

**Reading:** Malachi 2:1-9

**Theme:** Being as we should be!

As I read and prepared these verses, their primary force hit home to me, as it is directed, applied to those with the spiritual oversight and responsibilities of others. I thought I'd be shooting myself in the foot, if not the head and it would probably come out as a "*Woe is me!*" message. If so, then what it teaches would be lost if I did that, so I thought that I could skip these verses altogether as they apply primarily to pastors, elders, deacons, those in spiritual leadership, but I felt you would not let me get away with that! Thankfully I read a footnote from the Bible of the Puritans - the Geneva Bible which said "*He (Malachi) speaks mainly to them (the priests) but under them he includes the people also.*"

Yes, this message is aimed primarily at those in spiritual leadership of any sort, but it does not excuse any believer, because we are all to honour and glorify Christ as believers, to teach of Him by our lives and words. None of us as believers, whether or not we have leadership responsibilities, are to excuse our consciences and lives, yet we are all to recognise that its primary thrust is aimed at those who have spiritual oversight in a church. John Benton wrote "*It is very rare for the spirituality of a group of Christians to exceed that of its leaders.*" T V Moore wrote "*Ministers have a fearful responsibility for they cannot sin or suffer alone. They drag others down with them if they fall*" I could quote most solemn writings from Matthew Henry and John Calvin, but let's move on to what is being said here **for us all** in the verses we read and do so noting 3 things in this message from God – the first 2 of them are warnings and thankfully the third is an encouragement.

## **1. Derelictions.**

The Lord challenges the priest concerning their derelictions, their abandoning their required duties and calling. It was probably not in outward matters, because they would have done all the rites and rituals with mechanical precision, but it was only a surface conformity to what God expected in the externals of their role and work. It would appear they had no heart sincerity as they did not set their heart to honour, give glory to God's name (v2).

In our own spiritual lives, things will start to go downhill when our hearts abandon, leave off their honouring, giving glory to the Lord. We can so easily be like a great oil tanker when its engines fail, yet it keeps on going with no seemingly lack of speed or direction for a while, but it will eventually show. It is so easy for us to blame circumstances, people, events as to why we are as we are, but it would have begun in our hearts - dereliction, an abandonment of putting God and His glory first and foremost. We should be grieved and hurt that we can fail to love, honour and glorify this wonderful God with anything less than our whole heart, soul, mind and being. William Cowper wrote in a hymn *"Lord it is my chief complaint; that my love is weak and faint; yet I love Thee and adore; O for grace to love the more!"* If we find we have been negligent, gone off course in this, then pray we will honour and glorify Him as He deserves, as much as it is possible in our human life.

Then in v8 we have 3 great effects of the dereliction, abandonment of the duty and calling. They not only failed to honour, glorify God, but didn't know or teach His ways and so **firstly** they turned out of the way themselves and lived as they wanted, lived to please self, lowered or ignored God's standards and ways. **Secondly**, by their failures not only to teach God's laws correctly, but in their failure to do this in and through their own examples, so they lead the people astray, causing many to stumble. **Thirdly** they

corrupted, violated the covenant the Lord had with Levi and Levi with Him and this is referring to the priesthood in Israel.

The same things are true of ministers, church officers and all believers if we fail to glorify and honour the Lord. If we turn from the truth of God and His ways, we also can, if not verbally, then by our examples and lives, fail to teach and live out God's word and ways. People can stumble at our lives and maybe the things we say and teach. In doing this we violate, corrupt the covenant we have with the Lord as His people, a royal priesthood and we fail to live for His glory, to show the Saviour and the so great salvation we have.

The end of v9 the Lord once more shows the dereliction of their duty and privileges by the priests - again they have not kept God's ways. Yes, they had the rights and rituals, but it was not a heart loving obedience that was involved, just going through the motions. Sadly, they were also biased in their application of the law, probably in terms of letting any old animal be brought for sacrifice, most probably favouring the rich, powerful, influential people to get away with this and that in turning a blind eye and they were being favourable to them in matters that they had to exercise right judgement in.

To have held God as great glorious and holy, would have prevented and cured such an expression of the disease of contempt. We see these priests were doing as they wanted and felt like. They did not apply the holy demands of God's law to their own hearts and consciences and neither to the hearts and consciences of the people. It was an easy, comfortable, cosy religion they peddled and it caused them to be comfortable and well off in it. Sadly, they felt that this was acceptable to God. We need to bring every thought, let alone action, into conformity to

God's revealed will and standards, so that we are not guilty of dereliction, of abandonment of our duties and privilege.

## **2. Denouncements.**

The Lord, through Malachi, had strong denouncements to bring to these priests and also the people. They would be cursed and even their blessings become a curse (v2b). Because they did not honour, glorify the Lord, then they would be cursed from the Lord. If God could turn the cursings uttered by Balaam into blessings, then He could turn the blessings uttered by these God-dishonouring priests into curses! The high priest had to bless the people, using the lovely blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 and when they did, God said in v27 that He would bless the people.

Yet now, through the pronouncement of the blessing by the priests, God would bring a curse. Some interpret this part of the verse as saying that the actual blessings would be of no value to them and would be as a curse to them, even their privilege of being priests would be as a curse. This is tied into v3 - where their descendants or crops (*the word means both and can be translated 'seed'*) would be rebuked, reprovved and corrupted. This is a solemn word whether on their descendants or their crops. The result of these curses by God is seen in v9a, as God will show that these supposed ministers, servants of His, were nothing of the sort and they were not fit to serve Him, or to serve or represent people.

The Lord expresses in the 2<sup>nd</sup> part of v3 the contempt He felt for such priests - that they would be smeared with dung, or offal – the word used could refer to either. The Message renders that verse as “*Yes, and the curse will extend to your children. I'm going to plaster your faces with rotting garbage, garbage thrown out from your feasts. That's what you have to look forward to!*” Such things would be done so these false-teaching-priests would be recognised

unclean and be put away from serving Him and the truth expressed at the start of v9 would be clear for all to see and none of the Israelites would want such a man to minister to and for them.

Sadly, there are some in the Christian ministry, in positions of responsibility and they live as these priests did and it is sad to see such, but it is sadder to see believers and churches going on as if they're ok as they live in such false ways. The Lord Jesus has to reproach the church in Philadelphia about that in His letter to them in Revelation 3:1-3!

We are to be so grateful and thankful our Lord is so patient and long-suffering, kind and gentle. Yet we too need to be warned that we cannot go on treating Him, His name and glory with contempt. He can, in His love (Malachi 1:2), for His glory and His name's sake, rebuke and even denounce us as individuals and as a church. As we read Revelation chapters 2 & 3, we see similar, if not the same warnings to a number of the churches there, churches who knew and loved the Lord, but were going cool in their love and were drifting or had drifted from Him. Some of those churches seemed so prosperous, so comfortable, must have been envied by other churches and yet they were denounced by the Lord who walked in the midst of the candlesticks, lamp stands. Yet the letters are addressed to their angels i.e. their messengers, ministers of each church for they had the responsibility and accountability before God for the spiritual tone, temperature and life of these churches. Likewise, the pattern of Malachi was to address those in Israel with responsibility and accountability and yet here they were denounced.

The question that will cause us problems is *“What would Jesus say to our church, to its leaders, to me?”* Whatever He says, would we be listening? Whatever He said it would not be because He

wants us to squirm and grovel, to feel low and pathetic, but because He wants our love and our loving hearts for Him and for us to know He loves us. He wanted this for the priests, the Israelites and the passage is not all doom and gloom, not all denouncements, but also encouragements and tenderness. See:

### **3. Directives.**

The Lord points them, tells them the way they needed to go or rather, get back to! This is primarily focused in v4-7. The priests are reminded of what they should have been. John Calvin says that *“we have here described to us the character of true and legitimate priests”* and he goes on to apply it to pastors and ministers. It is a lovely and warm picture which Malachi presents and that John Calvin opens up on so ably.

The priests were in a covenant relationship and obligation with the Lord and the Lord wanted it to continue. ‘Levi’ is used - not that Levi himself had the covenant, but descendants of his in Aaron for the priests and the others of the tribe of Levi as helpers, workers, attendance at the Tabernacle and Temple.

It was a covenant of life and peace - through their ministry the life and peace of God could be mediated and experience to and by the people of Israel. They would bring and offer the sacrifices that secured the needed cleansing and relationship of the people with God. They bore the responsibility to be right, clean and approach God in a right way (c.f. Numbers 18:1 & 23). They were the ones responsible before God to make sure all was done correctly for the life and peace of Israel and also for their own blessings. All this was given to them by the Lord, so was both a great honour and duty was on them - to fear, reverence, revere the Lord. The priests had to recognise who they were dealing with, being dealt with and who they were in a relationship with - the great God and so they

were to fear, reverence Him. They were to recognise they were about God's business and therefore had to live conscious of Him and of His eye upon them at all times.

It may be easy for us to keep a pretence of a good Christian life and yet it is possible to live as one without God most of the week and only appear 'godly' when we are near or around other Christians. God is not fooled, nor is He deceived! We are to live godly and right lives 24/7 and be enthusiastic for God all the time and not as it suits us or for us to blow hot and cold.

These priests were directed in v6 to the way the early priests lived and conducted themselves. They truly taught God's commands and ways. The early priests had no partiality, no bias, no dilution and they told God's word as it was and were true to the truths of God's word. There was no downplaying, no worries about treading on toes, fearing that their income would be affected etc. They are directed to what they as priests should have been doing in v7. They had to preserve, keep knowledge - the knowledge and teaching of God's word and so the people would seek after them to learn the truth of God's word for their own lives.

Pray for me, pray for the church officers, other ministers and other churches that the word of God would be taught faithfully, truthfully, clearly, relevantly and, most importantly, with the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Malachi pointed them to the priests of old, personified as Levi, and these walked with God in peace and righteousness - they lived correctly in private and in public. The 2 cannot be separated. In NT Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:16 "*Watch your **life and doctrine** closely. Persevere **in them**, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*" It underlines that the life,

teaching and doctrine of a minister, elder, church officer, teacher of God's word is so closely tied together and every area of their lives must be watched over as a harmonious whole.

Why should the priests, church officers and all believers do this? It is because we are **all** the messengers of the Lord God Almighty, we are all as Malachi - whose name means "messenger of the Lord". People may not ever read a Bible or look for God, yet our lives, actions, words are possibly the only Bible they will read or see, or be the only place where they will see God – in us is the hope of glory! We are His messengers. Some of us have the privilege and responsibility to teach and preach God's word "upfront", but all of us are to teach and live out God's word in private and in public and we are to be God's messengers wherever we are, in whatever we do or say at all times.

We do this, not only to honour and glorify our God and Saviour, but to turn people from sin by our example of living for God. The priests were to turn many from sin (v6). We need to be those who live out and teach God's way, so that people, whether young or old, will seek out God and turn from their sin. In the book of Daniel 12:3 we read *"Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever."*

I wonder who we want to be like! Personally, I definitely do not want to be like the pathetic priests, but I would want to be like the shining stars! I pray we would not be guilty of dereliction of duty and deserving of God's denunciations, but that we would listen to and act upon His directives and directions and live as we should, so to honour and glorify Him and that He would be pleased to use us in the salvation of others in our day and age as His glory and honour is revealed in and through our lives.