

Finding Courage to Escape Apathy - Malachi 1

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Good morning. Blessings to you. I'm so glad to be here with you, and it is such a privilege to share God's Word with you today. This is the last week of the Old Testament in our Bible Reading Plan, and this is the last message of our series Finding Courage.

If you were with us last week in person or online, you'll remember that we took a journey into history to around 500BC. And, we learned that people of Israel had been conquered by the Babylonians.

Their land was overtaken, the walls of the city of Jerusalem had fallen, and the temple had been destroyed. In addition to that, the people were exiled from their land and became slaves of the Babylonians.

But God, being rich in mercy, worked it out for them to return to their land. Through the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we learned that after 70 years of exile, they returned to Jerusalem, rebuilt the temple, and then rebuilt the walls around the city of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's leadership. God even used the money from their enemies to pay for it all!

And, after everything was rebuilt, God used Ezra, Nehemiah, and other leaders to help reunite Israel as God's chosen people. So, about 50,000 Israelites gathered for a big worship festival. They had a revival.

And through that, we learned the keys for Uniting as a Church. They devoted themselves to the Word of God, and they repented of their sin. So, they made a covenant, or a resolution, to reject their individual and corporate sins, and walk in the ways of the Lord from that point forward.

Last week, if you are reading through your F260 reading plan, you were able to read the contents of their covenant together with God. I encouraged you to read it and underline or make note of the specifics of their covenant. Here is my summary of what they committed to God in Nehemiah 10.

The Contents of Israel's Covenant with God (Neh. 10)

1. Prioritize the family (10:31)

They would not intermarry with the peoples of surrounding nations. The reason is that they were in danger of being led astray to worship pagan gods, and as a result, the moral fabric of their nation would be weakened because of the decline of the family unit.

2. Keep the Sabbath (10:31)

They would keep the Sabbath holy by not engaging in work activities, and instead use the day for worship and joy to honor the Lord.

3. Support the Temple Tax (10:32-33)

It mattered to the people that they come together for worship, demonstrating corporately their beliefs and devotion to the Lord. So, they committed to support the temple, which was their central location for corporate worship unto the Lord. As we learned last week, God had stirred it up in the hearts of the government of their day to use their money and resources to build the temple. But, foreign governments would not be expected to upkeep and care for their temple, so they committed to own the responsibility themselves.

4. Additional Provisions for the Temple (10:34-35)

The people recognized that service in the temple required more than money. So, they agreed to wood for the altar and other provisions that contributed to corporate worship activities.

5. Dedication of the Firstborns (10:36)

The Israelites were to give the first of every kind of blessing they received to God. In certain situations their firstborn was dedicated to work at the sanctuary. In most cases, they paid a “redemption fee” in lieu of giving their child to this work because it was not practical for all firstborns to do this.

6. Faithfully Give the Tithe (10:37-39)

They recommitted the firstfruits of their labor to the Lord. The first tenth of everything they received and earned was to be given to the Lord.

So, they are at this worship festival and they recommitted themselves in these six ways. Yeah! We’re gonna make it happen! We are gonna do better this time! But in just a short time, the excitement and passion for God began to fade. They started to fall back into the same patterns as before.

Have you been there in that place? Can you relate to this? At certain points in your life, you had a spiritual awakening or a spiritual resurgence, but as quick as it came it started to fade. This condition has a name. It is called spiritual apathy.

Apathy is a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern. So applied spiritually, the definition would be a lack of interest, enthusiasm, or concern for God or the things of God. Spiritual apathy is telling God “I don’t care” or “that doesn’t matter.”

And those words don't have to be said to count. More often than not, spiritual apathy is displayed through a lack of actions or a lack of emotion, Just going through the motions.

Kids, I'd like to try and help you understand the word apathy. So a question...How many of you have seen the Emoji Movie? The word Apathy is like the "Meh" Emoji. Apathy is just "meh" when it comes to the things of life, obedience, things that are fun, the things that should bring joy.

So Kids, for example. Have you ever gotten in a fight with your brother or sister. Have you ever hit your brother or sister? So, what if your mom or dad is explaining to you that the reason you don't hit is because it hurts and injures others, and in doing so, you are not being kind and loving. What if you said or thought, "Meh, I don't really care." That is apathy.

But, what about your relationship with God. What if your mom or dad comes into your room before you go to bed and says, "hey, let's say a prayer to God." And you say or think "Meh, I don't want to, or I really don't care, or he's not gonna listen." That is an example of spiritual apathy. Spiritual apathy is "meh" to God, and his ways, or to the church and ministry.

Apathy, Meh...That is how the Israelites reacted toward God just shortly after they made a commitment to follow God. So, what God does is send his prophet Malachi to talk to the people about this and give them a series of messages from God. It is no wonder then, that Malachi's name means "my messenger."

So, God confronts them with seven ways they had shown apathy. Each time, the people say, Wait what?! How did we do that? Then God said: "let me tell you something, this is exactly how you did it." Let me give you an example of a couple the confrontations:

God Confronts Israel's Apathy

Confrontation (2:10-16)

God: I no longer respect your offerings or receive them gladly.

People: Why [do you not respect our offerings or receive them gladly]?

Mal. 2:14 And you ask, "Why?" Because even though the Lord has been a witness between you and the wife of your youth, you have acted treacherously against her. She was your marriage partner and your wife by covenant.

16 "If he hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord God of Israel, "he covers his garment with injustice," says the Lord of Armies. Therefore, watch yourselves carefully, and do not act treacherously.

Confrontation (2:17-3:6)

God: You have wearied me with your words.

People: How have we wearied you?

Mal. 2:17 When you say, “Everyone who does what is evil is good in the Lord’s sight, and he is delighted with them, or else where is the God of justice?”

Confrontation (3:8-12)

God: You are robbing me.

People: How are we robbing you?

Mal. 3:8 “By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions. 9 You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing me.

Confrontation (3:13-18)

God: Your words against me are harsh.

People: What have we spoken against you?

Mal. 3:14 You have said, “It is useless to serve God. What have we gained by keeping his requirements and walking mournfully before the Lord of Armies?

15 So now we consider the arrogant to be fortunate. Not only do those who commit wickedness prosper, they even test God and escape.”

So, Malachi is a short book - only three pages in my Bible. But, it is packed with some punches; some gut shots from the Lord to confront his people regarding their apathetic ways. Now, we could take each one of these confrontations and make a more well-rounded series on spiritual apathy. Perhaps one day we will. But today, God’s word will answer this question:

How do I escape the trap of spiritual apathy?

We are going to focus on Malachi Chapter 1 and the first two confrontations in the book. And, I really believe if we can get our hearts wrapped around what God is saying regarding these 2 issues, then we can escape or be prepared to escape the trap of apathy. So let’s read Malachi 1:1-5.

Mal. 1:1 A pronouncement: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. 2 “I have loved you,” says the Lord. Yet you ask, “How have you loved us?”

“Wasn’t Esau Jacob’s brother?” This is the Lord’s declaration. “Even so, I loved Jacob, 3 but I hated Esau. I turned his mountains into a wasteland, and gave his inheritance to the desert jackals.”

4 Though Edom says, “We have been devastated, but we will rebuild the ruins,” the Lord of Armies says this: “They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called a wicked country and the people the Lord has cursed forever.

5 Your own eyes will see this, and you yourselves will say, 'The Lord is great, even beyond the borders of Israel.'

How can you escape the trap of apathy?

1. Remember the Love of God

The Lord says to his people, "I have loved you." The love that is stated here is a continuing type of love. God is saying, "I have loved you and still do". So, you will get the wrong impression if you read it as I have loved you, but don't anymore.

God was saying to them, I have been continually committed in my love for you despite your flaws and failures. But, the people take exception to what the Lord has said. And the people respond with, "But how?" It is clear that they either don't believe it anymore or doubt what he says is true.

And perhaps they are looking at their circumstances. Sure, we were able to return after exile and we have our city back, but we are still under foreign rule. We still are struggling and fighting to survive. Our enemies still surround us. Our land still has to be rebuilt. Where have you been God? What have you done for us lately? How have you loved us?

It's like a couple in a long distance relationship whose only correspondence are letters. The love feels certain and the relationship is thriving as the letters are passed back and forth. But, what happens when one stops sending letters? The other will start to doubt the love. And eventually that doubt will turn to hopelessness.

So, through the prophet, God reminds them of his love through the example of Jacob and Esau. If you recall, earlier in the year, we learned in our Bible reading that God made a promise, a covenant with a man named Abraham.

He told Abraham that he would make him and his descendants into a great nation and that they would be blessed. And, that all the peoples on earth will be blessed through him. So, Abraham has a son Isaac, and Isaac has two sons, Esau and Jacob.

Esau was the first born and rightful heir of this promise to continue through his lineage. But, as the story goes, he despised his birthright and ended up trading it to Jacob for a cup of soup. And, then Jacob then did some sneaky, and sinful things to receive the blessing from his father.

So, God tells them, wasn't Esau Jacob's brother. Despite all these circumstances I have loved you, I have chosen you as the recipients and heirs of my promise! So, you are not better than him, but you are certainly better off because I fulfill my promises, and my covenant is with you.

Eventually, Esau's descendants, the Edomites, became some of the most wicked people in the land. Full of confrontation and violence, and animosity toward the nation of Israel. For example,

God told Israel through the prophet Obadiah that they would be overrun and destroyed by an enemy nation. And we learn through Obadiah that the Edomites were happy and gloated over the destruction of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. Listen to what the Lord says of the Edomites:

Obadiah 10 You will be covered with shame and destroyed forever because of violence done to your brother Jacob.

11 On the day you stood aloof, on the day strangers captured his wealth, while foreigners [Babylonians] entered his city gate and cast lots for Jerusalem, you were just like one of them.

12 Do not gloat over your brother in the day of his calamity; do not rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction; do not boastfully mock in the day of distress.

So, the people ask God, how have you loved us? Where's the proof? He says, just look at the Edomites. I did what I promised. They were wicked toward you, and even laughed at you when you were conquered. But you are here, beginning to thrive once again even after exile and they are not. They are wiped out completely, just as I told you they would be.

And guess what, I am the Lord of Armies, and they are not coming back. Kids, this is an answer to one of your questions on your sermon notes. Malachi uses his favorite name for God here, The Lord of Armies. This is a name for God used over 250 times in the Bible, and in three pages Malachi uses the name 24 times.

The Lord is saying to them, I've got untold forces and powers at my command. The Edomites can say they are coming back all they want. They will try to rebuild their territory, but I'll tear it down because I'm the Lord of Armies.

And despite your apathy, you are going to see this happen to them in your time with your own eyes, and you will say, "Great is the Lord!" Remember Israel, "I have loved you!"

God wants you to know the same thing today. "I have loved you!" "I love you!" But perhaps you are apathetic. I was talking with a couple of friends who work at our counseling center the other day, and we were talking about two types of apathy.

The first type is the "state" of apathy. Some of you here, or watching online, are in a state of apathy. Your state of being spiritually and your whole life until this point says, "I don't care" or "It doesn't matter" when it comes to God.

Perhaps you are hopeless today. Perhaps you have joy. You are doing things your way, living life how you want without considering God. Maybe your sin has caught up to you and you are living with some severe consequences. Well, friend, you need to hear this today. You should write this down:

God Loves and Cares For Those Who Don't

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

He wants you to hear this today, "I, the Lord of Armies waged war against sin and I won. And I love you so much that I sent my one and only son to die for you. He died the death you fully deserve for your own sin.

So, if you believe in Jesus today, you will not perish, but live eternally. God wants to save you, not condemn you. By believing in his son Jesus you can escape this life, this state of apathy toward God.

In addition to the state of apathy, there is also a season of apathy. This is where your passion for the Lord has faded. Perhaps you have just come out of a season of closeness with God, but now you are in a spiritual funk. This spiritual apathy has you doubting God's love. You are doubting your purpose, your mission, your ministry, your effectiveness.

As a result, you seem to care for God less or the things of God don't matter as much. If that is you today, you need to remember his love for you. I want you to write this statement down. If you are in a season of apathy, need to hear this:

God's Love is Certain Even If You Doubt

1 Jn. 3:1 See what great love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!

Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

You are a child of God. You can find courage to escape apathy today by remembering his love. But it doesn't just stop there, in response to his great love, you must give God your best.

How can you escape the trap of apathy?

- 1. Remember the Love of God**
- 2. Give God your Best**

Because the Israelites were doubting his love, they began to just go through the motions. And it was happening from the top down, starting with their priests. Let's look at verses 6-14.

Mal. 1:6 "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. But if I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is your fear of me? says the Lord of Armies to you priests, who despise my name."

Yet you ask, "How have we despised your name?" 7 "By presenting defiled food on my altar." "How have we defiled you?" you ask. When you say, "The Lord's table is contemptible."

8 "When you present a blind animal for sacrifice, is it not wrong? And when you present a lame or sick animal, is it not wrong? Bring it to your governor! Would he be pleased with you or show you favor?" asks the Lord of Armies.

9 "And now plead for God's favor. Will he be gracious to us? Since this has come from your hands, will he show any of you favor?" asks the Lord of Armies.

10 "I wish one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would no longer kindle a useless fire on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of Armies, "and I will accept no offering from your hands.

11 "My name will be great among the nations, from the rising of the sun to its setting. Incense and pure offerings will be presented in my name in every place because my name will be great among the nations," says the Lord of Armies.

So, God reprimands the priests. I'm your Heavenly Father. I have and still lavish my love upon you. But, in view of my great love, you despise me. You consider my table, my altar, to be detestable to you. The people once again say, "how is that?" The Lord says, "Because you don't give me your best."

The people had been offering, not just second rate sacrifices, but oftentimes, their worst sacrifices to the Lord of Armies. God required the people to give their best sacrifices to him, and the priests, as lead worshippers, should have known that. It's amazing how quick apathy can creep in and steal the honor that is due the Lord.

Isn't this true of us when we are in a season of apathy. We just go through the motions. We give God our seconds, our thirds, the last. Let's be honest, we sometimes offer him nothing in response to his great love for us. But, here is the truth. You might want to write this one down...

God's Sacrifice is Complete Even If Yours Is Lacking

When you give God your seconds...when you give Him what is last when you have much; Or nothing even if you have little; It doesn't change the fact that He still gave you his one and only. He sacrificed his one and only for you, Jesus Christ. And his sacrifice is complete when it comes to the forgiveness of sins.

We no longer have to give animal sacrifices. As a pastor, I am so grateful for that! Hallelujah! Jesus paid it all. But we have something even greater to offer as a sacrifice unto the Lord. And that is our lives! God tells us in Romans 12:

Rom. 12:1 Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship.

2 Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God.

If we are to offer our bodies, our lives as living sacrifices, then that means everything that we have should be offered to the Lord. Perhaps you are in a season of apathy, and you say, "I don't feel close to God and I don't know what his will is for my life." If that does bother you or seem to matter much to you then here I have an important question for you to consider...

How can you expect your life to be different, or your faith, your family, your job, your church, or for your world to be different, if you are indifferent toward God?

If you want to escape spiritual apathy, be transformed by renewing your mind. In view of God's mercies and love for you, start giving the Lord what is first, not what is last. Give the Lord what is first of your love, first of your time, first of your talents, first of your treasure. For this is your true act of worship.

If you are in a state of apathy today, and you have had no care for God and he hasn't mattered to you at all, hear me, he loves and cares for you even though you don't. I urge you to care today, and accept the free gift of salvation that is offered to you.

He loves you so much that he gave Jesus on the cross so that you might live. And when you accept him into your life, your eyes will be opened, and will be set free from the bondage of sin. And then that will only be the beginning of you discovering how vast his love really is for you.

But for those of us here today who have made the decision to follow Jesus, we are prone to wander aren't we. And you may be, or may find yourself in a season of spiritual apathy. I urge

you to return to the Lord. Remember how much he loves you. Remember the sacrifice that he gave for you.

I hope and pray with every single day that we are given, that in view of his love and mercies, we would give him our best, the first of every part of our lives. He is certainly worth it all. Let's pray.