

Portrait, Problem, Paradox

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[0 : 00] Malachi chapter 2 and verses 1 through 9. Malachi chapter 2, last book of the Old Testament, verses 1 through 9.

A heart bowed before God is a heart devoted to God. Let me say that again. A heart bowed before God is a heart devoted to God.

Standing in awe of God will stop us falling before men. Over the last number of years, there have been many high-profile moral failures amongst the leaders of God's church.

Bullying, adultery, and greed comprise but three of the more recent tragedies. Whoever we are, such public disgraces, while not wholly unexpected, hurt us deeply.

I would suggest that without exception, the common cause of all these tragedies can be traced back to the problem of hearts which are not bowed before God and therefore not devoted to God.

[1 : 25] Any sense of intimacy with the Heavenly Father has been lost. And so has any respect for Him. Malachi chapter 2, as you can see, begins with a firm warning to the priests of Israel.

But before we switch off and think this has nothing to do with us, because we're not Old Testament Levites, let's remember that according to Revelation 1, 5-6, the reason Jesus loved us and freed us by His blood was to make us a kingdom and priests to serve His God forever.

And according to Peter in 1 Peter 2, verse 9, we are a chosen people. We are a royal priesthood. We are a holy nation. We are a people who belong to God.

We believe in the priesthood of all believers. That every Christian is a priest of and to God.

Therefore, God's warning here is also for us. It is true for us all, whoever we are, that a heart bowed before God is a heart devoted to God.

[2 : 39] And that standing in awe of God will stop us falling before men. That, as I said it last time, when we looked at Malachi 1, when it comes to our faith in Christ and the practical expression of our love for Him, we need to put our heart and soul into it.

Well, Malachi 2, verses 1-9, with its theme of a heart bowed before God is a heart devoted to God, neatly divides into three sections.

Portrait, problem, and paradox. The portrait being that of the ideal priest whose heart is bowed before God and is wholly devoted to Him.

The problem being that of the unfaithful priest of God whose heart is proud before Him and is therefore unfaithful in His duties.

And the paradox being how this passage points us directly to Jesus and the grace of His gospel. Where then is your heart today?

[3 : 48] Is it bowed before God? Does it stand in awe of God? God. First of all then, we have the portrait. The portrait. You will know that the Levites were the tribe God chose to be priests.

That all these priests, being warned in this passage in Malachi, were descended from Levi, the son of Jacob. And according to verse 4, God made a covenant with the tribe of Levi.

A covenant which, whilst not being recorded in its entirety in the Bible, concerned God's grace toward them and their responsibilities to Him. As they walked in faithfulness before Him, they could expect His blessing upon them and their work.

But if they should turn away from Him, they become liable to His judgment and His curse. So what then, according to Malachi 2, is the portrait of a priest who is living according to God's covenant? What does He look like? How does He act? What are the characteristics of a Christian? Someone who's been called to be a New Testament priest?

[5 : 07] Well, according to Malachi, there is the fear of God. There is faithfulness to God. And there is fellowship with God. There is, in the first instance, the fear of God.

Remember our main theme. A heart bowed before God is a heart devoted to God. Consider then the description of the ideal priest in verse 5.

This called for reverence. And He revered me and stood in awe of my name. Or more literally, He feared me and was reverent before my name.

He stood in awe. These are the operative words. Fear. Reverence.

Awe. The ideal priest of God fears God. Reveres God. Stands in awe of God. If we want to use modern language, this is a person who before the awesome name of God calls out, Wow.

[6 : 21] Because the name of God is a summary of all He is. As righteous, holy, and just, loving, gracious, and compassionate. God so mysteriously, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable.

But if we're to think of it in New Testament terms as we should, The name of God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The glory of the Holy Trinity in which one is three and three is one.

Before the majestic glory of such a God, we bow in adoration. And our hearts are filled with awe as we call out in wonder.

Wow. Many of us might have wished we were astronauts. And could have seen planet Earth from space.

How it would change our view of our little problems. If we could contemplate the totality of Earth from above. I would wager that Neil Armstrong was never the same man after he saw the Earth from the moon.

[7 : 27] That wow factor changed him forever. And listen carefully. A heart which has been constantly wowed by the glory of God Is a heart which never can be the same again.

A heart impacted by the tenacious love of the Father, The violent grace of the Son, And the transforming power of the Spirit Will always be different.

If our hearts are bowed before God, Standing in awe of God, Feeding God, Revering God, To use a hackneyed phrase, The things of this world shall go strangely dim In the light of his glory and grace.

Do I feel my devotion to God, And my eagerness to pursue holiness, Diminishing in my life? Is the pool of temptation just so great for me to remain in Christ's love right now?

What should the Christian do whose devotion to God is flagging? Let's go back here to this fundamental position of awe, Reverence, Fear, The glory and the majesty of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[8 : 43] Let's spend time considering how much greater the love of God Than the allurements of this world. Because remember, A heart bowed before God Is a heart devoted to God.

There is the fear of God here As part of the ideal priest. But there's also faithfulness to God.

Faithfulness to God. In the Israel of Malachi's day, The priest had many functions.

One of which was, Rather like a prophet, A teaching ministry. He was to teach God's law. He was to instruct God's people When they asked him for guidance.

The priest was to be a speaker of the word of God As we read in verse 7. He's to be a messenger of the Lord Almighty. But not only is he to preach the word of God, He is also to practice it.

Nothing false is to be found in his lips And he is to live God's way. He must walk the talk. His godly example Must back up his godly expositions.

[9 : 50] He must practice what he preaches. His heart is bowed before God And therefore his life is devoted to God. He is faithful both in word and in deed.

This is the Christian who has faithfully Heeded the words of James When he says, Faith without works is dead. Or Paul when he says, We are God's workmanship Created in Christ Jesus To do good works.

Or John the Baptist when he said, Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. The Christian, She's no hypocrite.

She practices what she preaches. She speaks of the grace of Christ. And she lives in and out the grace of Christ. She's gentle and tender hearted.

She's meek and she loves peace. He is relentlessly putting sin to death in his life. And he is pursuing holiness. I want to suggest that the tragedies We've seen in today's church Are in the first instance Failures of belief.

[11 : 03] That these leading figures Have long since stopped Bowing before the mighty name of God. But then they are In the second instance Failures of practice.

Because they no longer Honor God in their hearts. They stop honoring him In their lives. By contrast The faithful servant of Christ According to Paul In 1 Timothy 4 verse 16 Does not just

watch his doctrine closely What he believes.

But also his life. How he lives. Word and deed Are to speak together as one And not say different things. I wonder whether there are areas of our lives Where what we say Does not match up with how we live.

Are we angry? Are we filled with bitterness and grudges? Are we impatient? Self-seeking in our relationships? Again, how do we deal with such an issue? Where what we say And how we live Are two different things.

Behavior modification Does not begin with behavior But with belief. A heart filled with the grace of Christ Will naturally express itself In grace toward others.

[12 : 21] A quickness to forgive Patience Kindness Another centered focus A mind fascinated by the majesty of God Will naturally express itself In humility toward others And will shun Controlling Or self-seeking Or bullying motives Because remember A heart bowed before God Is a heart devoted to God Then the third aspect Of this Portrait of the ideal priest Is fellowship with God Fellowship with God You will know that in the Bible There are certain expressions Which evoke wonderful images Of intimacy with God And in verse 6 We have one such He walked with me He walked with me It's a relatively unusual phrase Because we would normally read the words He walked before me But not this ideal priest

He didn't just walk before God He walks with God It's this expression of deep intimacy That the almighty God Father, Son and Holy Spirit Should walk with this This mere human being In close fellowship In daily communion And that's the circle of this ideal priest That of vibrant intimate fellowship with God This is a person Who doesn't just relate well to others But relates even better to God A person whose heart is bowed before God And is devoted to God And therefore can't live without God She can't conceive of life without God Life has no colour Life has no meaning If he's not with her It really is a most beautiful picture That of walking with God It's that picture of the journey of life

Where we're accompanied Every step of the way By God That he's always with us And we're always with him And this ideal priest He is fostering this intimacy With the God Before whom he stands in awe And to whom he's devoted his life There's this vibrancy in his devotional life Again it's a simple truth That leaders who have publicly disgraced The name of Christ By their behaviour and character Already lost their connection with him That a long time before Their public persona began to crumble Their devotional life fell into ruins They were no longer walking with God Their hearts were not bowed before God Their lives were not devoted to God Because they were not cleaving to Christ They weren't doing life with God

And their devotional life was dead So here then we have the ideal priest The portrait of the godly Levite The description of the New Testament Christian Whose heart is bowed before God Whose life is devoted to God And who is walking in fellowship with God And I'm asking where are you here?

Do you recognise the portrait? Do you fit the ideal? Do you match up to the description? Questions I'll answer in a moment That is the portrait Secondly and very briefly The problem I've taken a long time on the first point Unintentionally so I want to briefly move on To highlight the problem Malachi emphasises in his own day The problem we encounter When we match ourselves up Against this portrait of the ideal priest There is the problem in the first instance Of heart Heart In verse 2 God condemns the priest Because they've not set their hearts To honour God The rest of their lives is wrong Because first and foremost Their hearts aren't focused on God None of us can see the wind But we can tell there is a wind Because we can see and feel its effect

[16 : 53] We see flags flapping And trees swaying But we cannot see the wind In the same way Although we cannot see the heart of a man We can often tell what's in there When we see the effect No we can't see his heart But if his heart isn't set on honouring God Then in all probability Neither will his life be To honour God As we read in verse 2 Literally means To recognise And acknowledge His supreme glory It means to set our hearts In such a way That God is big And we are small And that our hearts Think more of him Than they do of themselves Here's a woman And she stands proud Before God And why is that?

Because she does not honour God In her heart In her innermost being She does not think of God As majestic Rather she sees herself As the centre Of her own universe We may not see each other's hearts But God can And to him The way we feel And think Is entirely as obvious As the way we speak And act is Toward others And that's a problem Is it not?

That God can see my heart It blows away Any semblance of pretense I can have before him And it humbles us In his eyes Fear Heart That's the first problem The second problem Is life Life Because the priests Of Malachi's day Had hearts Which thought little of God But much of themselves Their lives Were an immoral mess We read God's accusation Against them In verse 8 You have turned From the way Then in verse 9 You have not followed My ways Not only was the heart Of the priesthood Rotten Its practice Had become rotten also The law of God Had become an inconvenience At best At worst Of lifestyle choice Compared to the pleasures Of this world You know we can see the wind We can't see the wind But we can tell There's a wind Because we can see And feel its effect The Christian man

Who his heart Is filled with himself And not God Was short By the way he lives To go back To a frequent theme A heart Which is not Bowed before God Will not be devoted To God And to use A rather unpleasant Application It is generally true And I'm using The word generally Very generally tonight That those leading Christians Who have fallen to sin Have Even though They themselves Might have denied it Made much of themselves In their ministries And little of God The truth is They rather like Their name up in lights Because in their hearts They were bigger than God anyway We are deceitful people We are so prone To self-promotion If our hearts Are not bowed Before God Heart

Life And then thirdly The third problem Teaching Teaching Teaching If you recall from earlier We learned that One of the functions Of the priest Was to be a Teacher of the word of God And so the ideal priest Through his teaching Of God's word As we read in verse 6 Should turn many from sin But what about These unfaithful priests Whose hearts Are not bowed Before God Neither are they Devoted to God We read in verse 8 That far from Turning many From sin Their teaching Has caused many To stumble They've scandalized Their people By their False teaching By their neglect To teach the totality Of the word of God They have As God says In verse 9 Shown partiality In matters of the law When people came to them Looking for guidance These unfaithful priests Set aside These parts of the law Which were uncomfortable

[21 : 22] Or demanding Parts which commanded Generosity In charity Righteousness In life Faithfulness In marriage For these priests The message Of loving God And loving their neighbour Didn't sell tickets So to fill their pockets They changed their message But in doing so Many stumbled into sin And fell away from God How chillingly relevant Let me remind you Of our theme tonight That a heart Bowed before God Is a heart Devoted to God The problem was These priests Didn't honour God In their hearts Lives Or teachings How tragic That these descendants Of Levi These privileged people Should be so far From God And yet As God's New Testament Priests How contemporary How convicting

That any of these accusations Should be made against us And be true Portrait And problem And then finally this evening Paradox Paradox Okay up to this point This evening I've told you the truth And I've told you nothing But the truth But I haven't told you The whole truth Because I've preached law And I haven't preached Gospel at all Yes it's a wonderfully True phrase That the man Whose heart Is bowed before God Is a man Who is devoted To God This is the man Who according to Verses 5 and 9 Is characterized By the blessings Of God We also see That the man Whose heart Is proud Before God And therefore Not devoted To God Is liable To the covenant Curse of God Of being Humiliated

Before the people Of being Despised But here's this paradox Which elevates This from a dry Exposition of law To a rich Fountain of grace Because let me Confess something To you If I'm being honest By nature My heart Is neither bowed Before God Nor is my life Devoted to God I am selfish Unfaithful And proud I don't deserve Any of the covenant Blessings God promises The ideal priest The blessings Of shalom peace Rather on account Of how unclean My heart Is before God I deserve The covenant Curses God promises To the unfaithful Priests The curses Of humiliation And judgment That's what I am And whereby

God's all seeing I I know myself To be In fact I know Only one person Who has ever Perfectly kept The conditions Laid down here In Malachi 2 verses 1-3 1-9 For the ideal priest One person Whose heart Was completely Humble before God And whose life Was completely Devoted to God Who walked In perfect Fellowship With God One person In the history Of the universe Who could say With all integrity I have come To do your will O God One person Who said Only what the Father said And did only What the Father Did We know Of only one Person In history Of whom It can be Said In all integrity And with perfect Truth He walked With me And turned Many from sin Of course

You know I'm referring To none Other than The Lord Jesus Christ You want Proof of this Go read the Gospels Test its Claims By his Obedience And faithfulness And righteousness He earned The covenant Blessings Promised To the Ideal Priest Yet On the cross He endured The covenant Curses Promised To the Unfaithful Priest Here's the one Who was despised And humiliated Before men Here's the one Who's been Nailed To a cross Outside the City walls Of Jerusalem Close to Where the Offal of Animal Sacrifices Was thrown Out To be Consumed By stray Dogs He's dying There in Shame And agony And nakedness Crying out My God My God Why have You forsaken Me Why have You cursed Me Yes indeed

[26 : 28] Why Why were the Covenant Curses Of Malachi 2 verses 1 to 9 Being exacted On the Ideal Priest There's the Paradox Of the cross That a Great exchange Is taking Place there The price Of my Unfaithfulness Is being Endured By the Faithful One The cost Of my Selfish Heart Is being Born By the Only One Of whom It could Be said That his Heart Was wholly Bowed Before God On the Cross He is Bearing the Covenant Curse We Deserved The Humiliation And disgrace The punishment Of our Sin As Rabbi Duncan John Rabbi Duncan Previous Minister Of this Conlegation Once Breathlessly Explained To his Class In new College Having expounded Psalm 22 In their Hearing He bore

Our Damnation And he Bore it Gladly He bore Our Damnation And he Bore it Gladly But not Only Did our Curse Pass to Him His Blessings Have passed To us The covenant Blessing of Peace with God That which We did Not deserve Or earn Became ours All All that He Earned All that He Deserved He Gave It To us On the Cross His Infinite Merit Was Imputed To our Account And Reckoned To us As Righteousness Though by Nature We are So unfaithful And so Sinful Yet by The simple Paradox Of the Cross We have Become Righteous In the Eyes Of God Entirely As Righteous As His Own Son Jesus Christ And Now The covenant God Makes With us Is very Different The Promise Of the Gospel Is that Anyone Who Believes

In the Name Of the Lord Jesus Christ Shall Be Saved That if We Should Confess With Our Mouth That Jesus Christ Is Lord And Believe In Our Hearts God Raised Him From The Dead We Shall Be Saved Faith In Christ Are The Terms Of God's Covenant So That All Christ Did On The Cross Can Become Ours You See Then How Directly Malachi 2 Verses 1 Through 9 Points To The Cross Let Let Close To Malachi 2 Verses 1 Through 9 He Broke Off Midway He Just Couldn't Carry On And He Called His Class To Spontaneous Prayer And His Prayer To Them Is Recorded Grant Almighty God That As You Have Been Pleased To Choose Us This

Day As Your Priests And Have Consecrated Us To You By The Blood Of Your Only Begotten Son And Through The Grace Of Your Spirit O Grant That We Might Rightly And Sincerely Perform Our Duties To You To Be So Devoted To You That Your Name May Be Readily Glorified In Us And May We Be Thus More And More Confirmed In The Hope Of These Promises By Which You Not Only Guide Us Through The Course Of This Earthly Life But Also Invite Us To Your Celestial Inheritance And May Christ Your Son So Rule In Us That We May Also Always Cleave To Your Head And Be Gathered As His Members Into A Participation Of The Eternal Glory Which Has Gone Before Us Here's A Heart Calvin's Heart Bowed Before God And It's Expressing Its Devotion

To God In Spontaneous Exalted Prayer To God Malachi 2 Verses 1 Through 9 Points Us To A Cross Where The Ideal Priest Before The Where The Ideal Priest Is Suffering The Curse Of An Unfaithful People So That His Unfaithful People Might Enjoy The Blessings Of The Ideal Priest How Marvelous And How Unthinkable Therefore That We Should Ever Consider Anything Other Than Bowing Our Hearts Before This God And Devoting Our Lives To This God In The Light Of Such Glory And Grace We Shall Strive Together To Join Calvin In His Exalted Praise And Call out To Christ Same May You So Rule In Us That We May Always Cleave To You And

[31 : 30] Be Gathered As Your Members Into A Participation Of The Eternal Glory Which Has Gone Before Us Let Us Pray Lord We Thank You That You've Not Called You've Called Called Us To Merely Preach Law You've Called Us Oh Lord To Exult In The Gospel Gospel By Which Your Son Jesus Though He Is The Ideal Priest In Every Way Endured The Curses Of The Unfaithful Priests Lord We Thank And Praise You That This Evening We Place Ourselves Right At The Heart Of The Story And Although We Can Piously Say A Heart Devote A Heart Bowed Before God Is A Heart Devoted To God Yet We Know That Our Hearts By Nature They Don't Bow Before You

But How We Thank You That In Jesus Christ Our Sin Has Been Taken Away And That Through His Spirit We Are Being Changed Day By Day So That Our Hearts Are Increasingly Bowing Before You How We Long Oh Lord That Our Lives Made It Down To Your Glory And That We May Participate

In The Glory Of Your Son Jesus Christ In His Name We Pray Amen