

## THE MINOR PROPHETS – THIS IS OUR GOD

### God at his best - Malachi

Who's looking forward to Christmas?

Does anyone know when Christmas started?

Pope Julius 1 around AD335 decided 25<sup>th</sup> December was the day to celebrate Jesus' birth, and even then it affected society. Slaves were given temporary freedom for a month so they could enjoy the celebrations, something to look forward to.

We had a discussion in our Life Group the other night, as to what we enjoyed about Christmas or were looking forward to. For me it's the carols and the midnight service, a time to reflect - to grab a few quiet moments. For some it's the food and meeting up with family and friends.

For some though, Christmas is a struggle. Christmas can be spent rushing around visiting family; or you may not have any family to spend time with. We often try and squeeze so much in over Christmas that it can be a tiring and stressful time. And we miss the Prince of Peace, in it.

Perhaps this year we need to set some different priorities, to spend some extra time with friends and families during the year rather than cramming it in at Christmas, giving them our best time rather than the left overtime.

If we are to Love beyond Limits, maybe this is a yearlong challenge not a Christmas activity, where we are generally more caring and forgiving. Perhaps we even try to make up for the rest of the year at Christmas, where we feel we may have let others down.

Whether we like Christmas or not it comes around every year like a light in the darkness, a message of hope and love that is needed more than ever before in a world seemingly full of pain, wars and conflict and the impacts of global warming.

Christmas is something that does not change year after year after year, in fact, since the beginning of Christ's birth. There is something reassuring in life, knowing that some things don't change just like God's word, which is our secure foundation, our rock.

God's word reminds us that his faithfulness to us and his love for us does not change just like Christmas. Life and how we understand the message of Christmas sometimes changes, but not the importance of its true message, of unconditional love long after the presents and tinsel are stripped away.

At this special time of year, it reminds us of promises fulfilled, when Jesus was born. It's a time of hope even if hard to grasp sometimes, the opening lines of the Carol service song it says: 'Do not fear hope is here....' Hold onto the fact that we can hope in God's love, however dim and distant it might appear.

Even if we don't understand all that God does in our life. There are simply things in the bible we don't understand, some things that will always be a mystery but as Mark Twain said: 'It isn't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me. It is the parts that I do.'

Whatever you take away from this morning hold onto the fact that God is good, God is love and God has a purpose for your life and you can find hope in the darkest of situation.

A long introduction to Malachai....

We have reached the end of the minor prophets with Malachai. It's not a book I would chose to preach on at Christmas and its does not beat around the bush when confronting its readers with the truth. It reveals how fragile and vulnerable we are and in need of God.

Sometimes, I think we can soft-soap the impact of Jesus' birth on society and the world, Jesus was a radical at his birth and he would still be as challenging today, if we truly followed his teaching; to love God and our neighbors as ourselves. I think in order to understand Malachai you need to understand God bigger purpose and passion for his people over time.

God created Eden the perfect place, Gods ideal plan, and set the blueprint for life, it is unfortunate that as humans we weren't satisfied with Gods best plan, we thought we knew best and Eden was lost to us, but not to God. Then God set up his rescue plan through his chosen people of Israel.

The Priestly anointing was passed down the family line until God set apart Jacob, the Levite to be God's priest. To lead Gods people. That plan did not really work out, so Gods solution was to send his Son his last option, his only option, his greatest option.

So, this sets the scene

Malachi starts by reminding the people that he has made a choice in choosing Jacob over Esau, not sure why, but he does.

2 “I have loved you,” says the Lord.

But reminds the people they are breaking Covenant Through Blemished Sacrifices

<sup>6</sup> “A son honours his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty.

“It is you priests who show contempt for my name.

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’

<sup>7</sup> “By offering defiled food on my altar.

“But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’

By essentially giving God the leftovers and lame animals as a sacrifice, it’s like that unwanted present you open and think what’s this. We have all recycled a few presents in our time.

Malachi focuses breaking the covenant, the Jewish people were described as a covenant people, so it is a big deal.

This Covenant went beyond just a commitment, it drew the Jewish people into a deep and real relationship with God, one which God won’t break, however far we drift from God he is always drawing his people back to him.

Through this covenant relationship God saved Noah, parted seas, fed people for 40 years in the desert, it was a covenant of love, God at his best

Malachai reminds the people of the importance of this covenant

I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue,” says the Lord Almighty. My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. <sup>6</sup> True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

A covenant of Life and peace and turning away from sin. Sound familiar? Jesus is that new covenant come full of life peace and love.

However, Malachi does not stop at accusing them of defiling the table, breaking the covenant but says you're not giving me a tithe you are robbing me and yourself of a blessing.

I the LORD do not change. So, you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. <sup>7</sup> Ever since the time of your ancestors 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?'

<sup>8</sup> "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In tithes and offerings. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup> "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Money is always a tricky area in life, but if you go back to Hagai, all God wanted was for the people to build the foundation, and then God blessed them to build the rest. And even here God shows his generosity by promising to pour down his blessings.

But, I wonder if it would be re-written today would it sound like this:

"But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'

"In time and talents. <sup>9</sup> You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. <sup>10</sup> Bring your whole Heart into the storehouse, that there may be love in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from

devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup> "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

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God says return

But there is a danger that that we get caught up in the cycle if we are good God will bless us and we will be put on Santa's good list, if not we will go on Santa's bad list.

However, God is always only really interested in our hearts, in us turning back to God, God knows we are fragile, thoughtless and error prone.

Which is why Gods message through Scripture does not change in predicting Christs birth, death and resurrection it's a golden thread that runs through scripture and Malachai, because ultimately God only wants the very best for us. If we would only give him a try

At the end of this book it says:

See, I will send you the Prophet Elijah before the great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the heart of the children to their fathers or else I will come and strike the land with a curse. God Starts the book with I love you and ends with a rescue plan even if they did not appreciate it at the time.

God stays silent for 400 years and the silence is only broken through the birth of John the Baptist. Why do we think God has been silent in our lives? Are there still dreams yet unfulfilled?

God's plan is perfect and his timing perfect

Mathew 3

In those days John the Baptist came preaching in the desert of Judea and saying repent for the kingdom of Heaven is near.

And in John's gospel we read

There was a man sent from God whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify concerning that light, so that through him all might believe. 8 He himself was not the light; he came only as a witness to the light.

9 The true light that gives light to everyone was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. 11 He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. 12 Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— 13 children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

Sometimes we just have to cope with where we are in life's ups and downs knowing we are Gods children and loved by him.

Perhaps we just need to rant at God or be quiet, but this Christmas spend some time alone with God - listening to his heart beat and his love for you. That's the introverted side coming out in me. I just need to be alone.

But there is also part of me that recognizes the importance of community we are called to live together as Gods children with all our quirks.

And being in a community we have the opportunity to serve and share our lives with each other. For me Christmas is community with God and each other, bringing our hearts back to God and letting Him bring his light and his love into our lives. From singing carols in the Choir to stewarding at the door we are Christmas to each other when we turn back to God and surrender our will to his.

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