

SPIRITUAL CAT SCAN

MALACHI

A man backed his car out of a crowded parking lot, and accidentally hit the car behind him. He got out, surveyed the damage, took out a piece of paper and scribbled a note. He stuck it to the damaged car's windshield.

Bystanders who saw him assumed he'd written his name, and number, and insurance information. The man was being honest about his mistake.

When the owner returned to his car he read the note, "I've just smashed your car. People are watching me. They think I'm writing down my name and address, but I'm not. Have a nice day." The culprit had made folks believe he something that he was not. The man was a hypocrite.

The book of Malachi could be called, "**The Anatomy of a Hypocrite.**"

Here's Malachi's message in the words of the old country preacher, "Be who you is... cause if you ain't who you is... then you is who you ain't."

The hypocrite is a person *who is who they ain't*.

It's been said, "A hypocrite is like a straight pin - *pointed in one direction, but headed in another.*" He's an actor on a stage. He speaks his lines... plays his part... *but he himself is far-away, somewhere else.*

Remember, Jesus saved His harshest words - not for the *blatant sinner* but for the *bogus saint*... And the same is true for the Prophet Malachi...

Verse 1 is introduction, “**The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.**” Like the prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, Malachi was a Jew who returned to Jerusalem after the nation’s exile in Babylon.

But Malachi lived later – a century after Haggai and Zechariah.

There were actually three waves of Jewish immigration back to Israel.

In 536 BC, Zerubbabel led a crew of Jews that rebuilt the **Temple**. In 458 BC, a priest named *Ezra* brought revival to the **people**. And in 444 BC, Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to reconstruct the city’s **walls**.

This Nehemiah was quite a leader. With *sword* in one hand and *shovel* in the other he fought off his enemies and rebuilt the walls in just 52 days.

Nehemiah served as the Mayor of Jerusalem for 12 more years before he returned to Persia... And I’m sure you’ve heard the saying, “**While the cat is away, the mice will play.**” That’s what happened in Jerusalem...

In Nehemiah’s year-long absence God’s people acted like pagans. They ignored God – neglected the Temple – forgot the Scriptures. Oh, they were back. They *returned to the land*. But now they *turned their backs on God*.

Nehemiah eventually came back to Jerusalem and served a second term, but in his absence God raised up the *Prophet Malachi* to perform a spiritual cat scan - and prescribe a remedy for the people's hypocrisy.

And this is what we need... Far be it from me to call anyone a hypocrite.

In fact, I suppose if all of us were sandwiches – there'd be a slice or two of baloney in each of us. There're areas in my life *and* your life where *we're not what other people think we are - we're not what we should be or want to be.* *We is who we ain't...* We need Malachi to challenge our hypocrisy.

He begins in verse 2, "I have loved you," says the LORD. "Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?' To become a hypocrite, a person has to harden his heart, and to harden his heart he first has to deny God's love.

The Jews had accused God of not loving them.

But God did love Israel. He responds to their accusation in verse 2, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?..." "Yet Jacob I have loved; but Esau I have hated..." Here's proof of God's love – He chose Jacob over Esau.

Understand, when God says He hated Esau, He didn't intend to be taken literally. Here's a form of Hebrew speech we call "hyperbole."

It's "the use of exaggeration to hammer home a point."

A good example is Luke 14:26. There Jesus says, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”

Obviously, Jesus didn’t mean to be taken literally. Other Scriptures tell us to honor our parents and love our siblings. But Jesus exaggerates to make a point – *our love for God needs to be so strong and passionate it makes natural affection toward parents and siblings look like hate.*

God loved Esau and the Edomites, but He loved Jacob and Israel with a special love. He chose Jacob for unique status and privilege. God’s love for Israel was so overwhelming it made His love for Esau look like hate.

Of course, the question arises, “*Why did God chose Jacob over Esau?*”

The answer is, *we have no answer.* It’s a mystery, hidden in the wisdom and sovereignty of God... Once, a man approached Griffith Thomas with the same question, “*The Bible says, God hates Esau, what gives?*”

The pastor responded, “*I’ve got a more perplexing problem than that - the Bible also says, God loves Jacob.*” The real brain buster is not that God hates an evil person like Esau, but that He loves an evil person like Jacob.

Jacob didn’t deserve God’s love any more than Esau. Jacob was a dirty thief, a double-crosser, a con-man, a liar - yet God chose him anyway.

The only explanation for God choosing any of us is His amazing grace.

You and I deserve a hot spot in hell - yet instead - in Christ - we're given special status, spiritual privilege. *Embrace this grace, don't question it!*

The Jews *denied God's love*, but they also *despised God's name*.

God asks in verse 6, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master."

If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? Says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name." The Jews claimed a relationship with God - they called Him their "Father," "Master," but nothing in their conduct substantiated that claim.

If God is your "Father" why don't you show Him respect, and be an obedient child? How can you call Him "Master" if you never serve?

Tozer once wrote, "It's not that people don't want God, it's that people have things they want more than God! We are determined to have what we want most." We all need to ask the question, *what do we want most?*

Here's a searching poem, "I would like to buy \$3 worth of God please. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine. I want ecstasy not transformation; I want the warmth of the womb, not a new

birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I'd like to buy \$3 worth of God, please." Are you settling for a mere \$3 worth of God?

God doesn't come in small quantities. He comes in bulk only! You take Jesus for Who He is – all of Him – or you don't really follow Him at all.

In verse 7 God voices His third complaint. The Jews *denied His love, despised His name* – and *defiled His altar*. They trivialized worship.

The Lord says to Israel in verse 7, "You offer defiled food on My altar. But say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.'" The Jews offered worship in their rebuilt Temple, but they begrudged the time it took - and the effort it required to do so...

It's been said of our society, "We worship our work, work at our play, and play at our worship." Seldom are we serious about our beliefs.

We call ourselves believers, *but are we...* Like the Jews of Malachi's day, Christians today tend to play at Christianity. They lack passion.

In verse 8 God gets specific. "When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?" The Law required a Jew

to sacrifice the best of his flock. Instead they gave to God their leftovers.

Take the crippled, sickly lamb – that'll die soon anyway – and give it to Governor Sonny. But don't give it to God, and then call it a real sacrifice.

Yet isn't this what we do when we send old clothes we wouldn't be caught dead in to the Salvation Army - then call it an offering to God?

We spend all night reading a novel, or watching TV - then pick up our Bible and read a verse or two - *and wow! How devoted we are...*

We do what we want six days a week - then begrudge the idea of giving God an hour-and-a-half on Sundays... We think nothing of dropping big bucks for concert tickets; yet we're making a serious sacrifice – we're being abnormally generous - to slip a twenty in the offering box.

Are you giving God the leftovers of your time, talent, effort, money?

Do you throw him a few crumbs – toss Him a bone - to keep Him off your back. Are you giving God the sickly and scrawny of your flock?

God wants our very best – the firstfruits, the cream of the crop, the pick of the litter. In 2 Samuel 24:24, David expresses his worship to God, “**Nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing...**” If it doesn't cost *us*, then how can it be deemed a *sacrifice*?

Give God only what you can afford to give and you're just tipping...

God was so displeased with their worship He would've preferred for someone to shut the Temple doors, than continue to foster a charade.

God says in verse 10, "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you..." It was a sham. They were going through the motions.

And notice verse 13, "You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness!' And you sneer at it," says the LORD." They viewed worship and serving God as a burden – a drudgery - a duty not a joy... "Oh, what a weariness!"

Here's the worship leader... "I can't sing for God today. My voice is tired from screaming at yesterday's game?" Or the green team member, "What was I thinking when I volunteered to mow this grass..." Or the nursery worker, "I've got to wipe those snotty noses again this Sunday!"

If you've signed up to serve, yet you always complain, "Can't they find somebody else?" You're sneering at the altar. You're insulting God. You're saying that God isn't worth the effort or attention or time.

And be careful... because, Yes, God can find somebody else!

Have you forgotten what an honor and privilege it is to serve the Lord?

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7, “God loves a cheerful giver.” It literally reads “a hilarious giver.” Worship and service needs to be a lot of laughs, a delight, a thrill, a joy. If it’s not, it’s time to troubleshoot the problem...

DL Moody use to say, “I may get tired *in the work*, but I never get tired *of the work*.” Serving a God *you love intensely* will never get boring...

Malachi 2 is a word to the priests of Israel. There was a truth they’d failed to teach - and a sin resulted that was common to the people.

Verse 11 explains, “Judah has dealt treacherously, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem, for Judah has profaned the LORD'S holy institution which He loves...” The institution was marriage.

Notice several points from this verse... First, marriage is an institution God loves. God created marriage. It was *His idea and ideal for humans*.

Second, it’s a “*holy institution*.” Marriage is sacred and special. God has labeled marriage the highest form of commitment in human affairs.

“*Living together*” or “*shacking up*” is a lesser relationship. Don’t you dare say, “*Well, in God’s eyes we’re married...*” No you’re not. You’re making a mockery of God’s will if you make that statement. “*Cohabiting*” is more an expression of *reservation* than *dedication*. *I’m just keeping it real...*

Anything short of marriage is a *convenience* not a *commitment*.

The Jews of Malachi's day marred marriage in two ways: **First**, they married unbelievers. And **second**, they practiced unbiblical divorce.

Verse 11 says of Judah, "he has married the daughter of a foreign god."

When God forbid Israel from marrying other races he wasn't concerned about *racial purity* - but *spiritual purity*. The genealogy of our Lord contains racially mixed blood. Read Matthew 1... Rahab was a Canaanite, Ruth was a Moabite. God never had a problem with interracial marriage.

But what bothered God was when a believer married a non-believer.

God told the Jews not to marry foreign women because He knew they'd drag His people into idolatry. Marriage is a powerful attachment. A spouse has tremendous influence – for better or worse. God knew it was a short jump from *bedding an idolater* to *bowing before their idol*.

If you want a happy, harmonious home, be careful to marry a true believer. Marry an unbeliever and your home will be a battleground.

I could fill milk jugs with the tears that have been shed in my office by people who chose to ignore the Scriptures and marry an unbeliever.

She thought she could change him... He promised to be open...

But stubbornness only hardens after the vows. 2Corinthians 6:14 warns us, **“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers...”** Be careful who you marry - *then be careful how you treat the person you marry...*

God’s second complaint about marriage is in verse 13. The Jews cried to God, gave an offering, but He never responded. *They wondered why...*

Malachi explains, verse 14, **“The LORD has been witness between you and the wife of your youth, with whom you have dealt treacherously; yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”** They wanted God to promise them a blessing, while they violated the promises they made to their spouse. From *hypocrisy in the Temple to hypocrisy at home...*

Several years ago an article appeared in the Atlanta Constitution, **“Bless this Divorce: Couple Seals Separation in Church.”** A couple in Decatur’s First Christian Church wanted to end their marriage at a special service.

The pastor explained, **“Since both are members of this congregation, it seems appropriate to ask God to approve the ending of the marriage.”**

What? Appropriate to ask God to approve of what His Word condemns?

That's not appropriate it's ludicrous! Yet some of you want your pastor to approve of your divorce. *And I can't!* My job is to help you see marriage through God's eyes, not help you justify your actions in your own eyes.

If you divorced on biblical grounds you have God's approval and ours.

But if you divorced your spouse because you got bored, or felt unhappy, or found a better offer, or it got hard – we love you, and for your sake, we urge you to repent. You need *God's forgiveness*, not a *pastor's approval*.

I think verses 15-16 are two of the most vital verses on marriage in the Bible. **“But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit?”**

Marriage is more than a *contract*, or *romance*, or *living arrangement* – first and foremost marriage it's a union. It's a spiritual, mystical union that binds a man and a woman, and makes them one... *and why?*

Again, verse 15 **“He seeks godly offspring.”** The best way to insure well-adjusted, emotionally-healthy, spiritually-solid kids is to insure they have two parents united and growing in a loving relationship. A great way to damage and wound those kids - is to rip their parents apart.

Study after study shows the devastating consequences of divorce on kids. God seeks godly offspring – and if for no other reason than the kids, a couple should hunker down, work it out, and keep their marriage intact.

Over the years, I've spoken to hundreds of couples on the verge of divorce – and they're quick to offer excuses and justifications. But seldom does anyone ask me what God thinks about divorce...

Well, ask or not - He tells us in verse 16, **"For the LORD God of Israel says that He hates divorce, for it covers one's garment with violence..."**

Here's the untold story... divorce is a violent act. It's like ripping a shirt. **(Tear a shirt)** Tear a shirt, and it's not a nice, clean cut that can be neatly stitched back together. A tear leaves behind jagged and ragged edges.

Repair it the best you can, but it's never like new. There's always a scar. And the same is true with divorce. *A nasty scar remains...*

I've talked to many divorcees, who years later, wished they'd hung on a little longer – tried a little harder. Do it for yourself – do it for your kids – do it for the God you say you love... Remember, God ***"hates divorce..."***

Well, let me lighten the mood a bit... I'm pulling out a list of *"famous last words."* Here are a few final statements from the lips of dying men...

You can make it easy. That train isn't coming so fast...

Hand me a match. I think my gas tank is empty...

Hey, let's see if that gun is loaded...

Honey, these biscuits are hard as a rock...

Step on it, we're only going 75...

Just watch me dive off that bridge..."

And finally, *"What, your mother is going to stay a whole month?"*

Malachi was God's final word before the coming of Jesus. Between Malachi and Matthew we have what scholars call the 400 silent years.

The Babylonian Talmud, a Jewish commentary on the Bible, states, *"Malachi was last written, and the Spirit departed."* Malachi was God's last written word, before God sent His living Word, His Son Jesus.

God wanted Malachi 3-4 ringing in the ears of His people for four centuries. Here's God's preparation for the coming of His Son...

Malachi 3 begins with a prophecy, *"Behold, I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, will suddenly come to His temple, even the Messenger of the covenant, in whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,"* says the LORD of hosts."

This verse is quoted in Matthew 11:10, and applied to John the Baptist. John was Malachi's messenger. He prepared the way for Jesus.

Once, a young pastor preached his first sermon. His text was Malachi 3:1, *"Behold, He is coming..."* He was told in seminary if he ever had a loss for words, he could just repeat the text. It would jar his memory.

Well, on this morning, he drew a blank on three separate occasions. Each time he shouted, “*Behold, He is coming...*” The third time, the young pastor slammed his fist on the pulpit, shouted his text, *and lost his balance.*

He fell off the platform into the lap of a little old lady on the front row. He was so embarrassed and apologetic... Finally, the old gal told him, “*Sonny, don’t worry. It was my fault. You warned me three times you were coming.*”

The OT closes with a warning - God will pay a visit to the fallen planet.

Let me hit a couple of highpoints in chapter 3... Verse 2, “*For He is... like a launderer’s soap...*” If your garment has a stain so deep you can’t get it out, you take it to the laundry mat. The launderer handles the tough jobs.

Well, Jesus is like “*a launderer’s soap.*” He gets out the grime and the dirtiest dirt. If you need a good scrubbing come to Jesus.

Verse 6, “*I am the LORD, I do not change...*” God is immutable. He never changes. *In a world where the only certainty is that nothing is certain,* it’s a great comfort to know God doesn’t move the target.

In fact, one day if you find yourself distanced from God you can be sure it was you that moved, not God. God is the only anchor in a sea of flux.

In Malachi 3:7, God states, “*Return to Me, and I will return to you...*”

But notice the Jews reaction, **“In what way shall we return?”** They don’t even know they’ve drifted. Beware! Sin’s deadliest trait is that it causes blind spots... You think all is fine, when in reality God has issues.

And God brings up a big deal in verse 8, **“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.”** Robbing God just sounds like a serious offence.

Remember Judas Iscariot. He was Jesus’ treasurer, yet we know from the Gospels He stole from the petty cash. *How low can you go* – to steal from God’s wallet? But it’s not just Judas. There are people in this room today who are as guilty as Judas – they too are stealing God blind.

And they do it by refusing to tithe. In the OT the tithe was not yours’ to give. It belonged to God. Stinginess wasn’t merely the absence of giving – it meant you were stealing from God what really belonged to Him.

The word **“tithe”** means **“tenth.”** When Abraham went out to meet the High Priest he gave him a tenth of his spoils. The Mosaic Law called for several different tithes. They added up to nearly 33% of your income.

People often ask - ***Are NT believers obligated to tithe?***

The answer is **“yes and no.”** Obligated to a **percentage?** No! But don’t ignore the **principle**. Abraham is the father of our faith, and we were quick to follow his example in believing unto righteousness – but that’s not all he did. He also expressed his faith by giving 10% of his money.

Don't say you're trusting God if you don't back it up! It's time to put your money where your mouth is... If you really want to live by faith, give God a 10% token of your love and gratitude, and trust Him to provide for you.

Verse 10 tells us one of the reasons we need to tithe, **“Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house...”**

In the OT God's house was the Temple in Jerusalem, and the needs of the Temple and its priests were paid for from the people's regular tithes.

Likewise, your tithes support the ministry of our church and its pastors.

If you stop tithing to your church it won't be long before your pastors are selling pizzas. Nobody will be there when you need them. Here's a reason to tithe that's close to my heart - *it pays the bills and feeds the pastors.*

But there's another reason, verse 10, **“and try Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “If I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.”**

This is the only passage in the Bible where God challenges us to test Him. Often we're warned not to presume on God's mercy, but here He dares us to tithe – *just see if He doesn't open up windows in heaven.*

For 30 years Kathy and I have tithed our income. Our first check is to Calvary. At times we've had a little, but we've never been without.

I agree with the philanthropist who once was asked, “How is it you give away so much, yet have so much left?” He replied, “I shovel out, and God shovels in, and God has the bigger shovel.” God dares you to try Him...

Money is like manure. Stack it up and it begins to stink. But spread it around and it causes stuff to grow. Give and it'll be given to you!

In verse 14 Malachi changes the subject. The Jews complain, “It is vain to serve God...” Where's the benefit? *They're saying it doesn't really pay to serve God.* And I understand the feeling... you sacrifice blood, sweat, and tears – then you look around and see very few tangible rewards.

Malachi answers their complaint in verse 16. He mentions a “book of remembrance.” In heaven there's a book that records acts of service.

What you do for God may never get mentioned in the here and now, or appreciated on earth... Your name may never show up in a history book.

But God has written it down in a far more important book. God does see. He does pay. Your goodness is being preserved for all eternity.

This world might despise us, but in verse 17 God calls us, “My jewels.”

We're valuable to God. There's a Super Bowl commercial that's running in heaven tonight. It's paid for by God, as a reminder to the heavenly host.

You see a spinning globe - then the words: **Earth, cost: a few tons of dirt.** Next you see stars and galaxies - then the words: **heavens, cost: a few amps of electricity.** Then you see the wonders of nature and the animals, then the words: **fauna and flora, cost: a little creativity.**

Finally, you see our faces, and the words: **My people, priceless.**

Chapter 4 is a continuation of chapter 3, and the question, ***does it pay to serve the Lord?*** God's answer is, **Wait until payday!** When Jesus returns to Earth accounts will be settled. Chapter 4 focuses on His second coming...

Verse 1 reads, **"For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble. And the day which is coming shall burn them up,"** says the LORD of hosts..."

Verse 2, **"But to you who fear My name the Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves."** The proud get burned. The humble get healed and healthy.

Each year at Passover Jewish families set a place at the table for Elijah. Their tradition is base on Malachi 4:5, **"Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD."**

The Prophet Elijah will return before the second coming of Jesus.

Revelation 11 records the ministry of two men who appear on earth in the Great Tribulation. They have miracle powers. One of the men brings drought, and calls fire from heaven – both occurred in Elijah’s ministry.

It could be that one of these two witnesses will be Elijah.

Notice the last word in the OT, “**curse.**” The OT Law produced *a curse*.

In contrast, flip ahead to Revelation 22:21 and you’ll see the last word in the NT, “**The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.**” The OC left mankind under *sin’s curse*. Jesus brings us into *God’s grace*.

This is why we can end our hypocrisy. Confess your sin, turn to Jesus. You don’t have to *be who you ain’t...* when God *forgives who you is!*