

INTRODUCTION:

1. [Image] The economy is in trouble. Recent political events have left people in ruin and almost everyone is struggling financially. Inflation is out of control. People have no idea what the future holds economically. National moral is low. People are exhausted and angry. They were promised that better days were ahead but all they have found is disappointment. Corruption and wickedness are rampant even among the spiritual leaders. Those who are supposed to preach and teach the truth manipulate it. They declare that sin is good and that God doesn't really care what we do. The institution of marriage, as God designed is completely disregarded. Scandal after scandal among religious leaders has left people deconstructing and not sure if any of the Bible is true at all. The land is filled with religious skepticism. Even those who claim to care about God don't really live like it. The whole place is filled with a kind of spiritual apathy that just shrugs at God. I am speaking of course about Israel during the day of the prophet Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament.
2. [Need] That's the problem with the Old Testament isn't it? It is so far removed from our situation today that it's hard to relate to what they are going through (sarcasm). But the reality is that our situation has plenty of similarities to Israel in Malachi's day. Because every part of the Bible is always relevant to our lives. But one of the significant issues of our day is spiritual apathy. It is a general indifference to the things of God. People don't really care any more what the Bible has to say. Respect for the church and for its leaders is lower than ever. And if we are honest, we have all found ourselves in moments, or days, or weeks, or seasons of spiritual apathy ourselves. The question is why is this apathy so destructive and dangerous to our souls?
3. [Subject] This morning we are going to look at the spiritual apathy in Malachi's day. And we will see that his day is much like our own.
4. [Text] Malachi 1:1-14
5. [Preview] We will look at the message of Malachi and then see two areas of life that spiritual apathy has affected.
6. [Read & Pray]

Point number 1 in your bulletin. **The message of Malachi is the people need to repent of their spiritual apathy. The message of Malachi is the people need to repent of their spiritual apathy.**

Just to be clear, I want to define what I mean by "spiritual apathy"

Spiritual apathy is a lack of care for God.

Or spiritual apathy is a coldness or indifference to God.

It is the feeling that comes when you think maybe I should read my Bible but your heart just shrugs and you think "eh."

This apathy is everywhere in our day today.

And it was everywhere in Malachi's day as well.

Let's give ourselves a little bit of background on the book of Malachi.

Usually what holds us back from reading the Old Testament is that we are so far removed from it.

It feels like a distant land and completely unlike our day.

But when you study history,

Especially the history of our faith,

You discover that the people then were just like us.

And the book of Malachi is written to be intentionally accessible.

It's context is honestly slightly unclear.

From the beginning we are not actually sure who Malachi is.

He is probably the last prophet.

But we don't hear who is father is.

We don't know what tribe he is from.

We don't get his background.

All we get is in verse 1, **"The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi."**

And Malachi might not even be his name,

It could just be his title because it means "My messenger" or "my angel."

We know nothing about him.

And we don't know exactly when this book is written.
The only thing we know for sure is that it is written after their exile.
Because Israel was given the promised land.
And they could keep it as long as they obeyed.
But because of their disobedience after hundreds of years they are taken into exile in Babylon.

And after 70 years they get to return.
But their land is desolate and destroyed.
The economy is completely destroyed.
National moral is low because they have been conquered.
Their future is in doubt and no one feels secure.
Poverty is high and inflation is out of control.
Sin and wickedness are rampant.

Malachi takes place sometime after this.
And they appear to have rebuilt the temple.
Their sacrifices and normal worship has finally resumed.
Malachi probably came sometime near the Nehemiah and Ezra.
People differ on when exactly because we don't have many clues.
But I think Malachi came after Nehemiah's reforms.
And this book shows us that even after revival people have become apathetic again.

And the book is organized in a series of back and forth between God and the people.
They are a kind of disputations or arguments.
God through the prophet Malachi tells the people something.
And the people talk back to God.

You will see this phrase repeated **"But you say,"** 9 times in this short book.
They say this repeatedly because the people are spiritually apathetic.
They do not care what God says.

They do not care what God wants.
They do not care what the prophet of God tells them.

In fact they value God so little that they believe they can argue with Him.
This reveals their spiritual apathy.

[transition] So the message is about spiritual apathy. And throughout this book we will see different areas of Israel's spiritual life that this apathy affects.

Point number 2: **Spiritual apathy makes us doubt God's love. Spiritual apathy makes us doubt God's love.**

This is the foundation of our spiritual apathy.
At the very least it was in Malachi's day.
And the first thing that their apathy did was make them doubt that God loved them.

Verse 2, **"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say "How have you loved us?"**

This is their objection.
They have heard preachers their entire live declare that God loves them.
But they don't feel like it.
They do not believe it.
Their talking back to God illustrates this.
Their is question, **"How have you loved us?"**

It is a very modern objection.
We still have people who say this.
They say, "If God is love why do bad things happen?"
"If God is love why do the people He loves suffer?"

It is a question of doubt.

They say, "okay He loves me, so what?"
What has all of this love of God gained me?
What has God done for them lately?

Well God has a response.

They ask what God has done, so God reminds them of their history.
Because when you doubt God's love in the present, return to the past.
Remind yourself of all of the times God's love has been revealed to you.

"Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" Declares the LORD. "yet I have loved Jacob 3 but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."

Now, there is a lot to unpack here.

Why all of this talk of love and hatred, Jacob and Esau?

First this should remind of the story of Jacob and Esau in the book of Genesis.

They were both descents of Abraham and sons of Isaac.

So the special covenant blessing of God should have come to one of them.

But the problem is they were twins.

The question becomes which son will gain the blessing of God?

Technically Esau was born first.

And Esau was a manly man.

Everyone wanted to be like Esau.

And Esau was his father's favorite.

By all accounts Esau should have been the choice.

But God always chooses the weaker.

God chooses the neglected.

God chose Jacob.

This discussion of love and hatred are not describing emotions.

It is not as if God is twitterpaited or head of heels in love with Jacob, but every time He looks at Esau He just gets angry and filled with rage. Love and hatred, especially in the Old Testament are covenant language. They are not describing emotions. They are describing the promises of God.

His love means that He has made vows to Jacob.
His hatred means that He has not made vows to Esau.
It shows God's priority.

And God's love and loyalty to Jacob has been revealed throughout their history.

Verse 3, **"but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."**

So Esau has faced the judgement of God.
The country of Edom has been destroyed just like Israel.
But look at the difference in verse 4.

Verse 4, **"If Edom says, 'We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,' The LORD of hosts says, 'They may build but I will tear down, and they will be called the wicked country, and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.'"**

Edom has been destroyed by God's judgment and wants to rebuild. They want to come back from their exile and start over again. But God says no. You are not coming back. There is not escape from God's judgement.

This is in comparison to Israel.
They have been destroyed but are rebuilding the ruins.
They rebuild the ruined walls in Nehemiah.
They rebuild the temple in Ezra and Haggai.
And God allows it.

God encourages it.
What is the difference?

First we need to see that this is not a matter of injustice.
Edom is rightly punished for generations of sinfulness and wickedness.

You want to know how many prophets prophesied against Edom?
How many warnings and generations they had to repent.
Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Joel, Ezekiel, Obadiah, Elijah, The Psalms, the
Judges, even Moses himself.
All of them warn Edom to repent.

When Israel fled Egypt they were refugees.
And in their wandering they asked Edom for permission to pass through.
Edom refused.
Not only refused, but they tried to take advantage of them and destroy the
helpless Israelites.
When Israel again was attacked by Babylon, Edom joined in.
They saw a helpless country they could pillage and so they did.
For these and many other sins God brought His judgement.
But only have generations of patience
And hundreds of years of chances to repent.
Because even God's hatred and wrath is exceedingly kind and gracious.

God shows Israel His grace and covenant love.
Esau is not shown that.
Why the difference between the two?

I love what theologian Iain M. Duguid says, "The difference between the
two peoples is not whether they experience trials and difficulties in this
world, but whether those trials and difficulties terminate in their
destruction, or whether they have a future beyond the judgement."¹
The difference is in God's choice and His grace.

¹ [A Study Commentary on Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi](#), EP Study Commentary (Darlington, England; Carlisle, PA: Evangelical Press, 2010), 196.

He chose Jacob over Esau.
And He has stuck by Israel throughout their sinful history.
He has never abandoned them.
He never divorced them and tried another nation.

And God's grace is present whether they see it or not.
But it is all around if they are willing to look.

Verse 5, **"Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel."**

God is already in their midst showing His love for them.
His love and grace is happening even across their borders and outside their lands.

Just like Israel we are tempted to believe that God does not love us.
We ask the same question.
We look at our circumstances and suffering and believe God has abandoned us.
Beloved, there is not a moment God has left your side.
Not even in your darkest days.

What can help us escape our spiritual apathy is to lift our eyes.
To look beyond the borders of our circumstances.
Look at your past.
Remind yourself of every time God has shown His love in the past.

Look at the past of our ancestors in the faith.
Recount the stories of deliverance from lions, fire, and death.
Remember every moment of God's grace to undeserving people.
Remind yourself that God has never abandoned His people.

You might not feel like God loves you.

The early emotions of a spiritual honeymoon might have faded.
But God looks at you and treats you with love.
Every second that you have ever been alive you have been loved by God.
Rest in His love.
Let that love warm your soul and draw you back to Him.
Whether you feel it or not, God loves you.

[transition] Spiritual apathy makes us doubt God's love. And doubting His love has negative repercussions for the rest of our spiritual life. Because if you doubt God loves you, then it is unlikely you are going to engage seriously in following Him.

Point number 3. **Spiritual apathy destroys our ability to worship.**
Spiritual apathy destroys our ability to worship.

It completely shatters it.
Because we cannot worship half-heartedly.
You cannot worship God while going through the motions.
It does so firstly because we are apathetic in our priorities.
We do not care about God like we should.

This is exactly what happens to Israel.
And worship is more than just what happens on Sunday morning.
Worship begins with our priorities.
But Israel does not have the right ones.

Verse 6, **"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name."**

Malachi uses a few examples of what correct priorities look like.
Children are supposed to honor their parents.
It's the fifth commandment and a natural law of the world.
Servants are required to honor their masters.
Employees have to listen to the boss.

God is their heavenly Father, yet they do not honor Him.
God is their master and Lord, yet they do not respect Him.

Instead even the priests despise God's name.
We have been going over the Ten Commandments on Wednesday nights.
This week we covered the third commandment which is to not take God's name in vain.
The priests have been doing so every single day.

And they cannot worship God if they do not honor His name.
Worship begins by believing God's name is worthy of worship.
It begins by prioritizing God.
But they haven't.
And they don't even recognize how wrong their worship is.
So they object again.

"but you say, 'How have we despised your name?' 7 By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the LORD's table may be despised."

This is the primary sticking point in their worship.
They are offering polluted animals on the altar in the temple.
The Mosaic law is filled with descriptions in Leviticus of how what kind of offerings are acceptable.
The clean and the unclean.
But they are not bringing God their best in worship.
In fact what they offer to God in worship is offensive.

8 When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?

This is a big deal.
God calls their sacrifices not just, not good enough, but evil.
Their half-hearted sacrifices are repulsive.

What kind of animals are they supposed to offer?

Clean and unblemished.

Perfect animals.

Costly animals like males.

The kind of animals that win prizes at the fair.

Yet their offer worthless animals.

They offer the blind sheep.

They offer the calf that can't walk anymore because it stepped in a hole.

They offer the ram that's sick with plague.

They are offering animals that they are going to have to put down.

It is worse than giving God their second best.

They are giving God their worst.

They are giving Him the garbage they have laying around.

And this is a problem because the priests are allowing it.

After all they should know the difference in acceptable and unacceptable worship.

I'm not an animal expert.

But it's pretty obvious if an animal is blind.

You can see it in their eyes.

And these priests handle and sacrifice animals all day long.

For their entire lives they see and handle livestock.

Do you think they can't tell what people offer?

Would any of you who know animals be fooled?

You think they can't tell the difference between an animal that would win prizes at the fair and an animal that isn't worth a thing?

No.

What should happen is an Israelite tries to offer their polluted worship and the priests stop it.

They rebuke them and call them to repentance.

But the priests don't care.
They go through the motions as well.

It is evil that the people do it.
It is evil that the priests allow it.

**"Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor?
says the Lord of hosts.**

I love this. God tells them to give their gifts to public officials.
See how much they appreciate that gift.
If they will not dare give it to important people, how dare they give it to
God.

Who among us would serve leftovers if someone important came to visit?
Would you put dog food on the plate if the governor came over?
Would we not make them our best dish?
Serve it in our china?
Then what should we give to God?
What should we put in the offering box?
How should we sing?

Now we might not offer up blind animals anymore.
But we can be apathetic in our worship.
We offer up lame and sick gifts to God.
We give the least amount possible in our tithes and offerings.
We give God what we don't need.
After all of our expenses, fun, and entertainment, we see what's left.
We might as well give God pennies from the street.
We'll talk about that more when we get to chapter 3.

Or we give God apathetic singing.
We cross our arms or leave our hands in our pockets.
We don't sing unless we love the song.

We approach our worship music apathetically.
I'm not saying you have to dance or shout.
But is God not worthy of your best?
Is God not worthy of the best you have to give?
Whatever it is, however small.

Verse 9, **"And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts."**

Do they think that worshipping God this way please Him?
Do they think that God is going to answer their prayers?
Do they think that God will look at this gift and worship favorably?
Does God see our apathetic worship and be pleased?
Malachi says no.
He even goes one step further.

Verse 10 **"Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand."**

God wants them to just shut it down.
He wants the temple closed.
He would rather them stop all the sick and blind animals.
God would rather have nothing than what they give.

Leviticus 6 describes the fire in the altar should burn forever.
They should never let it go out.
God says let it go out.
Because their offerings and worship is repulsive to Him.

He wishes that just one priest.
That just one righteous person would say enough.

Verse 11, **"For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts."**

This is actually a bit of a judgment.

God is telling them the future.

That one day God will be praised in every single nation.

That pure offerings will be accepted in far off places.

Because until now the temple in Jerusalem is the only place worship can happen.

No other sacrifices.

No other fire.

No other altar.

No other offerings were allowed.

They can only happen here.

But they have so polluted and ignored God, that one day the temple will be finished again.

And God will allow true and good worship in far off places.

Even places across the ocean from Jerusalem in Duncan, Oklahoma.

And all over the globe where our brothers and sisters in the faith gather for worship.

Verse 12, **"But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised."**

But when we worship God apathetically,

We are despising His temple and His name.

And our apathetic worship is often bored worship.

Verse 13, **"But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord."**

Look at what they say **"what a weariness this is."**

They say it's too hard to worship God.

His demands take too much time.

How many today say something similar?

How many believe that worship is just wearing and boring.

We would rather stay home and watch the service on TV instead of be present.

There are good reasons to stay home, like if you are sick, traveling, or unable to come.

But failing to come because "its a weariness" is a problem.

There are some today who just stay home because they want to.

We think God's command to gather together is an optional as sacrifices good animals.

We think we can worship however, wherever we want.

As if we could give ourselves communion with buffalo wings and beer.

I hear all the time about how wearing preaching is.

That our world has changed so much.

It's wearing to listen to someone talk too long about God's Word.

I've heard that whatever you do Don't read the whole thing!

Why would you read an entire chapter from Malachi?

People are going to sleep.

Listen to me, the problem with our weariness is not that God is boring, but that we have been overcome with spiritual apathy.

The problem for Israel was not the sacrifices and liturgy, but their hearts.

The same is true for us.

If we are honest, we don't pray because it's boring.
We want to do something more exciting and stimulating.
We would rather do anything other than pray.

Listen to what God says about this apathetic worship.
Verse 14, **"Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations."**

Those who cheat God.
Those who worship God apathetically will be cursed.
They will face consequences.

Because our God is a great King,
It is miraculous that people are not constantly struck dead like Ananias and Sapphira for improper giving and worship.
Yet our great King is gracious.
And His name deserves to be respected.

What is the most wondrous about our king is His grace.
That Jesus left His heavenly throne to come to earth.
Because even our best worship, our best sacrifices are not enough.
So Jesus put Himself on the altar.
He was the one sacrifice that dealt with our sins.

And His death and resurrection give us life.
Jesus is the only cure for spiritual apathy.
Because we cannot save ourselves.
I don't have a ten step plan.
I don't have a three point sermon for how to avoid those seasons of the soul.
All I have to offer you is Jesus.
Because Jesus is all that works.

CONCLUSION:

1. [Summary] The message of Malachi is the people need to repent of their spiritual apathy. Spiritual apathy makes us doubt God's love. Spiritual apathy destroys our ability to worship.
2. [Challenge] Repent of your apathy and run to Jesus. Because He is gracious and kind even to the apathetic. If we can muster the strength to call upon His name.