

The Burden of the Lord

"Ye offer the blind and sick. Offer it now to thy governor: will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?—saith the Lord of Hosts"—Malachi 1:8

MALACHI CHAPTER ONE

THE word "burden," when associated with the Word of the Lord, suggests that the message was something to be borne, as a rebuke, judgment or reproof. The words before us are taken from Malachi, chapter one. Malachi means "My Messenger," and that the message was in reproof, is gathered as we read this chapter over.

The word "burden" does not seem so severe when approached in the light that the Lord Jesus presented it—

"Come unto me, all ye that labor and are **heavy-laden** (with the burden of this life), and I will give you rest.

"Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for **MY** yoke is easy, and **MY** burden is light"

(Matt. 11:28-30).

Yet of the Scribes and Pharisees, in his rebuke of them, Jesus said (Matt. 23:4)—

"They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders, but they themselves will not move them with one finger."

And it is this spirit of the scribes and Pharisees that caused the burden of the Word of the Lord to be spoken to Israel, in which we see a true manifestation of rebuke, and judgment, in deep measure heavy and grievous.

In Mal. 1:2, we read—

"I have loved you, saith the Lord."

These words express a truth both of the past and the present, as God said through Jeremiah (31-3-4)—

"I have loved you with an everlasting love."

And although in their blindness, the question was asked (Mal. 1:2)—

"Wherein hast Thou loved us?"

—yet all their history was and is a record of God's love for His people Israel. And we may today apply the words of this prophet not only to natural Israel, but spiritual Israel can place themselves within the declaration toward themselves, as it is on account of natural Israel's false love, that God has directly manifested His love to us, the Gentiles.

V.6: "A son honoureth his father, and a servant his master."

We may accept the fact that God, in requiring this of Israel, was manifesting His love. God was a Father to Israel. Through Moses, God spoke to Pharaoh of Israel being His "first born" (Exo. 4:22). Through Jeremiah (31:9) He declares He was a "Father to Israel." And then to spiritual Israel we read (Rom. 8:14)—

"For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."

God by His Word has made us to become "sons of God" (John 1:12), and we may take to ourselves the words of the prophet regarding the honor which God as a Father, rightly deserves, and a thorough manifestation of reverential fear in joyful anticipation of God's further love and blessing in the Kingdom of His Dear Son.

Israel as a "Nation of Priests and a Holy Nation," were despising God's Name (v. 6), although they asked—

"Wherein have we despised Thy Name?"

The answer is given in v.7—

"Ye offer polluted bread upon Mine altar."

And this answer seems to engender surprise. With all their meticulous washing of pots and cups, they would not think of doing such a thing! They said—

"Wherein have we polluted Thee?"

It is ever thus, as man wants chapter and verse as it were, when actions really speak louder than words. The Truth was that they **acted** in a way that proclaimed their actual despising of God's Name and character. God's "Name" is His glory and greatness and holiness and majesty.

By reading Mal. 1:8, we get the true meaning of what was meant in polluted bread—

"If ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And if ye offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?"

"Offer it now unto thy governor: will he be pleased with thee, or accept thy person?"

"The "governor" can mean anything that we may put in the place of the Truth, to take first place.

Neither we nor Israel after the flesh would think of offering anything but the best to a worldly dignitary whose favor and approval we desired to gain.

Thus the prophet, as God's messenger, speaks that Israel may recognize their mistake, and so turn from the error of their ways, as in offering "polluted bread"—careless service, half-hearted devotion, our "second-best."

God was being dishonoured, for to despise and dishonour the altar is to despise the One Whose altar it is. God requires the best, without blemish, spot or defect, and again we should deeply ponder v.8 in answer to these thoughts. To what extent do we value God's love? Just how deep and **ACTIVE** is our gratitude for all His infinite goodness—present and promised? What fruits have we to show?

"And now," says the prophet:

"I pray you, beseech God in a half-hearted manner, in a listless endeavour, and expect that God will be gracious unto you! This has been your manner—your means" (v.9).

Can we expect that God, Who is Lord of all creation, will accept worthless work?—that He would show partiality and favouritism to us above other men, though we are careless in His service? Yet we often seem to take this for granted—as though we are something special.

"I am God," says our Heavenly Father. He takes second place to none. We must speak the same things; be of one mind with Him; and be without partiality of any kind.

And then we read (v.10)—

"Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for naught? Neither do ye kindle fire on Mine altar for naught."

Though loud in their pious professions, they merely pleased themselves and sought their own profit, and did nothing for God in evidence of a living and thankful faith.

Another version gives a little different rendering—

"O that there were one among you, that would shut the doors, that you might not kindle a fire on Mine altar in vain."

In this view, God would rather have the temple closed than offering done in a dishonourable fashion. Israel profaned God's Name, not by blasphemous words, or lightly-uttered oaths, but by deeds, as their blemished offerings declared the table of the Lord to be polluted, and His meat contemptible.

We can surely apply the lesson to ourselves. When there are empty chairs at our meetings, some are sadly manifested as taking their stand with the scoffer, and lending to him help in his contemptuous inquiry—

"Where is the promise of His coming?"

That is, our action in being absent and putting comfort or convenience or worldly interests first, actually declares our disbelief of God and disinterest in His love.

God is a jealous God, and requires from us the very best and utmost that we can give—always. There is so much to be gained for so little that we have to offer for it, surely God is not asking too much, when He asks—

"Give me thine heart."

He must be the center, the very pivot upon which our love and devotion—yea, our whole life—revolves.

When we conduct ourselves in a half-hearted way, listless and unenthused, and blindly satisfied to be that way in God's service, then it becomes a weariness, as Malachi records (1:13)—

"Ye said also, Behold what a weariness is it!"

The clock and watch becomes so often consulted, as when Israel's service became a weariness to them, and Amos reveals them as saying—

"When will the Sabbath be over?" (Amos 8:5).

Israel was told sharply that such offering was not acceptable. It was insulting to God's majesty, and a despising of His love.

We, brethren and sisters, are of the Israel of God, we are of His Holy Name. We do well to read together what is contained in Mal. 1:14, as we have now entered the New Year, a year that may well bring the great day of our standing to give account of our stewardship—

"But cursed be the deceiver which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing.

"For I am a great King, saith the Lord of Hosts, and My Name is dreadful among the heathen."

These things, we are told, happened to them for examples and are written for our admonition, that we may have the wisdom to avoid the broad and common way of death and find the narrow, lonely, unfrequented way of life.

Are we offering to God our very best, in this our so short day of opportunity, or was this deep and solemn lesson through Malachi recorded in vain for us?

—W.J.P.