

Malachi chapter 2:1-10

Sunday evening, 18th April 2021 | Deal Christian Fellowship | Simeon Forder

Reading: Malachi 2:1-17

Good evening. **Let's pray.**

Introduction

Last week we began a verse-by-verse study of Malachi, the last book in the Old Testament, noting that we don't know a lot about Malachi himself, other than his name means "my messenger" - but that in the end, it's the message itself that is important. And in these 4 chapters we find 47 of the 55 verses are direct, first-person speaking from God - the highest percentage of any book. As was clear from chapter one, this book is just as relevant to us today, as it was to Israel some 2500 years ago.

As a quick reminder, here's how the four chapters break down:

Chapter overview

1. Israel is loved by God, but has despised God
2. Corrupt priests, broken relationships
3. The coming messenger, we must not rob God
4. Justice will be done - the day is coming

And last time, in chapter one, we were reminded that:

Summary of chapter one

- God loves us; we must not forget what He has done for us!
- Be humble enough to recognise your sin
- Don't give God your leftovers; give Him your best!
- Never pretend you are giving your all (when you are not)

In particular, note from this first chapter that God loves us. It's incredible that He does. And incredible that He loved Jacob, not that He hated Esau. Never forget that is what God starts with here, for it's the best news you'll ever have.

But in response you are to give God your best. Not your leftovers. Don't come to church because the game is off. Be here regardless. Family time shouldn't get in the way of being at church, or serving Him. Family time instead should reflect our relationship with God.

Looking ahead, here's what we have ahead of us in chapter 2 -

Summary of chapter two

- The responsibility of Godly leadership

- Our response to Godly leadership and His Word
- Ungodly relationships
- Broken marriages

There's so much this should cause us to consider, that we'll only get through the first 10 verses this evening, and we'll study the rest next week.

Chapter 2: Verse by verse

So then, let's dive into chapter two. Here we see a narrowing in the focus of the message as God now speaks to the priests. We read in verse 1:

Malachi 2:1

"And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.

Why specific to them? Because the priests oversaw all that was happening with the sacrifices. They saw the stolen, the lame and the sick animals being offered - and they didn't put a stop to it. He continues:

Malachi 2:2

*If you will not hear,
And if you will not take it to heart,
To give glory to My name,"
Says the LORD of hosts,
"I will send a curse upon you,
And I will curse your blessings.
Yes, I have cursed them already,
Because you do not take it to heart.*

In other words, they were not taking their responsibilities seriously. Their heart was not in it. And indeed, an offering without heart is just stuff. And having turned their hearts away from God, the priests were both already experiencing the consequences of it, and were going to face further consequences:

Malachi 2:3

*"Behold, I will rebuke your descendants
And spread refuse on your faces,
The refuse of your solemn feasts;
And one will take you away with it.*

This is strong language. What is meant by it? Well you see, under the laws given in Deuteronomy 18, the priests were entitled to take certain portions of the sacrificial animals - specifically the shoulder, the cheeks, and the stomach for their own use - hence the solemn feasts spoken of here. But other laws also required them to remove the less delightful parts and dispose of them - and here it is that ceremonially unclean part, the dung as the KJV and NIV translates it, that is smeared in their faces.

Why? I think God is making a point. The priests were not upset that God was being short changed - because they were still getting what they were due. Like being in ministry for the income, not the outcome. And now, in the literal sense, smearing their faces in dung would make them ceremonially unclean. They would have known it, and the people would have

known it. They wouldn't have been able to offer a sacrifice acceptable to God. And therein is the point, that their sacrifices were already unacceptable to Him! And the priests should have known that.

Another way of putting it; you've heard the phrase "you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink". Well, my boss, when we were once dealing with some colleagues that were slow to understand their responsibilities, changed this to "we're going to lead the horse to water, and then we're going to push its face in the water".

I think that's what God is doing here, highlighting the problem in the priesthood.

Malachi 2:4

*Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you,
That My covenant with Levi may continue,"
Says the LORD of hosts.*

God doesn't want to abandon them. He wants them to turn to Him. Likewise, God doesn't chastise us because He hates us. He chastises us because He loves us. We read in Proverbs:

Proverbs 3:12

*For whom the LORD loves He corrects,
Just as a father the son in whom he delights.*

And God, speaking through Malachi, continues talking about Levi in verse 5:

Malachi 2:5

*"My covenant was with him, one of life and peace,
And I gave them to him that he might fear Me;
So he feared Me
And was reverent before My name.*

I'm grateful to Finnis Dake for pointing out the links here - first to Exodus 32 where the tribe of Levi are the ones who answer Moses call of "Whoever is on the LORD's side—come to me!" and second to Numbers 25 where we read:

Numbers 25:10-13

Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. Therefore say, Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel.' "

What a contrast between how the priesthood started, and where it is now. From on fire for the Lord, to lukewarm. May we not be found to be lukewarm, for it is those Christians whom Jesus

says he will vomit out of His mouth, in His letter to the church of Laodicea in Revelation chapter 3.

Continuing, Malachi writes more praise of Levi:

Malachi 2:6-7

*The law of truth was in his mouth,
And injustice was not found on his lips.
He walked with Me in peace and equity,
And turned many away from iniquity.
“For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge,
And people should seek the law from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*

There are two great things I want you to note about this verse. That is the responsibility of the pastor, and the responsibility of everyone who listens to him.

Here, we are told “the lips of a priest should keep knowledge”, that it is the law that should come from his mouth, and that ultimately God speaks through him. And the clear parallel for that is the pastor today. Not just our pastor, but every pastor. You cannot be a pastor and fail to teach the word of God - the two are intrinsically linked. And you know what, that’s about it. Sure, pastors can, serve in other ways too. But if they don’t serve in those other ways, it doesn’t mean they have failed as a pastor. But if they fail to teach the Word of God, then they have failed.

Dale Partridge commented:

Pastors have a job description in the Bible and it’s not improving management, vision, execution, performance, productivity, marketing, brand, or platform. It’s to preach the Gospel and disciple people in biblical truth.

Dale Partridge

William Still, a faithful pastor of a church in Aberdeen for over 50 years, wrote this:

The pastor is called to feed the sheep, even if the sheep do not want to be fed. He is certainly not to become an entertainer of goats. Let goats entertain goats, and let them do it out in goatland. You will certainly not turn goats into sheep by pandering to their goatishness.

William Still

While J Vernon McGee, also a long serving pastor, wrote in his Bible commentary:

I believe that the sole duty of the pastor of a church is to teach the Word of God. God have mercy on the church that expects its pastor to be the public relations man, running

all over the countryside visiting sick babies and burping them, and expects him to spend his time in the administration of church affairs when he should be studying the Word of God and then teaching it to his people.

J Vernon McGee

This, of course, is a Biblical principle as we read in Acts 6:

Acts 6:2-4

Then the twelve summoned the multitude of the disciples and said, "It is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. Therefore, brethren, seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

And later, Paul said to the Ephesian elders:

Acts 20:28

Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

Why does he say this? We read in the next 2 verses:

Acts 20:29-30

For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves.

William Still comments further:

To put it otherwise and more simply: a shepherd is no mere warder-off of wild beasts. To save the sheep from wild beasts and all other danger is not to feed them; and if they are not fed, what matters whether they are safe or not?

William Still

In fact, again and again and again in scripture pastors are exhorted to teach the Bible:

1 Timothy 4:6

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

I think it's reasonable to conclude that if Timothy hadn't instructed the brethren in these things, he would have been a bad minister. Paul later writes to Timothy again, saying:

2 Timothy 2:1-2

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

And of course, we read in 2 Timothy chapter 4:

2 Timothy 4:1-5

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

The pastor's job is to teach the Bible.

But let's return to the second point that I really want you to note from verse 7:

Malachi 2:6-7

*The law of truth was in his mouth,
And injustice was not found on his lips.
He walked with Me in peace and equity,
And turned many away from iniquity.
"For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge,
And people should seek the law from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.*

While indeed it is the pastors job to preach the Word, your job is to listen to it, to apply it, to live it. Yes, pastors and teachers MUST teach the Word of God faithfully. But you also need to hunger for that!

We read in 1 Peter...

1 Peter 2:1-3

Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

Returning to God's rebuke of the priests, we read in verse 8:

Malachi 2:8

*But you have departed from the way;
You have caused many to stumble at the law.
You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,"
Says the LORD of hosts.*

It had started with faithfulness to God, but now their unfaithfulness is evident in what they say. And what an indictment - not only were they stumbling, but they were causing others to stumble. And causing others to stumble is still a serious offence today. We read Jesus' words in Mark chapter 9:

Mark 9:42

But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.

Talking of the young, of course, but in James:

James 3:1

My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Why the stricter judgement? Because teaching others carries with it a responsibility to be faithful to the Word of God, and if you twist scriptures, if you take them out of context, or ignore them altogether - you will have to give account for that. Just as here:

Malachi 2:9

*"Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base
Before all the people,
Because you have not kept My ways
But have shown partiality in the law."*

This is not the first time - just look at what happened to Eli's sons at the beginning of 1 Samuel.

Now, as we enter into verse 10, the focus seems to switch back to the people at large, rather than being specific to the priests. And, like it was written yesterday, this is so very relevant to us, for we read:

Malachi 2:10

Have we not all one Father?

Has not one God created us?

Why do we deal treacherously with one another

By profaning the covenant of the fathers?

We are not the random product of evolution. We have been created by God, in His image. In *that* sense He is the Father of us all. Our Heavenly Father. And that means that racism is out of the window - for there are no races. There is one race - the human race. And divisions by skin colour are entirely man-made. Indeed, all divisions, whether they be skin colour, culture or country are man-made. We may find some useful for identification, but they should not cause separation, and they must never cause persecution.

It's astounding some of the racism that we see in the world - it's abhorrent. And we should indeed be passionate about seeing change for the better. But also, let us not forget that even racism is merely a symptom of the wretched nature of sin - our wretched nature. Relationships, and not racism is the focus of the rest of this second chapter in Malachi, but the root cause is the same. And the solution is the same too.

In Acts 17, Paul, standing and preaching in the Areopagus in Athens, said:

Acts 17:26-31

And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.' Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man's devising. Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead."

What this world needs is Jesus. It needs a Saviour. For when our relationship with God is broken - as we see in the priest and in the people here - then our relationship with our fellow man, even those closest to us, is broken too.

You want a strong marriage relationship? Make sure you both have a strong relationship with the Lord. You want a harmonious household where your children listen to you and you care well for them? Lead them to the Lord, and parent them as the Bible instructs. You want strong

friendships? Then ensure your relationship with God is a priority - spending time with Him and His Word, that you may know how to choose friends and how to conduct yourself at all times.

Here in Malachi, that relationship has broken down. And what follows? The breakdown of their earthly relationships. They have dishonoured the Lord in their offerings, and now they are dishonouring Him in their lives.

Summary

As we close this evening, let's look back at the message Malachi delivers in this chapter:

Summary of chapter two

- The responsibility of Godly leadership
- Our response to Godly leadership and His Word
- Ungodly relationships
- Broken marriages

We'll continue next time looking at verses 11-18, but for now I'd like to close by a helpful comment by AW Tozer, who said:

As God is exalted to the right place in our lives, a thousand problems are solved all at once.

AW Tozer

May we put God in the right place in our lives.

Let's pray.