

## RESPONDING TO OUR SHOW & TELL GOD (Malachi 1-4)

What was your favorite thing in grade school? There are several things I remember with fondness: Playing kickball on the playground at recess, eating those hot rolls at lunch, but one of my favorites was show & tell. Do you remember show & tell? Sometimes, a child would bring a pet or a favorite toy?

A veteran, elementary teacher told about an outgoing second grader named Erica who told about her brother's home-birth. When her turn came, she waddled up to the front of the class with a pillow stuffed under her sweater. She held up a photo of a baby boy and said:

This is Luke, my baby brother, and I'm going to tell you about his birthday . . . Daddy put a seed in my mother's stomach, and Luke grew in there. He ate for 9 months through an umbrella cord.

The teacher reported, "She's standing there with her hands on the pillow, and I'm trying not to laugh and wishing I had a video camera rolling. The kids are watching her in amazement."

Then, about two Saturdays ago, my mother starts going, "Oh, oh, oh!" She walked around the house for, like an hour, 'Oh, oh, oh!' My father called the middle wife. She delivers babies, but she doesn't have a sign on the car like the Domino's man. They got my mother to lay down in bed like this. (Erica lies down with her back against the wall). And then, pop! My mother had this bag of water she kept in there in case he got thirsty, and it just blew up and spilled all over the bed, like *psshheew!*

Then the middle wife starts going "push, push", and "breathe, breathe." They start counting, but they never even got past 10. Then, all of a sudden, out comes my brother. He was covered in yucky stuff they said was from the play-center, so there must be a lot of stuff inside there."

The teacher concluded, "Then Erica stood up, took a big theatrical bow and returned to her seat. I'm sure I applauded the loudest. Ever since then, if it's show-and-tell day, I bring my camcorder – just in case another Erica comes along."

As I was working on today's message, it occurred to me that God wants you and me to be show and tell believers. Before we tell others about Jesus, we need to show them what it means to be a Christ-follower. We are to show them Jesus by the life we live in front of them, and then we are to tell them about Him.

I'm also convinced that our God is a show and tell God. This is clear in the passage we are going to look at today. We come to the final book of the OT, which is the last of the twelve minor prophets. I had a friend who referred to this book as Malachi, a little-known Italian prophet.

He is better known as Malachi, and I'm pretty sure he was Jewish. His name means "my messenger." God had something to say to His people, and He used the prophet Malachi to deliver His message. In the 55 verses that make up this short four-chapter

book, I counted 25 times that we find the phrase, “says the LORD.” Malachi tells us what God said.

I want you to notice the last time God we find the word *says* because there is another important word in the verse that comes before the word *says*. Look at 4:3. In addition to being a God who tells, our God is also a God who acts. He does. By His action, God shows us His power, His love, His purposes, and His plan. Our God is a God who shows and tells.

How are we to respond to this show and tell God? That is what we are going to look at today. We are going to highlight several passages within this book that teaches us what we are to do in response to our show and tell God.

We will begin with 1:3.

## I. LET’S BELIEVE WHAT OUR SHOW & TELL GOD SAYS.

That three-word phrase, “But you say” is used nine times in Malachi. On nine separate occasions, God makes a statement or an accusation against the Jews, and each time it is followed by a question or a denial. What God says and what the people say are at odds with one another.

Quick question: If you and God are not in agreement, guess who is wrong?

The six words most wives want to hear their husband say are: “I was wrong; you were right.” When you and I are not on the same page with God, the six words we need to say to Him are: “I was wrong; you are right.”

Those to whom Malachi wrote had not yet learned that lesson. I wonder if we have. We won’t look at all nine, but we will look at a few.

### 1. *Consider What God Says about Himself.*

God declares here in 1:3, “I have loved you.” The people objected. They asked, “How? Just how have you loved us?” They seriously doubted what God had so clearly declared.

Have you ever wondered whether or not God really loves you? We are tempted to do that whenever heartache finds its way into our lives. “You know God, if you really loved me then you would not have allowed such-and-such to happen?”

That such-and-such is different for each person. It might be the unexpected death of someone close to you. It could be your own health difficulties, or financial setback, or family tension.

Satan will look for any opportunity he can find to instill doubt into your heart. He has been doing that from the very beginning. He approached Eve in the Garden and asked, “Did God actually say you are not to eat from any tree in the garden?” He was trying to plant doubt in Eve’s mind. Next, he outright contradicted what God said. He claimed, “You will not surely die.” (Genesis 3:1b, 4).

If he can get you first to doubt and then deny what God has said, he will have you exactly where he wants you—defiantly standing in opposition to God.

Rather than allowing doubt to take root, we need to cultivate trust in whatever God says. Just remember:

- God never lies;
- He never makes a mistake;
- He never mis-speaks;
- He never misleads;
- God never experiences a memory lapse.

When God says something, you can take it to the bank. You can know beyond a shadow of a doubt that it is so.

Speaking through Malachi, God answered the people's question. They wanted to know just how God had demonstrated His love; so, He told them. God is under no obligation to answer your questions. He doesn't need your approval. He doesn't need you to understand Him. But if you have questions, ask God. He might answer. He might not. Either way, He still loves you. He will tell you what you need to know, but He won't always tell you what you want to know.

In answer to the people's question, "How have you loved us?" God basically says, "Take a look at your history." He reminds them of Jacob. Jacob was renamed Israel by God. Jacob had 12 sons. The 12 sons of Israel gave rise to the 12 tribes of Israel. God sovereignly chose to love Jacob. God did not choose to love Jacob because Jacob was an upright man of sterling character. Jacob was a scoundrel, a cheat. He would have made a very successful used car salesman, but God loved Him, and in time God's love changed him into a man who sought God, and God stood by Jacob.

If you ever began to doubt God's love, look back to your history. Consider what God has done on your behalf. If you look closely enough, you will see God's fingerprints all over your life. He has protected you, guided you, and blessed you.

I heard this the other day. I like it. I heard it said, "God is not a God of love; He is a God in love." God is in love with you, and He will never fall out of love. No matter how many times you fall and mess up and sin, you need never fear God coming to you and saying, "I just don't love you anymore." His love is steadfast. It is certain, and because of that, you are secure.

## *2. Consider What God Says about Us.*

I have said before that when we read Scripture, you need to look for ourselves in the text. As we read Malachi, we find that we are the Jewish people.

This book was written 100 years after the people returned to Jerusalem following their 70 years of captivity. The Temple has been rebuilt. The walls surrounding Jerusalem have also been rebuilt. They are experiencing a time of rest from their enemies, but the people have become complacent. Their worship is perfunctory. They are just going through the motions. There is no life, zest, or vitality in their spiritual relationship.

God has some tough words to say to the people. To the priests, He says in 1:6-7, "You despise My name?" and "You are offering polluted sacrifices." And they say, "Whaaat?" God then accuses the priests of offering blind and lame animals upon the altar as sacrifices instead of offering the spotless lambs, the completely healthy animals.

Do you ever give God the leftovers—leftover time, leftover energy, leftover money? God deserves the best, not just your leftovers.

In 2:17, God accuses the people of wearying Him with their words. They respond, “What are you talking about?” God answers, “You are saying things about Me that aren’t true.”

I wonder if we weary God when we say things like, “It doesn’t matter what you do. God is a God of love. He will accept you; so, just go ahead and live life on your own terms.” I wonder if God ever rolls His eyes and shakes His head when He hears us talking about Him, saying things that simply aren’t true.

Sometimes I preach because I’ve got something to say, and sometimes, to be honest, I preach because I’ve got to say something. If you ever find yourself in that boat of speaking only because you have to say something, make sure that whatever you say squares with the truth of what God has already said. Don’t weary Him with your words.

In 3:7 God calls upon the people to return to Him. They say, “How can we return? We never left!” They failed to recognize their own waywardness.

God has placed within us His Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is faithful to warn us when we are heading in the wrong direction. He is sure to sound the alarm when we need to make a U-turn. If we fail to respond to Him, we run the risk of becoming deaf to His voice.

In 3:8, God says, “You are robbing Me.” The people say, “What are you talking about?” God says, “You have withheld your tithes and offerings.” When we fail to return to God a portion of the financial blessings that He has showered upon us, we are guilty of robbing God. We are also guilty of robbing God in other ways. We can rob God of worship. We can rob God of obedience. We can rob God of trust and love. Whenever we keep what God is due, we are guilty of robbing God.

We may not always like everything that God says, but aren’t you glad you serve a God that speaks. Our God is not a silent God. We read in Psalm 19:1, “The heavens tell of the glory of God,” and the next verse adds, “Day after day they continue to speak; night after night they make Him known” (NLT).

God speaks through His creation. He spoke through the prophets and the authors of Scripture. His Spirit speaks to our heart as we read the Bible. God has spoken most eloquently through His Son, Jesus Christ.

We have looked at *the tell part* of our show and tell God and how we are to believe what He says. Now, we need to consider *the show part* of our show and tell God.

## **II. LET’S BENEFIT FROM WHAT OUR SHOW & TELL GOD DOES.**

Through Malachi, God told His people what He was going to do. Malachi makes a play on his name in 3:1. As we said, the name *Malachi* means “my messenger.” The messenger of which he speaks in this verse is not himself. He speaks of another. Who was it in the NT who prepared the way of the Lord? For further proof, look also at 4:5. In Matthew 11:14, Jesus reflected on His cousin, John the Baptist, and He said, “If you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come.” The One who comes after the arrival of John is, of course, Jesus, the Messiah.

What the OT does not make clear is that there is a first and a second coming of Jesus. The first time, Jesus came as a suffering servant. We see this beautifully portrayed in Isaiah 53. Jesus came to make payment for our sin. The first time, Jesus came to offer

grace and peace.

His second coming looks very different. The second time Jesus comes, He comes to execute judgment. Look at 3:2. Here we see the first and second benefit we can receive from what God has done in bringing Jesus to us.

### *1. Let God's Fire Refine You.*

There are several OT passages that portray God as a silversmith or goldsmith. One of those is found in Zechariah 13:8-9.

Not many of us are familiar with the work of refining precious metals, but in the process of refining silver, the silver is heated until it reaches a molten state. When that happens, the impurities rise to the surface. Those impurities are called *dross*. Very carefully, the silversmith scrapes the dross off the top of the molten silver leaving the silver free from any impurities. Then, the molten silver is poured into a mold so that the silver can become what it was meant to be.

You can be certain that you are precious to God. You and I know quite well that there are still impurities within us. God wants us to become what He means for us to be; so, God does the work of refining in our lives. He puts us through the fire of trials, not to harm us or to punish us but to refine and mold us.

A preacher interviewed a silversmith. He asked the man, "How do you know when the work of refining has been completed?"

The silversmith answered, "Oh, that's easy. I know I'm done when I can see my reflection in the silver."

That is what God is looking for in your life. He wants you to reflect the image of His Son. When Jesus is clearly reflected in your life, God will have achieved what He purposed to do.

### *2. Let God's Soap Cleanse You.*

Malachi 3:2 contains another metaphor that would have been well-understood in Jesus' day but is much less so in ours. A fuller was a person who whitened cloth, especially sheep's wool. He used a harsh soap or detergent in the whitening process.

If we will allow Him to do so, Jesus will whiten us. He will cleanse us from the sin that soils us.

Have you ever used Lava soap to wash grease-stained hands? The lava cuts through the grease quite well, but you wouldn't want to use Lava soap when taking a bath. That soap is gritty and rough. I don't know the ingredients of a fuller's soap, but I imagine it to be much like Lava soap. The experience is not a pleasant one, but the job gets done.

What does the silver have to do to be refined? It just has to submit itself to the hands of the silversmith. What does the dirty wool have to do to be whitened? It just has to submit itself to the hands of the fuller.

We just have to submit ourselves to the hands of our God.

### *3. Let God's Light Heal You.*

Look at 4:1-3. The sun that hardens clay is the same sun that melts ice. In a similar way, the coming of Jesus judges the wicked and heals those who reverence the Lord.

The word *wings* in 4:2 in some translations is rendered as *rays*. Jesus is the “sun of righteousness.” As He shines upon us, the rays of His light will heal us of our weaknesses and spiritual infirmities.

When my sister had her first child, her baby girl came home from the hospital with a case of jaundice. Her husband, who is a doctor, told her to put their baby in the sunlight. The next day, he came home to find his little girl positioned close to the window so she could catch the rays of the sun, but she was still bundled up in a blanket. She wasn’t getting the rays of the sun.

It is not enough to come to worship services at church. It is not enough to have Christian friends. We need to open ourselves up to the healing Jesus’ healing rays and let Him shine on us.

In a sermon from Malachi, Matt Woodley included a story about his 9<sup>th</sup> grade basketball coach. His real name was Mr. Hammerstein, but behind his back, the players called him “the Hammer.” Woodley said:

The Hammer was a gigantic ex-marine with hands the size of grizzly paws. Most of the time he acted with a quiet gentleness, but at times—usually when we had it coming—he could explode with righteous anger. In one game, for instance, we were playing a team we should have been beating; instead, we were down by eight points at half time. It was probably the most uninspired and unmotivated game in my brief basketball career, but I was perfectly content with my lackluster efforts. During half time, as the Hammer lectured us about basketball fundamentals, drawing little diagrams on his whiteboard and asking for more hustle, I was having one of my finer ADD moments: my mind wandered, I stared out the door of the locker room, and then I let out a huge yawn. The Hammer suddenly stopped talking, grabbed me by the jersey, lifted me off the bench and started shouting two inches from my face, “And Woodley, you’re playing like you’re bored stiff. If I don’t see more hustle out of you, I will personally take you out of the game, pour gasoline down your shorts and light you on fire. You got that, son?” Suddenly, from deep within me, I found motivation and focus. During the second half of that game, I played with unrelenting intensity.

Woodley went on to apply his autobiographical story with the message of Malachi. He said:

When God’s people were treating their spiritual lives with careless contempt, when they were unmotivated and uninspired, bored and distracted, yawning in the face of God, they needed a serious wake up call. They needed someone to pour gasoline down their shorts. Or in the words of Malachi, they needed to meet the God who is a Refiner’s Fire (3:2). So, God sent Malachi to say, “You were made for better days. You weren’t made to coast in your spiritual apathy. God has better days coming.”

You and I will experience those better days our Show and Tell God has planned if we will believe what He says and allow ourselves to benefit from what He does.