



## **The Burden of the Word of The Lord**

*Series: Malachi: Remember the Grace of God*

Malachi 1:1

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We are going to begin making our way back to Matthew this morning and we are going to get there by way of the prophet Malachi. Malachi serves, I think, as a fitting transition from the season that we have been in as a church – remembering our first love – back to the exposition of the gospel of Matthew.

Malachi is an amazing book. Malachi prophesied around 450 BC in Israel. He was one of the last prophets before the 400-year silence in between the Old Testament and Jesus Christ. The Israelites had returned from the Babylonian exile. Jerusalem had been rebuilt, and the temple had been restored, and they were going about their lives.

Still the people had not learned from their exile. They questioned God's love, failed to give Him honor as they should, were careless in worship and offered to God worthless offerings, rejected God's truth, were disobedient to the covenant with God, were faithless toward God, faithless toward one another, ignored the commands of God and treated His grace with contempt.

To this rebellious people God sent his messenger. As a nation they had been the recipients of great grace from God, but they had forgotten His favor and what it meant to be the covenant people of God. Malachi, speaking for God, brings a series of accusations and indictments against the nation that demonstrates how far they had fallen and their desperate need for renewal and revival. What we are going to do as we study through this prophecy from Malachi is to hear these accusations against Israel, to consider them in our context, and then let them serve as positive exhortations for us so that we might not fall away from God ourselves or return to where we have been. As old as this book is, it sounds distinctly modern. Read with me Malachi chapter 1.

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Let me read verse 1 again: “The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.” (Malachi 1:1, ESV) I am going to do something today that I do not normally do. I am going to preach today from 8 words, 8 words that set the foundation for the rest of this book. I want to preach to you this morning regarding the burden of the word of the Lord – that is what the word translated here as “oracle” means. It is the Hebrew word “massaw”. It means “a burden, a weighty thing, a load, a thing that is lifted up and carried.” I want to preach to you today about the weightiness of bearing, of carrying, and of preaching the word of God. The idea is that the word, the message, that Malachi preached was not something that he carried lightly, that he preached lightly, or that was to be received lightly. It was a weighty word from God.

Now I know that in preaching a message like this, there is a sense in which this message could sound self-serving – I have struggled with that thought. You know, like I am standing up here saying something like “my job is really hard, my job is really tough, you should feel sorry for me, you need to affirm me -- waaaah.” But I think, I pray, I know you know me better than that. That is the furthest thing from my mind today. My desire today is that you would have a greater understanding, a greater appreciation, a deeper realization of the momentous and meaningful thing that we do every week as a people when we gather to hear the word of God preached. I want you to understand the weightiness and the gravity of both the message and the moment.

The burden, the weight, the gravity, the significance of the word of the Lord is of great importance and eternal consequence. The ministry of the Word is not just filler, not just a part of a well-rounded worship service – the preaching of the Word of the Lord is divine truth coming through a human personality. It is God speaking to His people. The OT prophets, the Apostles in the NT, every faithful preacher in this age realizes that this calling to carry the Word of God is not to entertain and to tickle the ears. The faithful preacher knows and feels the weight of the truth that he is God’s ambassador, God’s messenger, God’s herald sent to preach to immortal, eternity-bound souls on behalf of God Almighty and for the sake of Jesus Christ. The faithful preacher is a man called by God, sent by God, with a message from God, to speak on behalf of God, for the glory of God and with eternal consequences for all who hear. The calling to carry the burden of the Word of the Lord is not inconsequential, not insignificant, and is not to be regarded lightly. It is substantial, weighty, significant, and meaningful. Jeremiah would say of the burden of the word of the Lord: (Jeremiah 20:9, ESV) Amos would declare: (Amos 3:8, ESV) The Lord has spoken, I’ve got to preach. Paul would say of himself: (1 Corinthians 9:16, ESV) It was the burden of the word of the Lord that made Peter and John stand against their persecutors in Jerusalem: (Acts 4:18–20, ESV) This is the burden which

every faithful prophet in the OT, every apostle and faithful preacher in the NT, and which every faithful preacher in this age knows – the weightiness, the importance, the seriousness, the gravity of carrying and preaching the Word of the Lord.

So, we are going to consider this thought this morning – the burden of the Word of the Lord. We need to consider together and reflect on and feel together the weight of the ministry of the Word of God so that we will value it, as we should. The ministry of the Word of God is weighty because we are dealing with the word of the Lord.

1) It is weighty because the preacher deals with the word of the Lord. This prophecy that Malachi had been chosen by God to deliver was not the product of his own intellect, wisdom, or imagination. It is not as if Malachi was looking upon the nation of Israel and evaluating their current condition and the culture and trying to come up with some sort of helpful suggestions for moral improvement and better living. It was not as if Malachi had gone door to door with a survey of what people were looking for in a sermon, or did a demographic analysis to figure out what questions people were most asking. That is not it at all. God gave him a message for the people of Israel and his job was to deliver that message faithfully and accurately regardless of the response. Malachi had no right to tamper with the message, to tone it down, to make it more acceptable, or to flavor it with human wisdom. He had received God's message and it is that message that must be proclaimed, not simply his personal opinions or thoughts. And that is true of every faithful preacher.

The burden, the weight of the Word of the Lord is to deliver the truth of God, the word of God faithfully and accurately. That is why Paul would write over in 1 Corinthians 4: (1 Corinthians 4:1–2, ESV)

It is not the calling of the faithful preacher to attempt to be cool or creative, to try to be profound and impressive. The job of the preacher is to be a faithful steward of the word of God, a faithful steward of the mysteries of God. The burden of the word of the Lord demands that faithful preachers handle God's Word with reverence, with accuracy, and with a determined pursuit of the right understanding of God's Word by the grace of His Holy Spirit – as a slave to Christ and a steward of God's Word. The faithful preacher bears the weight of knowing what he is dealing with -- the very Word of God. (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV) God says of His word in Jeremiah 23:29: (Jeremiah 23:29, ESV) It is the word that brings life, the word of truth, it is the word of God's power and working. (Hebrews 4:12, ESV)

The faithful preacher deals with God's very word and that is weighty and significant and vitally important. He knows that he is not playing games. He feels the weight of the Word of the Lord and He knows that the command is clear: "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth." (2 Timothy 2:15, ESV) Rightly handling it, rightly dividing it, rightly applying, rightly interpreting it – that is the weight, the burden of the Word of the Lord, not to mention the preaching of it. Beloved, faithful preachers realize that they have a responsibility to faithfully declare God's Word – it is what they were made for. Faithful preachers realize they must seek for, must have, and must deliver God's message to those whom they preach. And the faithful preacher knows that he must feel the weight of the word of God himself first – he must know personally the realities of repentance and faith, of the application of the word of God to his own soul, he must know the conviction of the Word of God himself first before he can ever stand and preach the word of God with full conviction. It is no light thing to preach the word of God.

It is not an easy thing to stand before people and deliver a message that you believe you have received from God. It is no easy thing to stand and preach, praying earnestly: "God give me wisdom, give me strength, give me clarity, give me unction, give me power, give me compassion but firmness, balance rebuke and encouragement, reproof and exhortation, balance grace and responsibility, forgiveness and the call for faithfulness, the greatness of your love with the awesomeness of your holiness, direct me to serve you wisely for the sake of your glory and for these souls." It is a weight that is borne with longing desire for the Word of God to have its full work in your in souls and lives and homes.

But as weighty as it is, this burden is not paralyzing. On the contrary, Paul wrote: (2 Corinthians 2:17, ESV)(2 Corinthians 4:1ff., ESV) The faithful man who stands in the pulpit is nothing less than a mouthpiece for Christ. When what he preaches is the prayed over, studied, proclamation of God's truth in the sight of God, the faithful preacher speaks in the name of God and for God. JI Packer: "A true sermon is an act of God and not a mere performance by man. In real preaching the speaker is the servant of the Word and God speaks and works by the Word through His servant's lips...the sermon...is God's ordained means of speaking and working." The issue is not the smoothness or slickness of the preacher, his flair or looks or style, it is his faithfulness to the truth of the word of God and his faithfulness to proclaim it as it is. My job is to deliver to you what has been delivered to me under the unction of God. I mean

it when I pray for God to empty me of myself and any any reliance upon my wisdom and to fill me with His Spirit and to use me as an instrument to preach his Word.

The ministry of the Word of God is a weight and it is one that must be felt and known and carried. It is like Charles Spurgeon says: He that does not find his ministry a burden now will find it a burden hereafter, which will sink him lower than the lowest Hell. A ministry that never burdens the heart and the conscience in this life will be like a millstone about a man's neck in the world to come. The ministry of the Word is weighty thing, the burden of the Word of the Lord, because of what it is. Moreover,

2) It is weighty because of its content. Again, consider the things that Malachi had to preach, the weighty truths that he is given to deliver. He confronts their doubts about God's love and faithfulness. He confronts their lack of honor and fear of the Lord. He accuses them of careless and worthless worship, of offering polluted sacrifices with careless hearts. He confronts the failures of the priests and people's indifference to the truth and to righteousness. He calls them out for faithlessness to God's covenant, for faithlessness in marriage and with their children, for their robbing God of the tithe and of robbing God of the glory of pouring out His blessing on them. He warns them of the judgment that is coming – the judgment that will vindicate and those who fear him and repent and love God who has loved them, His treasured possession – and the judgment that will consume the unrighteous. He calls on all of his hearers to repent before the day of the Lord. These are hard words – hard truthful words that Malachi was called to preach. You can bet that he wasn't universally loved for the words he preached. Some people hated him for his message. He ran the risk of being called inflexible and intolerant, placing unreasonable demands upon the people, but what he preached was the truth.

Beloved, the ministry of the word of God is difficult precisely because it is the truth and it is truth that is unavoidable and which demands a response. True and faithful preachers are called to deal with eternal realities. He is called to expose sin, to exalt God's holiness, to declare His right to judge, to proclaim man's powerlessness to save himself, to proclaim the gospel truth about Christ. We preach of heaven and hell, sin and judgment, righteousness and rebellion, blessing and cursing, the commandments of God, the pursuit of holiness and righteousness, law and grace. The ministry of the Word is weighty for the very fact that the gospel, the hallmark and unpinning, the foundation of all of our preaching is itself designed to bring all human pride

to nothing and to exalt Christ completely, to dethrone man and enthrone Christ over all. It is a message that is considered to be foolish. That is why Paul says: (1 Corinthians 1:18–31, ESV)

The ministry of the word of God is a serious and weighty thing because of the content of it and because of increasing intolerance to preaching, even by some who claim to be Christians. Paul wrote to Timothy: (2 Timothy 4:1–4, ESV) People prefer storytellers, joke-tellers, entertainers, guys that share, friendly fire-side chats, spiritual platitudes, motivational speakers, and vague religious sentiments. They want sound bites, movie clips, and experiences. Men who preach the truth of the Word of God will often be falsely accused of being narrow, arrogant, unkind, hard, ungracious, even unpatriotic – especially by those who do not know him and have no regard for God’s Word. Can I tell you, people that do not even know me, with whom I have never had a conversation, who don’t know a thing about what I preach, still manage to hate me because of what they think I must believe or teach or say.

The burden of the word of the Lord is not for faint of heart, for men of weak character and wavering convictions, for those who need coddling and whose egos need stroked. It is for men who know that they are nothing in themselves, but Christ is everything. Men who are willing to lose all for Christ. Men who care nothing for their own fame but only for the fame of Christ. There is a reason that Paul uses the analogy of a soldier: (2 Timothy 2:3–4, ESV) That is part of the burden of the Word of the Lord. It may not be popular, but is only the sound preaching of the whole truth, not just what we like, not just what might be acceptable in our society, not only the appealing parts, but the truth in its entirety that brings and sustains true life. We have the only powerful, only soul delivering, life giving, Satan crushing, soul-transforming, God magnifying and Christ exalting message in the world – the good news of the gospel -- Christ and Him crucified, risen and coming again to rule and reign in glory and in power.

Even so, it is not going to be readily received by everyone in the world and even in the professing church, but faithful preachers preach, bearing bold witness to the infinite, all-powerful and perfect Lord, bearing witness to His greatness, bearing witness to His grace and truth and holiness, as an act of faith, trusting in the Holy Spirit to take the word that we labor to bring to your ears and to move it from your ears to your heart. The ministry of the Word is weighty thing, the burden of the Word of the Lord, because of the content of it and it is

3) It is weighty because of its consequences. Preaching is serious business. Spurgeon said: “Life, death, hell, and worlds unknown may hang on the preaching and hearing of a sermon.” It is certainly true of the sermon that Malachi preached. There were great consequences that attended the preaching of the message that God had given to him. By the ministry of the word,

the burden of the Word of the Lord, God says to the people through Malachi: (Malachi 3:18–4:3, ESV) There would be eternal consequences, an eternal division drawn between the righteous and the wicked. Eternity was at stake.

Any pastor or preacher that does not consider that eternal life is at stake in their preaching and teaching, and counseling is foolish and lacks the fear of the Lord. Eternal joy in the Kingdom of God and His Christ or eternal misery in hell is at stake. This makes the ministry of the word a weighty thing. Paul understood this well. He wrote in 2 Corinthians 2: (2 Corinthians 2:14–17, ESV) Every proclamation of the gospel by the preacher either draws souls toward eternal life in Christ, or toward holiness and submission to Jesus as Lord or it consigns them to hell, or confirms them in sin and rebellion toward Christ, leading to the discipline of God. It softens hearts or it hardens them. It is a weight to preach the Word of God.

I have heard it said that some people think I am angry when I preach. Oh beloved, that is not anger; it passion for your souls. It is not fury at you; it is fierceness for you. I preach with the very real awareness that sin is all around us and in us. It would make husbands hate their wives. It would make wives despise their husbands. It would make children rebels and haters of their parents. It would make us all thieves, sexually immoral, homosexuals, idolaters, evil, covetousness, full of envy, or murderers. It would make us gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Sin is everywhere around us and it is only defeated by the earnest preaching of the Word of God.

So no I am not preaching with anger, but with holy longing and desperate zeal knowing that unless you receive the Word of God mixed with faith in your heart and you submit yourself to the words I preach – if they are faithful and accurate and true – that the words I say on God’s behalf will stand against you, to condemn you on the day of judgment or will bring the discipline of God upon you rather than being the instrument of God for your salvation and sanctification. I preach with the awareness that it is not only the unsaved that will be judged for unbelief but every Christian will be judged for how he receives the truth, and the way the truth is received is revealed in the way that he lives. To use Paul’s words: “For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.” (2 Corinthians 11:2, ESV)

Please believe me beloved, this is not anger but an earnestness, and intensity, born of the realization that the fullness of blessing is found in obedience in the Word of God alone. It is the realization that I am setting before you life and death, blessing and cursing and it is a yearning from the depth of my soul, from the core of my being, for you to choose life, for you and for your children, to love the LORD your God, and obey his voice and hold fast to him. ( cf. Deut. 30:19–20, ESV) It is not anger, it is urgency. Your response to my preaching will either be life giving or death confirming, praiseworthy or worthy of discipline and judgment and I earnestly, longingly desire that the ministry of the Word that I perform, commissioned by God, would be the fragrance of life for you. The ministry of the word is a weighty thing because of the consequences that attend the Word being preached and...

4) It is weighty because of the day of accounting that awaits both the preacher and the hearer.

Every steward is required to give an account of his stewardship and it that is absolutely true of the preacher and his bearing of the burden of the word of God as well. Every word that I have preached, every sermon I have prepared, everything that I have spoken is open to the searching gaze of God's judgment. As James writes, (James 3:1, ESV) Every time I stand to preach, I am aware that my words are not merely being spoken into the air...God hears my every word. Every word I speak, its purpose, its intent, whether it serves the gospel and the glory of God in Christ. It is heavy thing to know this. My preaching is not a performance for you to evaluate, but it is a stewardship to be thoroughly examined by God. I don't take that lightly. It is a terrifying thought sometimes.

But it is not only the preacher who will give an account. The writer of Hebrews warns us: (Hebrews 2:1–4, ESV) The Puritan pastor Richard Baxter counsels us: Remember that all these...sermons must be reviewed, and you must answer for all that you have heard, whether you heard it...with diligent attention or with carelessness; and the word which you hear shall judge you at the last day. Hear therefore as those that are going to judgment to give account of their hearing and obeying.

5) Though this burden is the preacher's to bear, you either add to it or you help the pastor to bear the burden by your response.

Beloved, I know this can sound self-serving, but hear me when I say this: If this book truly is the word of God and if the preaching of the gospel is, to those who are called, the power of God unto salvation, then there is no greater blessing and privilege in this world than that of having a man sent from God to declare to you the burden of the Word of the Lord. And you can either add to or help bear the burden of the word of the Lord upon the preacher.

How do you add to the burden of the Word of the Lord? You add to the burden of the word of the Lord when you sit under the ministry of the Word week after week and determine to never let it penetrate your heart, when you hear it well enough but it never is mixed with faith and does not find expression in your life. You add to the burden when you are casual about whether you hear the word of God preached or not, here a week gone a week or two, in and out, the way that you fuss and fidget during the preaching, the way you tune in and out, or simply treat the preaching of the word of God with casual disregard. You add to the burden of the Word of the Lord by hearing the word of God and acting as if it is an option to consider rather than a command to be obeyed. You add to the burden of the Word of the Lord when you are a hearer of the Word but not a doer of the Word. You add to the burden of the word of the Lord when you are so undiscerning as to consider all sermons equally true and all preachers equally faithful. These are the ways that you make the burden nearly unbearable.

But, how I praise God for you who help me to bear the burden of the Word of the Lord. Like Paul, I “thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.” (1 Thessalonians 2:13, ESV) You help the pastor to bear the burden of the Word of the Lord by receiving it well, when you receive the word of God from the pastor as what it is, the word of God, not a suggestion or opinion, but what it really is – the authoritative, binding, God-magnifying, Christ-exalting, life-giving word of God which is able to make you wise for salvation and work in your soul.

How do you receive the Word well? You receive the Word well when you come expecting that God will meet His people in preaching. You receive the word of God well when you come with a heart that is prepared to receive the Word of God – through prayer, confession, reading and meditating on the text ahead of time. You receive the Word of God well when you have a mind that is alert. Being attentive requires self-discipline. Our minds tend to wander when we worship; sometimes we get distracted. But listening to sermons is part of the worship that we offer to God. God speaks through the preaching of the Word, and we should listen. You receive the Word of God well when you receive it with a responsive heart. Philip Ryken says “Through the inward ministry of the Holy Spirit, he uses his Word to calm our fear, comfort our sorrow, disturb our conscience, expose our sin, proclaim God’s grace, and reassure saints in their faith,”

and that these are more than simply “brain functions,” they are matters of the heart, and we have to be not only ready and willing, but anxious to receive these things in our heart by faith. You receive the Word well when you have a life that is quick to respond to the truth so that your life is a reflection of the sermons you heard.

You help bear the burden of the Word of the Lord when you pray for your pastor. Don't pray that the ministry of the Word would not be a burden...the day that I or any other preacher stops feeling the weight and the gravity of declaring God's Word is the day I need to stop preaching. Instead, pray that your pastor would feel fully the weight and the gravity and the burden of the Word of the Lord, and that the Spirit of the Lord would sustain and strengthen him for the task.

You help to bear the burden of the word of the Lord when you encourage your pastor to faithfulness and for faithfulness, when you seek to draw others to hear the Word of God truthfully and devotedly proclaimed. You help to bear the burden of the Word of the Lord when you partner with the faithful preacher in the work of the ministry. You help to bear the burden of the Word of the Lord when you hold the preaching of God's word in high esteem and know that it is a grace of God to have it, when you do not say foolish and disparaging things about the worth of preaching, but when you understand it to be the stewardship from God that it really is. Though the burden is the preacher's to bear, you either add to it or you help the pastor to bear the burden by your response.

The ministry of the Word is a wonderful burden. I say "wonderful" because the Word that we bear is the greatest treasure the world can ever know. There is nothing that I would rather do, nothing that I could do. And yet the ministry of the Word is also a burden -- praying and laboring and preaching, trusting that God will move His truth into the hearts and minds and souls of His people.

Beloved we need to be freshly affected with the truth that it is a momentous and crucial and significant and meaningful thing that we do every week as a people when we gather to hear the word of God preached. We need to remember the weightiness and the gravity of both the message and the moment. We need to grasp this, you and me, as those who will give an account before God.

What a great grace it would be if we were in line together before the throne of God, on the Day of Judgment, and we could give our account to God with joy. What a great blessing for me to be able to say, “ Lord, I faithfully and accurately preached the words you gave to me. I preached your gospel without compromise. I preached the whole counsel of God. I exhorted, rebuked, reproved, corrected, admonished, instructed, and called to faith all your people in the power of your Spirit, faithful to your Word, for the renown and reward of Christ and for your eternal glory. I received the burden of the Word of the Lord and was honored to give myself to it.” And what an equally glorious blessing to have you standing there, able to say: “Lord, I received your word with faith and repentance, with an eager mind and a humble heart. I delighted to hear your gospel preached without compromise. I desired correction and edification. I was glad to be washed with the water of Your Word. I sought to be obedient to your truth and to be submitted to your will. I gladly received the Word of God and was thankful to have it.”

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