

THRU THE BIBLE SYNTHESIS
"Part XXXV: Malachi - Discerning And Overcoming An Artificial Spirituality"

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many people today are living unfulfilled lives. Consider the following facts:

(1) This past week, I heard news of a very unhappy, unfulfilling situation at a company in our area. A company overseer is so insensitive toward others on the job that, were they **unitedly** to do so, the workers could contact the labor board and throw the book at him.

However, nobody dares to speak up for fear of losing their job as they feel it would be impossible to find another job with its perks since the job market is so tight right now! Thus, everyone keeps quiet, puts their time in and longs for Friday to come to gain some peace. **In view of the area wide tightness in the job market, how many other people in Connecticut suffer unfulfillment in the workplace like these do?!**

(2) According news reports this week, people are leaving the countryside the world over looking for fulfillment in the cities they see advertised through the media only to end up slums! The population growth in large world cities like Lagos, Nigeria, or like Bombay and Calcutta, India and Shanghai, China will produce in forty years, if all things continue as they do now, over **half** of the **world's population** living **homeless** in **SLUMS**! It will create an enormous drive for the masses to flock across borders into Western nations just to find relief from their living conditions! **The WORLD is looking for fulfillment in the "good life" and increasingly is not finding it! What's the answer?!**

(3) People in Evangelical churches aren't immune from a lack of fulfillment, either. Ron Enroth initially wrote a book entitled, Churches That Abuse and had to follow it up with another book, Recovering From Churches That Abuse to handle the need for the hurt people he found in Evangelical circles. The ad for the book reads: "Christians (are) hurt by legalism, manipulation, excessive discipline and spiritual intimidation." **If CHURCHES are places where the hurting are supposed to find relief, why the existence and high response to such books by Ron Enroth?! Why are EVANGELICAL Christians so unfulfilled?!**

(We turn to the "Need" section of the sermon notes . . .)

Need: "Either I myself or a church-going associate find that life is strangely ABSENT of fulfillment no matter what is tried! God seems distant, worship services are unfulfilling, and even my marriage is a chore anymore! WHY? What should I do about it?!"

- I. **Even after God's people failed in their world mission, were judged by captivity and later graciously restored by God to Palestine, they continually struggled with a lack of fulfillment in their lives .**
 - A. Though God created the world and set man up as His deputy, sin deposed him, and Satan became ruler on earth, Gn. 1-5; 2 Cor. 4:4.
 - B. The Lord renewed history through the Noahic flood, Gen. 6:1-9:7.
 - C. Yet, Noah's descendant, Nimrod, began an apostasy opposing God's rule on earth, Gen. 10:8-10; 11:1-9; Rev. 12:1-3.
 - D. God thus chose Abraham to start a nation to check his sin, Gn. 12:1-3.
 - E. Yet, after many challenges en route, that nation failed to curb Nimrod's error, and God had to send it into captivity, Gen. 12:4-Daniel.
 - F. God restored the people to Palestine, but life was a constant struggle for fulfillment due to weakness and sin, Ezra, Hag., Zech., Est. & Neh.
 - G. In fact, after God had led a brilliant leader, Nehemiah to restore Israel's statehood, the people were still living unfulfilled lives:
 1. The prophet, Malachi ministered in Jerusalem possibly after Nehemiah had restored Israel to statehood, B.K.C., O.T., p. 1573.
 2. At this time, Malachi listed problems of unfulfilled living in Israel:
 - a. Some felt that God didn't really love Israel anymore, Mal. 1:2b.
 - b. The priests were bored with their sacrificial duties, 1:12-13a.
 - c. A number of the people had serious marital problems, 2:14, 11.
 - d. Some said God was not just since the vile were not judged, 2:17.
 - e. Some grumbled that it was not cost effective to serve God, 3:14.
- II. **God used Malachi to reveal a heartless spirituality behind this unhappiness to direct Israel unto spiritual renewal and fulfillment:**
 - A. Malachi's style is **disputational** to counter **insensitivity**, Ibid., 1574.
 - B. In this way, Malachi itemized Israel's **heartless, false spirituality**:
 1. Though Israel thought God didn't love her, God reminded her that He had restored Israel after her captivity unlike His repression of relative nation, Edom due to His infinite **love** for Israel, 1:2-4.
 2. God revealed that the priests were unfulfilled in their offices due to their own personal **callousness**:

- a. Out of disrespect for God, the priests approved **maimed** animals for **sacrifice** that **human** leaders wouldn't accept as gifts, 1:6-9. They thus **despised** performing their worship duties, 1:12-13.
 - b. Rather, the priests should have taught the people the Law's correct sacrifices due to a need to respect the Lord, Mal. 2:4-8.
 - c. For failing God this way, **God** would cause the **priests** to be **dishonored** before the people whom they served, Mal. 2:1-3, 9.
3. This lack of **rapport** with **God** led to **marital rapport** problems:
 - a. Some of the people were revealing a spiritual infidelity to God by marrying Gentiles in violation of the Law, 2:10-12 with 4:4.
 - b. This attitude **toward God** formed harshness **between spouses**, causing the "violence" of divorce which God "hates", 2:13-17.
 4. The belief that God was unjust in not judging severe sinners (Mal. 2:17) came from an insensitivity to divine **mercy**: God explained that He would send a forerunner to Messiah to reveal judgment, but **when** that happened, **few** if **ANY** would escape judgment, 3:1-5. Thus, only by God's **grace** was Israel still left in **existence**, 3:6!
 5. Besides, people were short on income because **they** had **shorted GOD** with **meager contributions**, 3:7-12. Thus, complaints that it wasn't cost effective to serve God (3:13-14) were **way** out of line!
- C. Through Malachi, God called the nation unto a renewed **HEART**:
1. Warmly, to foster repentance, he reported that God cherished the few who revered Him and privately testified of His glory to one another; God recorded them in a book of remembrance, vowing to make them His treasures in the Messianic Kingdom, 3:16b-17; 4:3.
 2. Harshly, to warn the unrepentant, those who failed to repent from their false, heartless spirituality would be destroyed by God, 4:1.
- III. **Malachi adds to the "thread of redemption" by predicting a Forerunner to Messiah, like Elijah, to turn Israel's HEARTS unto true godliness, 3:1; 4:5-6. This is John the Baptizer, Mtt. 11:10-11.**

***Application:** If we are unfulfilled, the problem is spiritual callousness in US, not in God or anybody else! WE must (1) believe in Christ for salvation from sin (Jn. 3:16) OR, (2) as a believer, (a) confess a false spirituality (1 Jn. 1:9; Malachi) and (b) rely on the Spirit for a loving attitude to (Gal. 5:16-23) (c) live Scripturally, 1 Jn. 2:1-6. (3) Among other things, this will produce a warm attachment to God, spilling over into warmth toward others, and we will become a blessing in our marriages, families, job s, communities and even to GOD (Mal. 3:16f)!*

***Lesson:** Since God is always fulfilling and warm toward man, if we are unfulfilled, WE have a false, heartless spirituality that needs correcting.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the sermon lesson . . .)

Following a talk that a Christian evangelist gave at a university gathering in the Third World nation of Costa Rica, a hardened Marxist student came up to him and said that she wanted nothing to do with his Christian beliefs. Her exposure to the material needs of her poor Costa Rican countrymen versus the opulence of the "Christian West" had turned her bitter toward Christianity's God.

The Christian evangelist tried to witness to her, but she just laughed and ridiculed him. A group of students soon gathered around, joining the girl in making fun of the evangelist.

Before leaving, the evangelist said to the Marxist girl, "Do you mind if I pray for you?" She was a little startled, but agreed, saying, "Well, I guess it wouldn't do any harm." On the spot, the evangelist bowed his head, closed his eyes, and started praying for her salvation. As he did so, he was moved deeply by the Lord over her spiritual needs, and tears began to flow down his cheeks.

When he finished praying, the evangelist looked up and the Marxist student was in tears. "No one ever cared for me enough to shed a tear for me," she said. "I'll listen to what you have to say."

The evangelist then led her to make a commitment of faith to Christ for salvation! (Billy Graham, "By the Foolishness of Preaching," Moody Monthly, February, 1986, p. 24.)

When the Holy Spirit moves the HEART of the believer, he lives out the righteousness of God with great power and great fulfillment to the glory to God. Even Marxists in needy Third World countries where the lack of fulfillment is so apparent in the lives of people streaming toward large cities in search of the "good life" are moved with TRUE, heartfelt spirituality that comes from a proper relationship to Jesus Christ!