

Faithful:

Lessons from Malachi

Spiritual Leadership

6.8.25

Message 2

Malachi

Malachi 1:6–2:9 (CSB)

⁶“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. But if I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is your fear of me? says the LORD of Armies to you priests, who despise my name.”

Yet you ask, “How have we despised your name?”

⁷“By presenting defiled food on my altar.”

“How have we defiled you?” you ask.

When you say, “The LORD’s table is contemptible.”

⁸“When you present a blind animal for sacrifice, is it not wrong? And when you present a lame or sick animal, is it not wrong? Bring it to your governor! Would he be pleased with you or show you favor?” asks the LORD of Armies. ⁹“And now plead for God’s favor. Will he be gracious to us? Since this has come from your hands, will he show any of you favor?” asks the LORD of Armies. ¹⁰“I wish one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would no longer kindle a useless fire on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD of Armies, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.

¹¹“My name will be great among the nations, from the rising of the sun to its setting. Incense and pure offerings will be presented in my name in every place because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD of Armies.

¹²“But you are profaning it when you say, ‘The Lord’s table is defiled, and its product, its food, is contemptible.’ ¹³You also say, ‘Look, what a nuisance!’ And you scorn it,” says the LORD of Armies. “You bring stolen,

lame, or sick animals. You bring this as an offering! Am I to accept that from your hands?" asks the LORD.

¹⁴"The deceiver is cursed who has an acceptable male in his flock and makes a vow but sacrifices a defective animal to the Lord. For I am a great King," says the LORD of Armies, "and my name will be feared among the nations.

"Therefore, this decree is for you priests: ²If you don't listen, and if you don't take it to heart to honor my name," says the LORD of Armies, "I will send a curse among you, and I will curse your blessings. In fact, I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart.

³"Look, I am going to rebuke your descendants, and I will spread animal waste over your faces, the waste from your festival sacrifices, and you will be taken away with it. ⁴Then you will know that I sent you this decree, so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the LORD of Armies. ⁵"My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave these to him; it called for reverence, and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. ⁶True instruction was in his mouth, and nothing wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and integrity and turned many from iniquity. ⁷For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should desire instruction from his mouth, because he is the messenger of the LORD of Armies.

⁸"You, on the other hand, have turned from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have violated the covenant of Levi," says the LORD of Armies. ⁹"So I in turn have made you despised and humiliated before all the people because you are not keeping my ways but are showing partiality in your instruction."

1. God has been faithful.

A. 1,000 years before, God had delivered the Israelites from Egypt.

1. Through it all, God had been faithful.

2. Even through the 70-year exile, God had protected and preserved God's people in a way that should have been obvious.

3. But 15 years after the exile and the rebuilding of the Temple, God's people are once again unfaithful.

4. They are unfaithful in their worship, leadership, their marriages, and their finances.

B. God, however, has remained faithful to His commitment to His people.

1. God had done everything He had promised.

2. Even when the People of God didn't deserve God's love, His love remained.

3. Faithfulness and love are commitments that have no expiration date.

4. Fifteen years after the Second greatest miracle in Israel's history, the people of God are unfaithful.

a. The greatest miracle in Jewish history was the deliverance from Egypt.

b. The second greatest miracle was the return from Exile.ⁱ

C. I shouldn't be surprised that Israel was already unfaithful.

1. Even today, people who experience great miracles in their lives don't always remain faithful to God.

2. I meet people all the time who will testify to a moment when God did miracles for them, but they aren't living for Jesus.

3. This was true in the Old and New Testaments, and it's true today.

4. Miracles do not guarantee our faithfulness.

5. Miracles are not a sign of God's approval but of God's sovereignty.

2. Malachi is a book of Accusations

A. The first question or accusation of Malachi revolved around love.

1. God, you don't love us!
2. Where do I see your love?

B. The second accusation revolves around honor.

1. God accuses His people of not honoring him and despising his name.
 - a. God asks, "Am I not a father to you?"
 - b. Have I not acted as a faithful, loving God?
 - c. But God tells the Israelites that he has been treated worse than a human father or master.
2. How are we despising and dishonoring you, the people question?
3. "When you present blind and lame sacrifices."

Before we discuss the sacrifices, let's examine the roles of priests and spiritual leaders.

3. Spiritual leadership matters

A. It would be easy to read this text and say this doesn't apply to us:

1. First, Christianity doesn't offer animal and food sacrifices.
2. As Protestants, we don't even have priests.
 - a. We don't believe we have to have a man to administer to us grace and sacraments.
 - b. We believe that every believer is a priest and stands before God.
3. This is why Protestants, like Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Pentecostals don't call leaders priests but pastors.

B. We do have spiritual leaders.

1. We do recognize and call people to exercise spiritual influence and authority over us.

2. Even here at Licking A/G, there are several expressions of spiritual leadership and influence.

- a. The most obvious is me as pastor.
- b. But we also appoint Deacons who minister in arenas such as accountability and stewardship.
- c. We have a membership that not only conducts the business of the Church but also holds each other accountable and ministers to each other.
- d. We trust Delanie to lead the ministry to children.
- e. I trust Bro. Harvey with the Wednesday legacy service and he provides pastoral insight and guidance to me.

3. Additionally, I have a Presbyterian who provides me with guidance and accountability, along with General and Network Superintendents, and other Assembly of God leaders with whom I'm affiliated.

4. I have pastor friends who help support and hold me accountable and have permission to speak into my life.

5. Ministry is far more than a one-man show, and that's how it is supposed to be.

C. By attending a church, you acknowledge and recognize the spiritual leadership of others.

1. For Protestants, if you don't like the leadership of the church, you have several options.

- a. You could work through the process of voting the pastor out and electing a new one,
- b. You can ignore the pastor hoping he will leave soon,
- c. Or you yourself can attend another church with different leadership.

2. This is not the case, for example, of the Catholic church.

- a. Not only is the priest trained and hired by the Catholic church and appointed,
- b. Catholics must attend a Catholic church with an ordained priest to receive the Sacraments.
- c. Without the priest, there is no true worship or grace administered.

D. For the Jews in Malachi's day, their relationship to God looked more Catholic than it does Protestant.

- 1. Only the priests could offer sacrifices, and they were required to do so.
- 2. Only persons from the tribe of Levi could work at the Temple.
- 3. The Jewish priesthood was hereditary, meaning you were born to be a priest.
- 4. The priests and those who worked in the Temple were from the tribe of Levi, and the sons of Aaron were the priests.
- 5. This is why Malachi says that God had given this to Levi who served faithfully.
- 6. A thousand years later, God still remembered the first priest Aaron who was of the tribe of Levi.

E. The point is that when the priesthood was unfaithful, the people didn't have a choice.

- 1. God would raise up faithful people, like Samuel, who confronted the unholy priest, Eli.
- 2. But overall, there was no option for the people to impeach the priests and to reform the priesthood.

I'll apply this in more detail toward the end of today's message.

F. Moving to our day, it is safe to say that we have fewer excuses to accept poor spiritual leadership and guidance, because we do have a choice.

1. We don't have to sit under sinful pastors.
2. We shouldn't tolerate men or women who blatantly transgress the holiness of God.
3. We don't expect our spiritual leaders to be sinless, but we cannot tolerate sinful leadership.
 - a. I'm not sinless because I still struggle.
 - b. I recognize struggles with gossip or controlling my anger.
 - c. Jealousy and envy are easy traps to fall into.
 - d. I know that if I don't guard my heart, then I could fall into lust, or lying, or any other sin.
4. The Book of Hebrews reminds all of us that Jesus is the only sinless and perfect High Priest, who could sit down because His work was complete.
 - a. The impossibility of perfection does not excuse sinful leadership.
 - b. All people sin, but we cannot excuse sinful leaders.
5. When we excuse sinful leaders, we create opportunities for abuse and immorality.
 - a. I heard a podcast this week that defines spiritual abuse as when a pastor or spiritual leader "repeatedly sins against" us.¹
 - b. So many people get "hurt in church" because we permit sinful leaders.
 - c. If we confront a spiritual leader who is exhibiting sinful behavior and they don't repent, then either they need to go down the road or you do.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ALRzLOWF7Jg>

G. God calls out the priests of Israel because they were sinful, lazy, and corrupt.

1. This is where God starts His accusations.
2. To the priests, God directs His focus for these next verses.
3. Judgment begins in the House of God because spiritual leaders are responsible for the witness of Christ to the World.

Malachi 1:6-7

Yet you ask, "How have we despised your name?"

⁷"By presenting defiled food on my altar."

"How have we defiled you?" you ask.

When you say, "The LORD's table is contemptible."

4. How have we despised your name...how have we defiled you?

A. The Altar was the focus of a priest's life.

1. One of the most important ministries of the priests was the offering of sacrifices.
2. This is where a person would bring an animal, as prescribed by the Law, and that sacrifice would be given to the priest.
3. He would pray for whatever the purpose of the sacrifice was, and then he would slaughter it.
4. Some parts of the offering would be burned, some would be taken out and buried, and some would be saved for the priests for their food.
5. The people brought the sacrifice, and the priests would minister over the sacrifice.

B. Part of the priests' responsibility was reviewing the sacrifices and guarding the altar.

1. The condition of the sacrifice was that it had to be unblemished.

2. But the people were bringing sick, lame, and stolen animals to be given to the Lord.
3. The people were keeping the best for themselves and excusing the poor quality.
4. By presenting defiled food and calling the table/altar contemptible, they brought God's judgment, the Curse, upon themselves.

C. The problem in our text is that the priests were tolerating unacceptable sacrifices.

1. They were teaching the people that it was ok to give God less than their best.
2. They were teaching God's people that God's demands were too hard, too unfair, and wasn't worth the expense.
3. The altar was contemptible: not worthy of respect or honor.
4. The message the spiritual leaders were teaching the people was, "give something because it doesn't really matter!"
 - a. God will take whatever.
 - b. Don't give God the first or the best, but what is left over, because God doesn't need your best.
 - c. (This shows up big time with the tithing issue.)

5. They missed the significance.

- A. It is clear that the spiritual leaders of Israel didn't grasp the purpose and nature of sacrifices.
1. They didn't understand the Law of Moses because they didn't know the heart of the God who had been faithful.
 2. When they slit the throats and offered the blood of the animals, they had no clue what was being enacted.
 3. They had lost sight of God in the Garden who killed the first animal and made clothes to cover the shame of Adam and Eve.

4. They missed the provision of a ram in a thicket to spare their great-great-great-great grandfather Isaac from being sacrificed by Abraham.

5. They didn't understand that every drop of animal blood pointed them forward to a day when the Son of God, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, would step to eternity's altar and offer His blood as a perfect sacrifice.

A blemished substitute could never depict the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus, which every atoning sacrifice in the Old Testament anticipated. It was a direct insult to the gift that was to provide eternal life for all who would believe, even in Old Testament times. It was an act of sacrilege to offer the blind, lame, and sick. Not only was it valueless; it also was blasphemous—especially when Leviticus 22:18–25 and Deuteronomy 15:21 expressly forbade offering blemished animals. Is it not evil? Asks Malachi (1:8). How could anyone put God off with such shreds and mediocre remnants of their substance, gifts, and strength?²

B. Because of this, the people and the priests bring God's curse upon them.

Malachi 1:14

¹⁴“The deceiver is cursed who has an acceptable male in his flock and makes a vow but sacrifices a defective animal to the Lord. For I am a great King,” says the LORD of Armies, “and my name will be feared among the nations.

1. The person is not cursed because they sacrificed a defective animal, but because they kept the best for themselves.

2. The New Testament book of Acts recounts a similar story: a Christian couple named Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property.

² Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Malachi: God's Unchanging Love* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 41.

- a. They tell everyone they gave all the money for the poor but kept back part for themselves.
- b. Peter confronts them, not because they held some back, but because they lied and were deceiving others to make themselves look better.
- c. The sin wasn't in the withholding but in the deception, the posturing to make themselves look better than they were. And the result: they both, in succession, fall dead.

C. The Lord takes His church no less seriously today.

- 1. The Lord never requires you to give what someone else has.
- 2. He does require your best.
- 3. The God of Malachi and our God are the same.
- 4. So when we claim to worship Him, but do so in a way that treats Him as contemptible, unworthy, or less than, then we bring a curse upon ourselves as well.
- 5. When we proclaim to follow Jesus, yet our lives embarrass the God we claim to serve, we have made the Lord and His Salvation contemptible.

6. Oh that someone would close the doors...

Malachi 1:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

Malachi 1:10 (NLT)

¹⁰ "How I wish one of you would shut the Temple doors so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "and I will not accept your offerings.

A. The Temple was God's idea.

1. The sacrifices were God's command.
2. The priests were God's chosen leaders.
3. Yet the priesthood and the worship reached a point where God said, "I'm done!"
4. It was better to shut down the worship of the Lord than to allow it to continue in such a blasphemous condition.

B. Today, I hope you hear my heart.

1. I'm not criticizing another church.
2. I'm talking to Licking Assembly of God.

C. Are we giving God our best?

1. Are we treating God with contempt by not honoring His name?
2. Are we excusing sin and calling bad good and good evil?
3. Do we worship God with honor and respect in all areas of our lives?
 - a. When you are at church, are you focused and on mission?
 - b. When you talk to your kids about going to church, are you using language that encourages them, or do you teach them that going to church is contemptible?
 - c. We have been given such great opportunities and privileges to worship and draw near to God.
 - d. But are we?

7. If you love me, why can't I see it?

I want to preface what I'm going to say, because what I have to say is blunt.

A. Not all spiritual difficulties are rooted in sin.

1. There will be times in your life when it seems that your prayers are not answered.
2. There are times when it seems like our prayers are not being answered, our worship feels stale, and life is just really hard.
3. This does not mean that you are living in sin.
4. There are valley moments and dark nights of the soul for all of us.

B. For Israel, they couldn't see God's love and faithfulness because of their sin.

1. Sin clouds our vision.
- 2 Sin prevents divine love from being able to demonstrate itself fully."³
3. Israel couldn't see God's love for them even though it should have been perfectly clear.
4. When we habitually walk in sin and ignore the conviction of the Holy Spirit, we will become blind to God's faithfulness and love.

C. We will also be blinded or oblivious to our sin.

1. The priests were used to handling holy things.
2. But they couldn't see the sinfulness of their actions because they were blinded to it.
3. They were offended when God confronted them because they could no longer see the true condition of their heart and the sacrifices.

D. So God stopped listening and responding to their prayers.

Malachi 1:9-10

³ Kaiser

⁹“And now plead for God’s favor. Will he be gracious to us? Since this has come from your hands, will he show any of you favor?” asks the LORD of Armies. ¹⁰“I wish one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would no longer kindle a useless fire on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD of Armies, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.

1. Blatant, willful, and persistent sin hinders prayers because God stops responding.

2. I found this quote helpful:

Since the worshipers, encouraged by a grossly indifferent priesthood, had violated both the reverence for God’s altar (with their polluted verbal professions and hearts) and now reverence for the Lord himself, there was little chance that God would be disposed to hear anyone’s prayer or grant their requests.

“Supplicate (or literally, ‘make smooth’ [if you now can]) the face of God” (v. 9; cf. the same expression in Zech. 7:2). He deliberately used the name “El” instead of the personal name of the God who would be there, Yahweh, in order to stress the great gap that exists between a human governor and the incomparably great Creator of the universe, Elohim.⁴

E. Prayers are hindered by blatant sin.

1. Because prayer is not centered on ritual but on relationship.

2. The ritual can be right, but if the heart is wrong, then the offering is wrong.

3. It’s why Jesus, watching from the Temple 500 years later, celebrated the two coins of the widow (the widow’s mite).

4. It’s why God, in Genesis, accepted the offering of Abel but rejected the offering of Cain.

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Malachi: God’s Unchanging Love* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 41.

- a. If the heart is right, the offering is right no matter the amount.
- b. If the heart is evil, the offering is evil.

8. Why Spiritual Leadership Matters:

A. It represents God's divine order.

- 1. Leaders are responsible for the people.
- 2. Where the leaders go, the people will follow.
 - a. The sins of the pastor are often magnified in the people.
 - b. The priorities of the pastor are reflected in the congregation.

B. To be called to spiritual leadership is a heavy and holy thing.

I don't have this kind of conversation with many people.

But if you've ever asked my opinion about a minister who has been caught in sin, you know that my stance can sound really harsh. I don't come across very gracious.

Part of the reason why I, as a fellow minister, don't show a lot of grace to fallen and unrepentant ministers is because of the seriousness of what we do.

C. Ministers stand before God and man, and we handle holy things, holy people, and holy ideas.

- 1. And the thought that we could be leading people astray is a sobering thought and possibility.
- 2. To think that, because of our indifference towards God, sin, holiness, and righteousness, we can lead you to indifference, resulting in God turning His face away from us, is enough to cause any person called into leadership to cry out, "Oh God, have mercy upon me a man of unclean lips."
- 3. When a leader and shepherd of God's people falls away due to moral failure, I know that they have been ministering for some time with unclean hearts and unclean lips.

- a. I know they have been preparing holy sermons while participating in unholy things.
- b. I know that they stood before congregations and groups, speaking holy words while intentionally and willfully dirtying their hands and their hearts with filth.
- c. I know they have handled the offerings of godly people, counseled the broken and hurting, and prayed over gatherings while secretly treating the Lord as something unholy and unworthy.

Look what Malachi 2:3 says:

³“Look, I am going to rebuke your descendants, and I will spread animal waste over your faces, the waste from your festival sacrifices, and you will be taken away with it.

D. “I will spread animal waste over your faces...we have lots of words for this in English and none of them seem appropriate for a pastor to say behind the pulpit.

1. God told the priests:

- a. If you want to offer unholy sacrifices and call them good, then I will take the unholiest and dirtiest part of that animal and spread it on your face.
- b. But that is shameful and mean and nasty!
- c. And God says YES IT IS and that is what you are doing to my face!
- d. God told them You are profaning me, my name, my nature, my faithfulness, my character.
- e. Everything about me you are misrepresenting and trashing every time the doors are open, and with EVERY service, and with EVERY offering you are teaching the people to do the same.

2. God is declaring, in my language, “If you want to trash me and shame me, I will do the same for you!”

3. When men and women who are entrusted with the holy things of God consistently and intentionally handle the unholy, then the result are offerings that are rejected, prayers that are not heard, and love that is hidden.

9. Reading Malachi as a love letter.

A. If God hated Israel, He wouldn't have warned her.

1. If God hated Israel, He would have announced judgment like in Obadiah and moved on.

2. If God hated you, then you wouldn't have the chance to be here today.

B. If I didn't love you, I wouldn't be preaching here or this message.

Key takeaways:

A. Who are you allowing to influence your life?

1. Who your pastor is matters.

2. I know that I'm referring to myself, but please consider who you call pastor in your life and whom you allow to influence you.

3. This can apply to the books you read and their sermons online.

4. Ask,

"Is that person a person of integrity, character, and doing their best to lead you spiritually?

Is this person worthy of my trust?

Not a question of "is he likeable," but "is he godly?"

I don't profess to be sinless, because I'm not. But as I stand before you today, I can confess to you that I am doing my best to lead in holiness and righteousness.

There is nothing in my phone, my iPad, or browser that I would be ashamed for you to see.

I'm walking in holiness in my marriage, my finances, and my vocation.

I'm doing my best to grow in prayer, understanding of Scripture, and how to shepherd and care for the people of God that He has entrusted to me.

I try to lead with transparency and integrity.

B. What about you?

1. When you come to worship with other brothers and sisters, are you bringing your best?

2. None of us would want to play on a baseball team if our teammates didn't give their best. If they showed up unprepared or uncommitted, we would find that unacceptable. If they arrived without their equipment, they would end up on the bench. If they didn't hustle, we would not tolerate that behavior.

3. My brothers and sisters, when you come to the Lord on Sundays, are you prepared and committed?

Did you come ready, prayed up and primed for worship?

Did you read the text, asking the Lord to speak to you and to confirm His word through the preacher?

C. When we meet together, are we honoring the Lord?

1. Let us apply this with a New Testament example.

2. In the Corinthian church, the believers were treating the Lord's Supper, the Lord's Table, with disrespect.

3. Notice what Paul says:

1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (CSB)

THE LORD'S SUPPER

¹⁷ Now in giving this instruction I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For to begin with, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ Indeed, it is necessary that there be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. ²⁰ When you come together, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. ²¹ For at the meal, each one eats his own supper. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk! ²² Don't you have homes in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you in this matter!

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

SELF-EXAMINATION

²⁷ So, then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep. ³¹ If we were properly judging ourselves, we would not be judged, ³² but when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world.

³³ Therefore, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, welcome one another. ³⁴ If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you gather together you will not come under judgment. I will give instructions about the other matters whenever I come.

Before we receive the Lord's Supper this morning, let us examine ourselves.

Confess any sin that He exposes.

Repent and believe that in His power you will not give in again.

Give thanks to the Lord for His mercy endures forever.

ⁱ Other key miracles: Hannukah and the oil that didn't run out, the Birth of Jesus, the restoration of Israel in 1948, and the last with be Jesus' return at the Eschaton.