

Malachi 2:1–9

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[0 : 01] Again, the scripture text is Malachi chapter 2, 1 through 9 on page 890 of the provided Bibles. And now, O priests, 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 do not lay it to heart.

Behold, I will rebuke your offspring 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. It 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 : 10] 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 make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your instruction.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Good morning. Sometimes a holiday can just downright sneak up on you.

It can catch you unprepared. In other words, something on the calendar can arrive on your doorstep long before you knew it was even on the way.

And when that happens, it puts you in a hurry. The entire event goes off in the context of your flurry.

[2 : 26] And truth be told, you miss it. You miss it because your heart was never ready. For these reasons, we've decided to look at the book of Malachi.

Before Christmas. I'm warning you, Christmas is coming. And I don't want us to be caught unprepared.

Malachi is the final Old Testament book before Advent, before arrival, before the wonder of a birth. And by the looks of our text here today, chapter 2, 1 to 9, it would appear that the priests were nowhere ready. Nowhere near ready.

And so this sermon preached by Malachi to the priests, chapter 2, verse 1, in a sense, is telling the clergy, get ready for Christmas.

[3 : 37] Now the clergy generally think they're out in front of the congregation. They have church calendars to plan, church concerts to get in place, their own Advent preaching to be thinking through.

They fancy themselves, we do the clergy, the mediators between the people and God, as needing to be prepared come Christmas.

But their heart, verse 2 of chapter 2, if you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart. Or look at the way verse 2 lays down at the end, because you do not lay it to heart.

This heart, among the priesthood, needed a talking to. And so you and I are asked, why?

Why? Why were the clergy of all people in need of getting ready for what would come next, namely Christmas?

[4 : 49] Not only why, but what could be done? Or more particularly, what about Malachi's message would help them make up for lost time?

Those are the two words that I think can stand above this message by way of its movements. You and I need to know, why were the priests not ready?

And what about Malachi's word would help them? For the why, for the why then, let's spend a few minutes. It would be good, wise perhaps, to put ourselves in their shoes.

They say it's always good to walk a mile in somebody else's shoes. So, okay, welcome to the priesthood of Malachi's day. Let's look at their situation and their circumstances.

Let's understand the world from their perspective, especially in light of God's great promises. Now, let me just explain a little bit about the world they were walking in.

[6 : 01] According to the final verses in 2 Chronicles, another book in the Old Testament, and the first few verses in Ezra, we see that there was a king in Persia who made an edict following the moment of the Babylonian exile that permitted the Jews to return to the Promised Land and to restart what had been 70 years of generational decay in Jerusalem.

The scriptures actually say that those priests who came back at this time were among those whom, quote, God had stirred. Let me tell you who they were then.

These are urban pioneers, these priests. These are neighborhood renewal folk. These are the spiritually appointed community activists.

These are the ones who go into an environment where there was 70 years of generational decay and they put their own back, their own weight, their own resources behind the renewal of Jerusalem.

In other words, they were ones who set out to see the city of Jerusalem transformed by the power of divine promises.

[7 : 54] What happened to their heart? Well, from Nehemiah's day, also a contemporary of kind, we actually have a list of the founders among whom these priests were engaged in that work in Jerusalem.

And he gives 30 verses to the names of the core group who came along, hearts having been stirred, but he follows it with 27 verses limited to the Levites and the priests and the temple workers. In other words, these people of Nehemiah's time were those who were leading. They were all in.

They were the representative leadership.

I mean, it must have been an interesting group. It was about 4,500 in number. But well over 10% of that group had a representative role of leading from the Levites.

You might know that Aaron was a priest and one of his sons was Levi. And eventually, as we'll see, all of the priesthood comes through that line of Levi.

[9 : 20] So here they are on the ground in Jerusalem. But things hadn't gone as planned. They got in.

They got going. They went block by block, street by street, repairing the places and the breaches in accordance with where they had laid down some roots.

But then, not much happened. Life got hard. People began to pay attention to what they needed rather than coming on back to what God's house needed.

The economy was difficult. The Persian kings were extracting undue resources. And all of this began to deaden the heart toward the promises of God.

There's one place in the Old Testament I want you to turn to. I don't like to turn around in the Bible very much because sometimes I feel like every time I go somewhere I'm going to lose some of you and you never come back.

[10 : 38] But I'm going to give it a shot today. Take a look back at Deuteronomy chapter 30. This is a time when Moses prophesied not only that Israel would go into exile which by the time we're reading they've already come back.

But he also prophesied what life would look like when they came back. Take a look at Deuteronomy 30. It's worth looking at this with your own eyes because you're going to see where the book of Malachi comes in.

Verse 1 And when all these things come upon you the blessing and the curse which I've set before you and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord God has driven you.

In other words Israel will be driven away from that neighborhood out of that land. Verse 2 And when you return to the Lord your God you and your children and obey his voice and all that I command you today with all your heart and with all your soul then the Lord will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you.

If your outcasts are in the uttermost parts of heaven from there the Lord your God will gather you and from there he will take you. Verse 5 And the Lord your God will bring you into the land that your fathers possessed that you may possess it.

[12 : 08] Those were the divine promises and these priests and Levites and people believed it and they had moved back in but they had also read verse 6 And he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers and the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul that you may live and the Lord your God will put all these curses on your foes and your enemies who persecuted you and you again shall obey the voice of the Lord and keep all his commandments that I command you today the Lord your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand in the fruit of the womb in the fruit of your cattle in the fruit of your ground for the Lord will again take delight in prospering you as he did your fathers and yet between the period at the end of verse 5 and the capital A at the beginning of verse 6 stood these years in which Malachi must have been written they had come back but their heart had never been circumcised

God had never made good on his promises nothing had gotten easier it continued to be more difficult and the community that they were trying to build and transform looked exactly the way it did 15-20 years along the way and so eventually the priests began to question whether God was good all the time and they saw the hardships among the people and they saw families that were barely getting by and so a family with very little who has a lamb who's torn by violence let's say of a wolf decides I need food on my table so as I'm coming before God

I'm bringing this this sacrifice that had been violently taken from me or I'm grabbing the lame one or the blind one because my life is overwhelmed and eventually the priests say that's fine I don't know where God is anyway in fact whatever you think will mediate your relationship with God just bring it you know I'm glad you're here today that whole thing about perfect blood sacrifice well I'll be honest with you I've been walking with you for a while now and I haven't seen God either and so by their actions and by their attitudes the priests walked away from God and as a result they weren't anywhere near ready for Christmas think of it today think of the clergy think of those who have given years of their lives and appointed leadership for the household of God's family think of the burdens that the people are under and you can see why over time the priesthood is coming on to Christmas completely unprepared what what about this message would help the priesthood make up for lost time two words they needed to hear a warning and it had to be put with a word picture the warning is in verses one through five notice there's a command given to them in verse one and a reiteration of that word command in verse four and the command is embedded with a if then if then statement from

God priests who are worn out in what was a worthy cause if you will not listen if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings indeed I have already cursed them what an irony the Levites who in Moses' day called out the curses upon the people if they were to forsake God's word at Mount Gerizim and Ebal and had the people call back upon hearing the curses amen so it be to me if I don't listen to you oh priests were by this time going to receive the very curses they had warned the people of he says there in verse three I mean this is this is in the Bible I will rebuke your offspring in other words the children and the children's children of the spiritually appointed leaders would have

God's hand against them if they don't listen to the warning and notice what he says I will spread dung on your faces the dung of your offerings and you shall be taken away with it I don't know how to make it any more clear than that but the stuff was going to hit the fan and the fan was going to hit their face and this was a despising of their very person the word there for dung is the inward parts of an animal that would even when you were carving an animal to determine what goes in the freezer for later and what was worthless and was going to be thrown away it was all the inwards it was all the intestine it was all the unusable stuff the stuff you wouldn't cook it was the mess and it would be taken out and off the table all the way down to fecal matter God and then he says your offerings which is another way of saying at the time of your festivals which is another way of saying and by the way this thing when it comes upon you it's not merely a little bit that a napkin is going to wipe away it's at a time in life where we got plenty of it it's in the festival days when there's lots of this stuff to go around that's the warning let me put it to you this way if you're a pastor in this church or a spouse of one if you're an elder in this church or spouse of one if you're a deacon in this church both husband and wife man and woman if you're a community group leader in this church both men

and women if you have been spiritually appointed to honor the name of the
[20 : 25] Lord then this warning comes to you come Christmas listen take it to heart in other words
heart repentance is how one prepares the heart for Christmas in our action in our attitude and as
we'll see in our instruction notice what's wedded to the warning it's a word picture that comes
through verses four and five when he raises a covenant made with

Levi a covenant that would have given life and peace that God gave to him the covenant of fear
when Levi stood in awe of my name what's the word picture Levi was one of the sons of Aaron the
priesthood had been given to Aaron but his older two sons burned strange fire and were set aside
Levi then was a son through whom the priesthood would remain because there was on a particular
day after the people of God were whoring with the nations where Phineas a son of Levi stands and
runs his spear through Israelite man and pagan woman out of zeal for the name of the
Lord at which time God says I'm making a covenant with Levi who actually understands that the
people of God are to live holy lives before God and that is a covenant of life and of peace to him
and so Phineas then becomes the long time right hand man of Moses who speaks before the
people and mediates and his line is actually offered forward now what he does in the word picture
then from 6 through 9 is he contrasts Levi with the Levitical priesthood of Malachi's day it's a word
picture and notice it's concerning the priest's instruction verse 6 true instruction was in his mouth
look at verse 7 the people should seek instruction from his mouth look at verse 8 but you are
causing many to stumble by your instruction instruction and then verse 9 because you show
partiality through your instruction now get this it's instruction it's the word
Torah but here it's not used as a noun in the sense of the content of the Torah it's used in the action
of the one who's teaching the Torah so just the same way in the New Testament you have the word
gospel which is a body of stuff but the same word can be thrown in a verbal form that you are
gospeling so to here you have the Torah but I'm worried about your Torah in you have the teaching
and you have your instructing get this get this you need to see the word picture clearly the
priesthood here he's not worried simply about the manifestations of sin we see today in the clergy
womanizing and sexual predators and he's not here talking about the lack of their social presence
of justice he's talking about their spiritual teaching that's that's the particularity of this text in other
words we need a clergy that is not merely clean from womanizing and sexually acting as predators
and we need a priesthood that is not merely woke and about social presence you need a priesthood
that is spiritually teaching in accordance with the word you got to have all three and it's this third leg
of the journey that he's particularly talking about here in verses six through nine the teaching
ministry of the church if you're a teacher in this church and you stay clear from sexual indiscretion
and you stay right on spiritual wokeness but you capitulate on spiritual truth then you have
compromised the name of the

Lord and the whole experiment revitalizing the people of God in the presence of the world is done
so when you look at their problem the indictment is right there the indictment is right there in verse
eight and nine but you have turned aside from the way teachers who stop teaching the fullness of
God's message because there are things in it they don't like look at number two what's the result of
that you cause many to stumble by your instruction so the problem in the pulpit leads to the sin in
the pew when I if all I wanted to do was tell you what I thought you wanted to hear every week you
might go out going

[27 : 28] I'm coming back but the scriptures say you be stumbling on your way how do you cause
someone to stumble you remove something that was supposed to be there and as a result of it not
being there they fall or you can put something that isn't supposed to be there there that I will go
headlong over as I fall and that's what's going on with teaching when spiritual teachers remove the
fullness of God's word the people are going to fall and when they throw stuff in they're not supposed
to throw in the people are going to fall fascinating to me fascinating to me but you can see the
dilemma when the pulpit!

decides to relinquish the fullness of God's word the people will stumble he says there the very third
indictment that you have broken then the covenant of Levi why weren't the priests ready for
Christmas because life got tough and they went soft what did they need to know to make up for lost
time be warned!

And use that word picture to get ready teach the full counsel of God that's what's going to happen
today I guarantee you somebody here today is going to go you know what I've decided to go to that
church because he's going to look me in the eye and sometimes tell me what I didn't want to hear

and someone else today this room they'll be like no I'm not going back there because I didn't hear everything I wanted did they get it did they get it did the priesthood get it there's some signs that guys like Ezra got it but when you actually look at the history by the time Christmas comes even Zachariah who's married to a daughter of the tribe of Levi who's ministering in the temple who receives the word that

Christmas is now here he doesn't get it he didn't believe it as a result God says well you're not speaking for me then and he goes mute till the word of God comes and when Jesus arrives they actually will say of him we know you're from God because you do not teach with partiality and then Jesus himself goes to a cross perfect priestly provision and his blood shed that we might actually have proper worship so while we are all the kingdom of priests in another sense there's only one priest the Lord Jesus Christ through through whom in his fidelity to the

Torah in his obedience to the teaching in the laying down of his life for sinners to his arriving in the womb of a woman to be born under the law we we can be ready clergy!

[31 : 39] clergy get ready for Christmas now you may say well that's good man I'm glad he hit all those appointed leaders in holy trinity but come on back next week because Malachi is not done and he had a word for the pastor today he got a big old word for the people come next Sunday we look forward to being together our heavenly father truth be told Christmas can come up on us catch us unaware we're not ready for the arrival of your son and what it might mean for our lives help help us oh lord to demonstrate heart repentant ness that we would live under the word and the rule of Jesus in whose name we pray and we give before you with thanksgiving amen amen to to