously, believes that he is being denied something he not only wants, but that which he deserves. He might even mournfully cry, “You don’t love me.” But is that the case? Here in our text, Israel is acting like that selfish, strong-willed child & rebuffs God’s affirmation of love by saying, “*Wherein hast Thou loved us?*” There is not a question of perplexity but one of “cynical dissatisfaction” (Wisdom). It reveals the stubborn, self-righteous attitude on the part of those who have forgotten God’s goodness & failed to acknowledge God’s greatness. Review with me the theme of this book – the autopsy of & antidote to dead religion. God charges Israel with 7 counts evidencing formalistic, heartless religion. This morning we saw God’s charge of **insincerity** (Israel’s insincere worship). Tonight we see in Malachi’s spiritual autopsy report the charge of **ingratitude** (Israel’s insensitivity to God’s love & grace). May we also learn & apply the antidote to ingratitude!

I. The declaration of God’s love & grace (:1-2a)

A. The prophet’s introduction (:1)

1. The “**burden**” of the message:

- a. From the verb, “to lift, carry, or take” – hence, a load borne on the back of an animal or human.
- b. Applied to a heavy, weighty message of judgment (used 34 times in O.T.) & refers to a divinely revealed message.

2. The **bearer** of the message:

- a. An identification?? – “*Malachi*” means “My messenger” (nothing else known or recorded of him).
- b. An interpretation?? – Some suppose this stands for an anonymous writer (yet all the other prophets give their identity).

B. The Lord’s affirmation (:2a)

1. **Sense** of the Hebrew verb > marks continuity: “I have loved, I do love, I will love you, saith the Lord” (Morgan).

2. **Sentiment** of the Holy God > an unconditional, unchanging love.

Illustrate: “Love is not love,

That alters when it alteration finds” (Shakespeare).

II. The dissatisfaction with God’s love & grace (:2b)

A. God’s love unrecognized > “*Wherein...*” (God’s love scoffed at?)

1. “In what way do you love us?”

2. “If you really love us, why are we in this mess?”

[Promise of complete restoration not yet fulfilled; city & temple lack former glory...]

- B. God's love unrequited > (God's love spurned?)
1. They failed to love God with all of their heart, soul, & mind (see Deut. 6:5).
 2. They failed to show God's love to those about them (Exodus 19:5; Deut. 26:17-19).

III. The demonstration from God's love & grace (:2c-5)

A. The reminder of God's goodness (:2c-3a) [Israel's unmerited election]

1. *"I loved Jacob"*
 - a. God's love is sovereign, undeserved, & persistent.
 - b. God's love is evidenced even in His chastening of Israel > though sent into captivity, Israel is preserved there & later returned to her homeland.
2. *"I hated Esau"*
 - a. The use of the word "hate" – a comparative sense; as in Genesis 29:30-31; Deuteronomy 21:15-16; Proverbs 13:24; Matthew 6:24; & cf. Luke 14:26 with Matthew 10:37. Hence, "to love less or love more."
 - b. The use of the word "*hatred*" can be prophetic – Esau (& his descendants, Edom) will suffer the judgment of God for their sins.

Summary: Jacob is chosen & receives God's mercy & grace. Esau is not chosen & receives what he deserves (cf. Romans 9:6-29). Edom's continual opposition to God down through the centuries led to his destruction.

B. The reminder of God's greatness (:3b-5) [Israel's unfailing preservation]

1. God's **judgment** displayed (:3b-4):
 - a. *"Laid his mountains & his heritage waste"* – Nebuchadnezzar?? Nabateans??
 - b. *"They shall build, but I will throw down"* – Edom was never restored or rebuilt.
 - c. *"They shall call them"*:
 - (1) *"The border of wickedness"* – characterized by sin.
 - (2) *"The people against whom the Lord hath indignation for ever"* – the perpetual judgment of God.
2. God's **greatness** declared (:5):
 - a. When Israel realizes the contrast of fates between her & Edom, she sees God's intervention as a demonstration of His love.
 - b. *"The Lord will be magnified from ("beyond"? "above"?) the border of Israel"*
God's greatness is witnessed & declared by the surrounding nations (see :11, 14).

Conclusion: In spite of God's unfailing love for Israel, she continually demonstrated an appalling failure to love God in return. Rather than reveling in Jehovah's love, manifested in both chastisement & restoration, Israel rejected God's love & refused to obey. God's love was both unrecognized & unrequited by Israel. But before we look down our noses in disgust & unbelief at Israel's reaction, consider our own hearts. Have you ever despaired in a time of trial, wondering where God was or what He was doing? Do you ever question why God allows suffering, especially when it comes to you? Do you allow such questions or doubts to put a barrier between you & your God? Has your love for God waxed cold or become ritualistic? Have you continued the outward exercises of worship – prayer, devotions, church attendance – without an inward expression of love & gratitude to the One who loved you & gave Himself for you? What then is the antidote to this spirit of ingratitude, this insensitivity to grace? Consider Jennie Evelyn Hussey (1874-1958). She spent much of her life tending to her invalid sister. Apparently never married, she endured deformative arthritis for many years. When nearly at her breaking point with suffering, she wrote, "Please, Lord, make me willing to bear my cross daily without complaining because you bore yours for me." These words became the "seed-thought" for a complete song, with her writing of verses 2, 3, & 4, before the first. For only after voicing the petitions of the last 3 verses could she write, "King of my life I crown Thee now – Thine shall the glory be; Lest I forget Thy thorn-crowned brow, Lead me to Calvary." Is that your prayer?