

# Malachi 2

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[ 0 : 00 ] Malachi chapter 2. This is what it says. And now, O priest, this command is for you.

If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart, to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings.

Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you did not lay it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your offering, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.

So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him.

I was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity.

[ 1 : 04 ] For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth. For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way.

You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. And so I made you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your instruction.

Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why, then, are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.

For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts.

And the second thing you do, you cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning, because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. But you say, why does he not?

[ 2 : 11 ] Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Did he not make them one with a portion of the Spirit in their union?

And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit. Let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.

So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. You have wearied the Lord with your words, but you say, how have we wearied him? By saying, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.

Or by asking, where is the God of justice? This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, as you're finding your seat, let me put your mind at ease.

Probably more than a few of us here puzzled to walk into a church come Advent and hear a reading from Malachi chapter 2, you might be asking yourself, now what does this have to do with Christmas?

[ 3 : 31 ] But we're looking at Malachi, although written 400 years before the birth of Christ, was the last prophetic word given to God's people prior to Christmas.

Malachi is God's last word before Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Christmas. Getting ready for Christmas.

So many preparations for Christmas. If you're like me, there are gifts to purchase and then wrap.

Cards to write and send. Parties to attend. For some, there are plane tickets to purchase. There may even be exams to take.

For many, there's a pine tree to buy. Or even one that you need to cut down before hauling it home. Then the lights. The ornaments.

[ 4 : 39 ] You know, Lisa and I are celebrating our 41st Christmas together this year. And we always have a live tree or as live as a tree can be that you cut down and remove from the ground yourself.

Got me thinking this week. It usually stays up in our living room for a month, perhaps six weeks. I've worked it out early this morning. I've been living with a tree in my living room now for about 246 weeks of my married life for 61 months.

A tree in my house because of Christmas. These are the things you think of when getting ready for Christmas. But there's more.

There are the meals. The many meals. The special meals. My mom always made the same egg casserole on Christmas morning.

Perhaps you have memories of the consistent things eaten over the decades that you now prepare. Thinking of preparing, there are guests to be prepared for.

[ 5 : 51 ] Beds to be made up. These many things are all part of getting ready for Christmas. It really takes the making of a list.

Without a list, things are forgotten. Something certainly is lost. It's undone. It appears to me that Malachi is a good list maker.

Or at least one who can augment the ones that you and I have made. He highlights the things that would otherwise be undone in our own attempts to get ready for Christmas.

Things that we forget about. Important things. Actually, the essential things. Look for yourself.

You're going to see Malachi in this chapter on this last word before Christmas. First, getting the clergy ready for Christmas. And then in 10 to 17, he's going to get the congregation ready as well.

[ 6 : 57 ] Evidently, the pastors and the people in Malachi's day needed to know what to do to be ready for Christmas.

Getting the clergy ready for Christmas. Verses 1 to 4, here it is.

And now, you, O priest, this command is for you. If you will not listen. Notice the if-then clauses with me as I read it. If you will not listen.

If you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts. Then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them because you did not lay it to heart.

In order for the clergy to be ready for Christmas, a warning was needing to be received.

[ 7 : 59 ] No warning received. No readiness for the wonder of a birth. The warning is interesting. Pastors, priests in the text, mediators, those who stand before people in our day, placing God's word as the mediating influence on your relationship, needed to be prepared themselves.

And in Malachi's day, if they weren't honoring the name of the Lord, if they weren't taking it to heart.

Did you notice that twice said there in verse 1? If you will not take it to heart. Or the close of verse 2. Because you do not lay it to heart.

Getting clergy ready for Christmas is a matter of a heart. The heart. And it's a warning. I'm preaching to myself today.

You're probably like, amen. I hope you get your own word today, preacher. You've been looking at us all year long. It's a matter of the heart. If the heart is not ready within the leadership of the church, all the work that they have done to prepare otherwise for their home won't count for much.

[ 9 : 23 ] And notice what is needed on my list. It's a heart that honors God. I mean, this reads back into verse 6 of chapter 1, doesn't it?

Oh, priests who despise my name. But you say, how have I despised your name? By offering polluted food upon my altar.

But you say, how have we polluted you? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals and sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?

Present that to your governor. Will he accept it or show you favor, says the Lord of hosts. The priests of Malachi's day had corrupted the faith by permitting among the people a sacrifice to the Lord that wasn't measuring up to the Lord.

But let's not put any of the weight here on the people. Let's put it all on the priests. The priests in his heart had begun to despise the name of the Lord and begin to teach through his own instruction that God, our God, will accept anything.

[ 10 : 54 ] Whatever you want to bring to him will be fine and received by him. This is a problem for the pastoral ministry.

When keepers of the gate don't think highly enough of God to hold the line in their instruction on what God requires.

It normally comes out of a fear of the people. So a lowering of the standards, a lessening of the force of the scriptures, begins to then begin to be taught from a pulpit that allowing anything to pass is acceptable.

What was happening to the priests in Malachi's day is their own arteries were being clogged around their heart. They hadn't laid it to heart.

The arteries were clogged. They needed a spiritual stent. They needed an invasive moment spiritually that opens up to the heartbeat of God and his word and the fullness of its force and his holiness and his glory and his perfections and his beauty and their ability to say, all of this God requires.

[ 12 : 27 ] Yet, that which was true in his day is true upon ours. Indeed, the curses which had already come upon them for not laying it to heart rest presently upon the class of clergy in our country and around the world.

You've got to be blind or have your head in the sand to think that God isn't winnowing the work of those who are supposed to articulate his word.

We've seen it. We've watched it over the last years and decades. The abuses are well documented.

The sins are well known. The private has been made public and not merely in mainline churches or from Rome itself but from within our own tribe.

The faces of clergy covered in shame with a smell that repulses the world from ever wanting to get ready for Christmas.

[ 13 : 45 ] It was a week ago. Do you remember in our own church? Herman Taylor called me early in the morning. I'm not sure I was really rolling yet.

But if I see his name, I better pick it up. Pastor, how you doing? I'm going to ask you straight. I've just heard of another one in the country from our own midst.

It's a moral failure. Moved him out. What about you? Beautiful phone call. For all the human frailties and fragilities of life, it is good for the pastor to take the warning daily.

That while we are not prepared for these things, nor can we stand perfectly before God, our lives need to demonstrate that our hearts are repentant.

That's the readiness needed for the wonder of a birth. A heart by Christmas.

[ 15 : 04 ] Fortunately, he even gives an example of one who demonstrated such a heart. That's the way the text moved there in the latter half of that opening unit. Did you notice in verses four and a half or so through verse nine, he refers to a covenant with Levi.

God is saying, I'm going to curse you so that the blessings I brought through Levi actually stand. He's referencing something further back in Israel's own history.

Numbers chapter 25. You can read about it later today. It was a covenant of fear, he says. God found one among the priests who feared God.

It says he stood in awe of my name. Wow. True instruction was in his mouth. No wrong was found on his lips.

He walked with me in peace and uprightness and he turned many from iniquity. See, unless there is that in play, it's hard for others to follow along and walk in righteousness.

[ 16 : 08 ] He says, for the lips of the priests should guard knowledge and people should seek instruction from his mouth. For he is a messenger of the Lord of hosts.

He's referring here to something back in Numbers chapter 25 at a time in Israel's history where the people were compromising their faith by living with, marrying into, and walking in accordance with those that had any faith unlike universal exclusive union with God.

The priests were permitting all of this. It speaks of a scene in which Phineas, who's a descendant of Levi, by the way, we should be baptizing or dedicating a Phineas at some point along the way after you hear this message.

This man is worthy. Phineas sees what's going on. He's within the priesthood himself. Perhaps he's a young associate minister, an apprentice of sorts, a man in training.

Who knows? But a man comes into the congregation with Moses in front of all of the people with a Moabite woman who now he's worshiping her gods.

[ 17 : 29 ] And you can envision a marriage ceremony among the people of Israel when an Israelite is now living in syncretistic ways, you might say.

And they go into the tent to celebrate their new marital union. And Phineas says, enough. And Phineas takes a spear in Numbers 25.

And out of a zeal for the name of the Lord and for the purity and the holiness of God's own character, he runs the spear both through the man and the woman.

And a plague is stopped among the people. Nevertheless, many thousand died before it occurred. It reminded me of last week's word in verse 10.

Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors. That's what Phineas did. He said, no more. And he's now put forward here as one to emulate.

[ 18 : 38 ] Let's just get it clear come Christmas. The clergy are in need of a savior. Even Phineas, as great as he was, wasn't going to be great enough.

I even think of a later priest by the name of Zechariah, godly man, serving the Lord into the temple. Here's the word that his wife will bear a child and the child will be John the Baptist.

But his heart wasn't yet quite ready to receive it. And he questions and he doubts the very word, the very instruction of the Lord and therefore is made mute until the promise comes to pass.

Fortunately, there is a priest for all priests. Jesus himself fulfills this role so beautifully.

He is the one in whom his instruction is true. He walks in peace, uprightness.

[ 19 : 45 ] He guarded knowledge. He was the messenger of the Lord of hosts. He was the one in the church.

Fortunately, for the pastors that now are under the weight of the word, the people likewise are put there, beginning in verse 10 and following.

According to verses 10 and following, when it comes to getting ready for Christmas, there's work to be done in the pew as well as the pulpit. There's work to be done among the people as well as the pastor.

There's something you need to be done in the 17 days that remain before we celebrate his birth. This ought to be actively in play in our congregation.

Getting the congregation ready for Christmas is really what's going on in 10 through 17. And whereas the clergy needed a repentant heart, the people needed an undivided faith.

[ 21 : 19 ] The wonderment of Christmas will be lost on you if there is an unpreparedness, a guarding of your own faith.

It begins there. Verse 10, have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another?

There's the word. Treacherous, really. Think about it. Faithlessness is treacherousness. Why then are we faithless? By that he means, why do we have a divided heart?

Is there not one father? Why are we less than in union with him? Profaning the covenant of our fathers, Judah has been, there it is the word again, has been faithless.

An abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married a daughter of a foreign god. This again, bringing back Israel's understanding of marriage outside the faith as some kind of amalgamation, some kind of syncretistic union that you can do God and not do God at the same time.

[ 22 : 49 ] That you can do a life that says, I'm here, but down here I can be trans. I can be living a life that's just divided in many other ways.

Faithless, a divided heart. Syncretism, I looked it up. It actually means an amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions or schools of thought.

So as the priests had a corrupted heart, the people had a compromised faith. That's about as easy as you can put it. One to nine, a corrupted heart. Ten and following, a compromised faith.

Verse 10, faithless. Verse 11, faithless. Faithless. Look down again at verse 14, to whom you have been faithless. Again, verse 15.

So guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wise of your youth. Again, in verse 16. So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless.

[ 23 : 58 ] Five times over, that's on your list. That's what it means to be getting ready for Christmas. Have you guarded your heart in ways that you are yet in union with the one God and not living life among all gods and receiving anything as it would come?

The language of the text takes this up in the relationship of marriage, which is interesting. It's worth taking a look at for a moment. The very real material relationship of marriage does in the text become also a metaphor for a divided faith.

The divorce of a husband from a wife for undue cause actually is a metaphor in real terms of a people who leave off their union with God.

In one sense, you could say the pastors are needing saving and the people need saving too. Who among us has given himself or herself exclusively to God?

Have we not instead wedded ourselves both to God and other things? Just as a man might give himself to a woman who's not his wife. And all of this is still rooted in the mind of Malachi, back to that story that was unfolding in Numbers 25.

[ 25 : 25 ] I noticed this week an interesting line in verse 13. This is the second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he no longer regards your offering or accepts it with favor.

What's happening among the people is they're weeping, but for the wrong reasons. Their emotions are stirred to the point of tears, but not over the things that ought to stir the emotions to that extent.

And the weeping was also present in Numbers 25. As that young man brings the woman into the camp and marries her and Phineas appears, it depicts the people of God as continually being before the tent of meeting weeping.

And what are they weeping for? We're not hearing from you. You don't love us. Or look at the end of the text. Why do evil people get good things in your sight and you delight in them?

Or they say, where is the God of justice? So the congregant, the person, the man, the woman, you, who go to God and in a sense put him on the witness stand.

[ 26 : 45 ] All the while living a life where one's heart is divided and giving yourself to a number of things. He says, that's got to end.

There was a survey done. I'm almost done. Survey done in 1922. 1922. My word. 2022. They talked to a bunch of people that were supposedly evangelicals.

Now I know in this day and age it's hard to know who is an evangelical. Given all you read out there, I'm not quite sure who evangelicals are. But evidently there's some people who say I'm an evangelical. So at any rate, let's take a look at their survey. They categorize these people as having evangelical beliefs.

Listen to some of it though. Almost three out of four, 73% agree that Jesus is the first and greatest being that was created by God.

Not God. 75%. More than half, 58%, believe that God accepts the worship of all religions. Doesn't matter what you do or what you believe.

[ 27 : 57 ] He's going to be there at the end. Everything leads to him. As long as you just do it sincerely, you'll be good. More than half, 55%, believe the Holy Spirit is a force, not a personal being.

More than half, 55%, agree that everyone sins a little, but most people are good by nature. I mean, look in the mirror, people. We're not good.

There are some better lights within us, but they're like battery lights that seem to go out. Got to reboot them, recharge them. More than half disagree with the claim that even the smallest sin would deserve judgment from God, especially eternal damnation.

And 44% say that Jesus was a great teacher, but he wasn't God. See, we believe these things about God so that we can live the way we want to live, and yet tell ourselves we'll be accepted by God.

That's called, in this text, faithless. So what's the remedy? What do you got to get on your list? You got to write this down.

[ 29 : 11 ] This has to be on your list. Guard yourself. It's there twice. Guard yourselves so that you will not be faithless.

We need a repentant heart. We need an undivided faith. We need saving. We need Christmas to get ready for Christmas.

Until Christmas comes, I can't get right. But he comes in a manger. One father.

His heart united to him. Faithful in every respect. Yeah, he comes with a heart that was born to do God's will.

He comes to make both people and pastor right with God by the perfect substitution, his own life at Calvary, so that God himself, you know, this is God's problem.

[ 30 : 30 ] God has a problem in the Old Testament. You know what his problem is? His problem is his promise. He promised that he's going to get things right for us. And he solves his own problem by bringing his son into the world, who then can give his life as a perfect substitute, thereby keeping God just and righteous and all the while merciful and your salvation.

Yes, we need Christmas to be ready for Christmas. Are you getting ready for Christmas? Have you written your list? Are you checking things off?

Gifts? Check. Tree? Check. Plane ticket? Check. A heart that honors God? Check.

A heart that's ready to receive him as my king? Check. A mind that says, I'm not going to be divided, given the fact that he's already come.

Check. Exclusive love, devotion to him and him alone. Check. You got 17 days.

[ 31 : 56 ] 17 days. Now, I know sometimes we make a commitment, then you wake up the next morning and you say, eh, that was yesterday. I feel like doing what I want to do today.

You better check that. Better think about it. I want our family ready. Our Heavenly Father, come, thou long expected, Jesus, but make us ready for your coming.

Help us as we get ready for Christmas. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.