

6. **Futility** is the final stage of back-sliding. It's the point at which we question the existence of God, or if not his existence we doubt his goodness. "What good did it do me," we ask. Where is God when I need him? What have you done for me lately? It's no use.

Application

A. Do you remember when you first came to faith in Christ? What was that like? I bet you felt so full of the Spirit and were thrilled to be saved. Bible reading was a joy and worship was a privilege. You loved being with God's people; Sunday was the highlight of your week.

B. If that is not where you are today I can tell you what happened. You began to make little choices that were compromises. Each one moved you a little further from God instead of toward God. First you made a compromise with the enemy and before long you were negotiating with the devil. How could you? You made one compromise at a time.

C. Take a moment to survey your heart's desire in six areas:

	Weak	Neutral	Strong
Worship	1 --- 2 ----	3 ---- 4 ---	5
Word	1 --- 2 ----	3 ---- 4 ---	5
Relationships	1 --- 2 ----	3 ---- 4 ---	5
Moral Confusion	1 --- 2 ----	3 ---- 4 ---	5
Self-Centeredness	1 --- 2 ----	3 ---- 4 ---	5
Futility	1 --- 2 ----	3 ---- 4 ---	5

D. Take this message with you this week: "I have loved you," says the Lord.

Introduction

A. Today we celebrate the birth of our nation. Think about it: This November it will be 390 years since the Mayflower dropped anchor off Cape Cod with the Pilgrims on board (November 1620). It is almost impossible to grasp all that has taken place during this almost 400 year period. What a history we have!

B. I paint that mental picture to remind you that between the book of Malachi (the last book of the O.T.) and Matthew is also 400 years. We can hardly comprehend all that took place during that time, but one thing stands out: There was no clear word from God.

Oh history was being made; people were religious like they are now. The Pharisee sect was formed in the 2nd century and the Sadducees in the 1st century. But no prophet spoke a word from God during that time. It was as if God became silent.

C. That makes both Matthew and Malachi so valuable – God's last word and God's first word for 400 years. Today we give our ears to the word of God through Malachi. Malachi fits into biblical history like this:

- 600 BC – Judah is taken captive into Babylon (approx. date)
- 530 BC – Exiles begin to straggle back from 70 year exile
- 520 BC – Haggai preaches and the temple is rebuilt
- 445 BC – Nehemiah brings last group back; walls rebuilt
- 400 BC – Malachi preaches the last word from God for a long, long time: 400 years (again, these dates are approx.)

God's Central Message

A. Please don't miss this thought: The opening phrase of Malachi gives us the central message of God, a message given by all of his prophets; all of his spokesmen and women for centuries. It's easy to miss this message as we read the decrees of God and the indictments against the people laid out in oracles, sermons and prophecies over the previous 400 years by the prophets.

B. God's message through the prophets was what Malachi delivers in vs. 2: "I have loved you, says the Lord." What if America plunges into a depression? What if the policies of a liberal government ultimately silence the public witness of the church? What if we are persecuted as followers of Jesus Christ? What if the freedom we cherish is a memory: Will we remember that God loves us? Hear God's word today: I have loved you! I love you."

C. The people in Malachi's day had forgotten the central message of God – His love. Instead of rejoicing they asked, "How have you loved us?" As if to say, "Prove it." In response, Malachi shaped his message around a series of complaints of God against his people. The people ask, "How? Prove it. What are you talking about?" And God answered them.

D. I need to take a few moments to explain God's first answer because it sounds so out of character to hear God say, "I loved Jacob and hated Esau." (1:2-5) Here's how I understand that:

1. First, God is telling them to look at their history. The very formation of their nation was not based on anything they did but on God's love. Jacob came to represent one whose heart is soft toward God. God loves that in people. It delights God's heart.

2. Secondly, Hebrews 12:16 interprets this "love/hate" statement for us. The writer tells us that Esau was a godless man. By despising his birthright he showed that he gave little value to spiritual matters. What God valued Esau de-valued and the rest of his life, his miserable existence, was testimony of a life turned away from God. Esau is an example of a life denying God's love.

3. As we always learn from other difficult biblical statements, it wasn't God that made the decision to hate Esau. God had loved Esau as well, but Esau chose to place himself in the path of God's wrath and judgment. He turned away from God. Esau rejected God's love and his life was proof of that fateful decision.

E. I pray that the problem of the people in Malachi's day will not become our problem. May we not forget the love of God.

Anatomy of a Backslider

A. As I looked into the exchanges between God and the people he loved I see the "anatomy of a backslider". There is a sequence of failures in the life of God's people that is a practical and relevant warning for us. Here's the way it went for those people:

1. In vs. 1:6-14 God charges the people with giving him less than their best. When they ask "how" God points out that they bring defiled food to the altar, sacrifice sick and deformed animals at the temple, and generally are careless about worship.

Do you know the first sign of spiritual backsliding? Typically it is a **careless attitude about worship**. When worship suffers our estimation of God is diminished. Anything and everything begin to take the place of God, worship attendance and fellowship with believers is lost. We begin to compromise and we suffer in spirit.

2. In vs. 2:1-9 God's charge is that his **Word is not taken seriously**. Priests were not offering true instruction and the people were stumbling in regard to truth, faithfulness, and knowledge.

A natural consequence of #1 (God isn't honored) is that the truth begins to be compromised. Once God is not honored as highly as before, it is easier to question his Word in ways that it was not questioned before. Worship suffers, the Word is questioned, and then the third step begins – God's next charge:

3. In vs. 2:10-16 God confronts the people about **broken relationships**. The phrase he uses is "breaking faith with one another." God was a God of covenants that he made with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, and he called his people to be faithful to covenants as a sign of following him.

The very personal, startling example he gives is from marriage where in 2:16 God declares, "I hate divorce." He compares it to an act of violence. Now please read that verse carefully. It says, "I hate divorce." God hates divorce because God loves people so much. He doesn't hate divorced people. He hates what divorce does to people.

Here's a warning to us from God: When worship becomes casual, God's Word is questioned, and relationships fail. Do you want to heal your marriage? Go back to the Word and from there recapture your love affair with God. Worship him and save your marriage (or your friendship, or your other relationships).

4. In vs. 2:17 we see the shortest, but perhaps the most contemporary charge that God brings: **moral confusion**. People had begun to call evil good and good evil. Does that have a familiar ring to it?

Could we have imagined a few decades ago that the garbage thought up by medical experts, psychiatric elitists, and Hollywood writers would be fed to our children as good? Educators, politicians, and even judges suggest pornography and obscenity are good for a person. We are one small step from homosexuality being accepted as normal; that family is whatever you want it to be – two lesbian women or a group of homosexual men.

I could go on but you get the point. We're living in Malachi's day when evil is called good. Today the believer that stands up for righteousness and truth may very likely be labeled evil. How did we get here? People forsake the worship of God, question the Word of God, de-value the relationships established by God, and we find ourselves in a sea of moral confusion.

5. In vs. 3:6-12 God charges the people for withholding the tithe. Did God need their money? Of course not! God desires our hearts and when we fail to give God his due (the tithe of our time, treasure and talents) we are simply exposing our **self-centeredness**.

God created us in his image. When we withhold our tithe we are saying we're created in our image. It is all about us, and the cycle of compromise is almost complete. There's one more step to go which we see in vs. 3:13-14(read)

Introduction

The Last Book of the O.T. The First Book of the N.T.
Malachi400 years Matthew

The Central Message of God

Malachi 1:2 ”I have loved you,” says the Lord”
The people’s response: _____ have you loved us?
“Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated.”

- 1. A _____ lesson. The beginning of a nation
- 2. A _____ lesson. Hebrews 12:16 Esau was _____
- 3. A _____ lesson. We are free to _____

Hold on to this truth: God _____ you!

The Anatomy of a Backslider (Six steps to futility)

- 1. A _____ attitude toward worship 1:6-14
- 2. The _____ is not taken as seriously 2:1-9
- 3. _____ become fractured and broken 2:10-16
- 4. _____ confusion begins to take over 2:17
- 5. Self _____ is more and more evident 3:6-12
- 6. _____ replaces faith 3:13-14

A Survey of My Heart

	Weak	Neutral	Strong
Worship	1 - - -	2 - - - -	3 - - - - 4 - - - 5
Word	1 - - -	2 - - - -	3 - - - - 4 - - - 5
Relationships	1 - - -	2 - - - -	3 - - - - 4 - - - 5
Moral Confusion	1 - - -	2 - - - -	3 - - - - 4 - - - 5
Self-Centeredness	1 - - -	2 - - - -	3 - - - - 4 - - - 5
Futility	1 - - -	2 - - - -	3 - - - - 4 - - - 5