

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Prophecy of Malachi

Malachi 2:1-9

7 The Joy of Godly Leaders

August 25, 2019

Malachi 2:1-9

1 "And now this commandment is for you, O priests.

2 "If you do not listen, and if you do 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; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

3 "Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it.

4 "Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the Lord of hosts.

5 "My covenant with him was *one of* life and peace, and I gave them to him *as an object of* reverence; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

6 "True instruction was in his mouth and unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many back from iniquity.

7 "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

8 "But as for you, you have turned aside from the way; you have caused many to stumble by the instruction; you have corrupted the covenant of Levi," says the Lord of hosts.

9 "So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

To the Glory of God

Now I told you earlier that the entire **Book of Malachi** is a series of "Divine Indictments" that God gave to His Own people. And as God used this humble Prophet to give each Indictment, revealing to the

chosen people where they have failed God, they responded with amazement and disbelief. You see, the average Jew of the last 400 years before Jesus was born had grown arrogant toward Truth and cold toward God. Even after God had moved to make them His Own people and deliver them from 70 years of Captivity, and brought them back into the Promised Land, and blessed them to be able to rebuild the Temple and restore Jerusalem, they were apathetic and lethargic toward God.

So, after being back in the Promised Land for only a century, the Commands of God that were birthed in genuine Love for God, and that produced great degrees of biblical Holiness, descended into nothing but a pitiful "*semblance of godliness*", and "*man-made rituals*", and "*lifeless ceremonies*". And the Glory of an utterly majestic God became nothing more than a "religious routine" that led to hard-heartedness and apathy. And that hardening of the heart eventually led to widespread *abandonment* of God's Law by both the people and the priest. And in verse 2, God spoke:

If you do not listen, and if you do 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; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

But thanks be to God that God not only rebukes, but He also heals that which is sick. And so, it was at that very moment of compromise and apathy that the Grace of God shined the best. So, even as people had wholesale left off serving God, God was, nevertheless, faithful to raise up this obscure Prophet named Malachi. And as a mighty "Messenger", *heralding* the Divine Call to Repentance and Holiness, Malachi rebuked and condemned these abuses *forcefully* and *authoritatively* indicting the people and calling them all back to God.

So, the Burden of Malachi here is that God is not being honored and respected and treasured as He deserves. And this is the *primary* focus of this entire Book. It tells us how people speak and act and live and worship who have forgotten God.

Now the major Theme in all of Scripture is: *The Glory of God*. This one single Theme runs through all 66 Books, and it is repeated over and over again using different terms and words by all 40 biblical

writers. Without understanding that God is "*white-hot*" in His Passion to be known and feared and adored and treasured and obeyed and magnified by all of Creation will cause you to simply *not* grasp why God did and said many of the most important things in the Bible. Let me say this another way: Without understanding that the Glory of God is the foremost thing in God's Mind and the catalyst for why God acts and moves, you will not comprehend why the Bible says what it says.

The Reformers though this one single Subject was of prime importance that they summarized it with a Latin phrase:

Soli Deo Gloria! (to the Glory of God Alone)

This phrase means that since all that God does is done to His Own Glory, THEREFORE, everything that *we* do should *also* be *to the Glory of God*. So, how we think about things like Life, and Marriage, and Sex, and Children, and Politics, and Government, and Money, and What We Do, and How We Think, and what is the prime motivation behind all that believe, and all that we say, and all that we carry out, should be done so that God is glorified and honored and worshipped, and so that Jesus looks magnificent, and that He alone is our Treasure and our hearts desire.

Our progressive Sanctification, with all of our Trials and Sufferings and Tests and Afflictions and Blessings and Joys, are all working together to radically transform us so that two things become absolutely true and absolutely rock-solid in our lives:

1. That God is glorified.
2. That our Joy is made full.

Now, I think it is safe to say that as of this morning, these two Objectives may not always be true in our lives. Many of us fall short of this lofty Goal, frequently. We may periodically hit into it, but then the cares of life and the day-to-day grind of living in a broken world wears us out, and we revert right back to an Old Covenant mentality that says: "*If we will do this, then God will do that*". Many of us are still laboring under a carnal and false and unbiblical concept that says that the motivation behind Serving God, or Obeying God, or Following Jesus,

is a human sense of "Duty and Obligation"¹, and that our Service and Obedience is *best* accomplished through sheer will-power and human decision and earthly effort.

The tragedy is that all who get onto this "spiritual treadmill" soon find that no matter how fast we run, and no matter how steep the treadmill gets, we simply *cannot* manufacture a Joy or a Delight in God through this method. And that would be bad enough, but what usually happens is that the believer gets very discouraged as he sees what the Bible promises as a carrot on a stick, always just out of reach.

We must understand that what we need are *not* more Rules to follow. We don't need any more Commandments. We already have plenty of Commandments under the Old Covenant *that we can't obey*. We certainly don't need any more. And, if the New Covenant is nothing but a different set of Rules or Commandments (from the Old), then the New Covenant would NOT be any better than the Old. In fact, we would be *worse off*. If all God has done in the New Covenant is to swap out one set of Obligations (that we can't obey) for another set, then we could hardly call that "Good News". And if the New Covenant actually *raised* the bar and proclaimed an even *higher* and *harder* Standard, then all God did was to make Obedience even *more impossible* for us to meet up to it. And if that was the case, we would all be *much* better off going back underneath the Old Covenant.

But it isn't the case. Because what we need, dear friends, and what God has graciously provided for through the infinitely superior New Covenant is a new heart, a new mind, and a new spirit that forcefully and eternally propels us toward Love and Obedience. One of Malachi's fellow Prophets, a man named "Ezekiel", wrote about it in **Ezekiel 36:22&23:**

22 "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

23 "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst. Then the nations

¹ Many in the modern church call this dynamic a "Debt of Love" that we owe to Jesus for saving us. And people who buy into this live their lives seeking to "pay back" that "Debt" with our Good Works. I suggest that this dynamic is a false and unbiblical dynamic- since all of our labor after Salvation is due to God's Grace- and therefore- we are actually going *deeper* in "Debt" anytime we obey.

will know that I am the Lord," declares the Lord God, "when I prove Myself holy among you in their sight.

Wow! Ezekiel says here that God is going to act; He is going to do something. God says that He is going to move in the earth to accomplish something great and mighty and important and powerful, and something that will shake the nations of the world, and prove to them that He is glorious and worthy and majestic and magnificent! But look again at just what the motivation is that is *behind* the Act that God is going to do:

It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name

God says here that what He is going to do is NOT for the sake of His chosen people, but rather, the motivation behind what God is going to do is for one reason:

For My holy Name!

... which is simply another way of saying that what God is going to do is for His Own Glory! But *why* does God have to act? *Why* does God have to do something to magnify Himself?

22 ... "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went.

23 "I will vindicate the holiness of My great name which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst...

God says here that the Reason He has to act, sovereignly, to do something powerful and earth-shaking is because His people have *dishonored* Him before the nations of the world. God says that because the chosen people have NOT brought the "Fame of God" to the other nations, God is going to act *all by Himself, decisively, sovereignly, powerfully.*

But, *how* did the chosen people NOT honor God? *How* did they fail to lift up the Glory and the Fame and the Beauty and the Majesty of God to the other nations of the world? All through the **Book of Ezekiel,**

down through all the Prophets, and up into the **Book of Malachi**, God says that His people *failed* to see Him as the Treasure of the Universe. They *failed* to find their Delight in Him, and they *failed* to embrace God as their foremost Value. And as a result, the various nations of the world did not see God as Someone they needed to love and obey and delight in. After all, if God's Own people don't really think there is much to God, why should the nations come to worship Him? So, what does God plan to do that will accomplish both Goals?

1. **I will vindicate the holiness of My great name.**
2. [I will] **prove Myself holy among you in their sight.**

So, what can God "do", how can God "act", that will "vindicate" or "prove" His "Holiness", His "Uniqueness", or His "Otherness"? What can God do *all by Himself* that will *irrefutably* prove that God is the most important, and the most valuable Being in the Universe, and that "there is none like Me in all the earth?" It has to be something very powerful, something *radically* powerful, because He has *already* called a people unto Himself, and He has *already* moved to free them from 400 years of slavery with breathtaking miracles, including killing every first-born in Egypt. He has *already* vanquished the mightiest military on earth, and He has *already* proven His Love by feeding them and giving them water and prohibiting any of them from getting sick as they wandered in the desert for 40 years. Their shoes didn't wear out, their clothes didn't wear off, and a cloud guided them by day and a pillar of fire by night. God gave this people their own unique language, and their own unique culture, and their own unique religion, and their own unique land, and their own unique Government, and their own unique Laws. And after all that, the people had become apathetic and worldly and bored with God.

So, all that God has done, in, by, and through the First or the Old Covenant, had not brought about the desired results. And now, after yet another great Deliverance, the people that God had called to Himself by and large did not love Him, they did not worship Him, and they did not obey Him. So, what can God do now that will be *better* than what He has already done? What can God do that will bring about the desired Results? Look what God told the Prophet in **Ezekiel 36:24-27**:

24 "For I will take you from the nations, gather you from all the lands and bring you into your own land.

25 "Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols.

26 "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

27 "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

God says here He is going to do ten different things, *sovereignly, powerfully, all by Himself*, that will accomplish what the *entirety* of the Old Covenant could not accomplish. And by doing these ten things, God will satisfy both Goals:

- 1. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name.**
- 2. [I will] prove Myself holy among you in their sight.**

... so, what are those ten things? God said that He was going to:

- 1. [Sovereignly] take² [a people] from the [pagan] nations [outside of Israel]**
- 2. [Sovereignly] gather³ [those people] from all the lands**
- 3. [Sovereignly] bring [those people] into their own land (a "land" that is NOT geographic Israel/ the Church)**
- 4. [Sovereignly] sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean**
- 5. [Sovereignly] cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols**
- 6. [Sovereignly] give you a new heart**
- 7. [Sovereignly] put a new spirit within you**
- 8. [Sovereignly] remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.**
- 9. [Sovereignly] put My Spirit within you**
- 10. [Sovereignly] cause⁴ you to walk in My statutes**

² This original Hebrew word is best understood as "choose" or select".

³ "Assemble"; "Draw"

⁴ Effectually Accomplish; Bring to Pass;

.. and what did God say would be the net Result of Him doing all of these things, *sovereignly* and *decisively*?

... and you will be careful to observe My ordinances.

... which is simply another way of understanding Obedience, or Service, or Righteousness.

But please notice that the Obedience and the Service and the Righteousness of these people is NOT something they initiate. It isn't even something they cooperate in. No, the careful and continual Observation (Doing) of the Ordinances of God are not brought forth by human will-power, or human effort, or human decision. No, God says here that the careful Obedience of these people is merely a *Result* that is *caused* by the ten things that God does for these people *first*. In other words, BECAUSE God will do these ten things, those in whom God acts this way WILL respond by *obeying* Him, and *following* Him, and *serving* Him.

So, God, radically changing people (by and through what He alone does for them/at great Cost to Himself, the Death of His Son) so that these people are now careful to obey Him (joyful Obedience/glad Obedience), is so powerful, so amazing, and so earthshaking, that it will accomplish these two Goals:

- 1. I will vindicate the holiness of My great name.**
- 2. [I will] prove Myself holy among you in their sight.**

Now, everything I just said can be boiled down to a very simple (but profound) phrase:

Everything God does in Salvation is designed to accomplish two main Goals:
that God alone is glorified, and that our Joy is made full.

... or...

Salvation (more than anything else) displays the Glory of God's Grace
which when seen (in a people who experience it)
magnifies the infinite Value of Jesus Christ,
Who is the Glory God

And this explains *why* this one, single Issue, *the Glory of God*, *captivated* the mind and heart of every single Prophet of God. Each one of these Prophets (including Malachi) were passionate and jealous that God would receive the Glory that was due to Him.

Yet defining "the Glory of God" is hard. Putting a finger on the single most important Subject in the Bible is very difficult, which is *why* so many people just skip over it or ignore it. Because defining the term "The Glory of God" is more like trying to define the word "Beauty" than it is the word "Football". If somebody says that they have never heard of a football and they don't know what a football is, they would ask, "*Please define a football for me*". And that would not be hard to do. You would use your hands, and you would say, "*Well, it has a funny shape, kind of like an egg, so that it won't bounce like you might think it will, and it's made out of rubber or leather, and it has stiches on it, and when you throw it, it goes into a beautiful spiral, and the American people have deemed those who play with it to be some of the most important people on earth, because we pay them millions and millions of dollars to run around with this football.*" And after a while, they would have a pretty good idea what a football was.

But you can't do that with the word "*Beauty*". There are some words in our vocabulary that the only way to understand them is to see them. We can point to what they are and say, "*That's it! That's what we mean when we say 'Beauty!'*" And *that* is the way it is with the word "*Glory*". So, how do I do it? I have to try, because we can't just leave it for each person to put his own personal spin on it. So, here is the way I am going to try to define "*Glory*". I am going to take this word and contrast it, biblically, with the word "*Holy*", and then ask, "*What is the difference between the 'Holiness of God' and the 'Glory of God?'*" And in doing that, I think we can get a handle on the nature of this term, the "*Glory of God*", and why Malachi was so passionate about it.

So, the "*Holiness of God*" is God being in a Class all by Himself in His Perfection, and His Greatness, and His Worth. God's absolute Perfection and His Greatness and His Worth are of such a distinct and separated category (we have been taught that the word "*Holy*" means: *separate*), that God is in a Class *all by Himself*. *Nothing* and *no one* is like God. He is truly a "*one-of-a-kind*". God has *infinite* Perfections,

infinite Greatness, and *infinite* Worth. So, when you add up all that God is, that is His *Holiness*.

So, God's Holiness is what He is, as God, *that nobody else is*. It is His *quality* of Perfection that can't be improved upon, that can't be imitated, that is incomparable, and that determines all that He is, and that is determined by *nothing* from *outside* of Him. So, God's Holiness signifies God's infinite Worth, His *intrinsic, infinite* Value.

Okay. But when **Isaiah 6:3** tells us that one angel is crying to another,

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts”...

... the very *next* thing they say is:

“The whole earth is full of His...”

... and you might have expected them to say *“Holiness,”* but they don't say that. They say **“Glory.”** The angels say:

“Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts- the whole earth is full of His Glory!”

But, *why?* *Why* do the angles cry, “... the earth is filled with His *Glory*”, when they just got through saying that God was *Holy*? They do this because that statement helps us to define what is very hard to define. And it tells us that the “Glory of God” is the manifest Beauty of God's Holiness. It is the *part* of God's Holiness that is seen. It is the “going-public” or the *displaying* of God's Own, Personal, Intrinsic Holiness. God's Glory is the way God puts His Holiness on display for people to apprehend. So, the *Glory* of God is the *Holiness* of God made manifest.

Look at what God said in **Leviticus 10:3b**:

... I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored...

... in other words, God says here that He will be treated as *“Holy”* among those who are near Him, and before all the people, *He will be glorified (honored)*, which is the same way that Malachi put it:

Malachi 1:6b

... if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?

... so, for human beings to see, or to *apprehend*, or to *reckon* with God's *Holiness* (and, in some sense, to perceive it) is to see Glory, and, thus, to honor or glorify God. So, here is a frail attempt at a definition:

The Glory of God is the infinite Beauty and Greatness of
God's manifold Perfections.

... so, when **Psalm 19:1** says, "**The heavens are telling of the Glory of God**", David is telling us that God is *shouting* at us. And He shouts with clouds, and He shouts with vast blue expanse, and He shouts with gold on the horizons, and He shouts with galaxies and stars and supernovas. And God is shouting:

"I am glorious. Open your eyes. I am what you are looking at, only better, if you know Me."

So, if we had eyes that could see in this Sanctuary, you would see the Glory of God *everywhere*! You could see it in the eyes of the people, in their transformed lives, in their passion for God, in their determination to live for nothing else but to magnify God's Worth. O, how we need eyes! We need eyes more than we need anything else!

2Corinthians 4:4b

... the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

So, I ask you, "*Do you see God's Glory? And do you love what you see?*" You were made for this. And if you are a totally disinterested person, sitting here this morning, secretly hoping that I would be quiet, so you can go home and do what you're really interested in, there will come a day (and I hope it's today) when enough of the crust is scraped off your eyes and you will say, "*I was created for this! This is why I exist: to see the Glory of God and to be changed into what I see. Everything is pointing to that. And all the things that I put so much*

value in and that I worked so hard to achieve is going there. This is all just husks and ashes. Brother Blair was right. The Bible was right. Jesus was right. The Glory of God is everything!"

Malachi saw this. And Malachi loved what he saw. But he saw it in shadows and at a distance. It wasn't as clear as it is with us. But he saw enough of it, to pant after it, and to make the Glory of God his *prime* ambition.

Now last time, I took time to show that this Passage in **Malachi** is relevant for today. And I argued from the **Book of Hebrews** that there is no longer an official Priesthood in the Christian Church today. Christ has become our *one and only* High Priest. And all genuine Christians are a Kingdom of Priests to God. But, then, in **Malachi 2:7**, we saw that the duty of the Priests, at stake in this Passage is *not* sacrificing, but teaching. Malachi said:

For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

And *this* is why this Passage is so relevant for today: it rebukes and exhorts those of us who are appointed to be the Ministers of the Word for the people of God. So, the Ministers of the Word can either fail or they can succeed. And that's what this Passage is about. And there is an Agony when the Leaders of the Church fail, and there is a Glory when these men are godly and succeed. And that's what is happening today, all around us in the modern church. We are seeing great failure and great agony. But we are also seeing great success and great glory. And *that* is why this Passage is so relevant.

So, let me give the same brief overview of this Passage that I gave last time. In verses 2, 8, and 9, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the Prophet Malachi to point out five Failures of the Priests of his day. And this equates to the Pastors, Elders and Teachers of our day. And then in verses 5, 6, and 7, he describes what Success in the Ministry of the Word was supposed to look like. And the thing I didn't mention last time was the terrible Threats that God gave to those Priests if they did not clean up their act.

And those Divine Threats are found in verses 2, 3, and 9, and it may be well to begin our exposition right here with those Threats. We will touch on them briefly, and then move on, because the reason they

are here is simply to make us feel how tremendously important this Matter is in God's Eyes.

We must understand that Pastors will not be spared the Judgment of God on their sinful failures. In fact, in **James 3:1**, the writer said:

Let not many *of you* become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment.

... and that means that every single one of my Sermons, all my Bible Studies, my White Papers, my radio broadcast transcripts, and all my individual time with all of you, all my group counselling sessions, as well as my home life, the way I treated my wife and children, will all be laid on the bench as I stand trembling before the Judge on the last day, and the words of **Romans 2:21** will be read:

You therefore, who teach another, do you not teach yourself?

... and everything I have ever said and taught and preached that was *not* of God will be burned up and counted against me. So, think hard before you envy your Pastors at the Judgment Seat of Christ. And listen to the *intensity* of God's Anger in verses 2, 3, and 9. I'll read them together:

If you do not listen, and if you do 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; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart. Behold, I am going to rebuke your offspring, and I will spread refuse on your faces, the refuse of your feasts; and you will be taken away with it. So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

Here we see Four very frightening and ugly Threats:

1. God will curse them, *personally*.
2. God will turn their Blessings into Curses.
3. God will rebuke their children and/or their crops.
4. God will smear the dung of their diseased sacrifices on their faces.

But what has made God so angry? That kind of language is not intended to communicate a cool, dispassionate dealing with Disobedience. When you talk about rubbing dung in somebody's face, I would suggest you are really angry. And there is nothing more terrible that can be conceived than to have the Beauty of Holiness turn against you with omnipotent Power and become the Rage of God. So, why was God so angry at these Teachers and Church Leaders?

All of these frightening Judgments were brought on by the five Failures in the Priesthood. And we looked at two of them last time, and I'll briefly mention those two again, refer to the other three, and finally look at the Joy of godly Leaders.

1. Failure to Hear the Word of God

If you do not listen... says the Lord of hosts, "then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*...

The first failure is found in verse 2: the failure of the Minister of the Word to hear the Voice of God. And this is a failure because you simply *cannot* herald what you have not first heard yourself.

2. Failure to Have a Heart for God's Glory

... if you do 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; and indeed, I have cursed them *already*, because you are not taking *it* to heart.

The second failure is when those who lead in the Church do NOT have a heart for the Glory of God. And this is actually the root cause of all the other failures in the Ministry. But as I told you last time, the Prophet is not talking about merely *believing* abstractly in something called "the Glory of God". Malachi is talking about the Glory of God not having *preeminence* in the Leader's life, so that everything else he says and does revolves around it.

3. Turning Aside from the Ways of God

But as for you, you have turned aside from the way... So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways ...

The third failure of the Leaders is that they personally turned aside from the Ways of God. This is when their own personal walk with God is a lie and a fake. Their private lives fall way short of the Standards of the Truth that they were supposed to Teach and Model. This exists when these men are simply "going through the motions" of loving Jesus, while their heart has been turned to lust and money and other things a long time ago. But because they are in Leadership, they are too proud to admit their failures, too self-righteous to ask for prayer, and too self-sufficient to cry out for help. So, they simply make a mockery of the Ministry by trying to "play the game" with no heart and no real love and no passion.

And usually, it takes a great public scandal to reveal what has been going on for a long, long time. This is why we are seeing an almost epidemic of Pastors and Elders and Teachers being exposed on an almost weekly basis. And almost all of this could be avoided if they would simply do what the Bible says, confess their sins, cry out for forgiveness, and abandon their hypocrisy. Since the Leadership is so vital to the success of any Church, it is very important that the Leadership has a "zero tolerance" concerning sin in their own behavior, and that they constantly keep their eyes on Jesus, their face on the ground, and their mind in the Truth.

4. Showing Partiality in Teaching

So I also have made you despised and abased before all the people, just as you are not keeping My ways but are showing partiality in the instruction.

What was Malachi talking about here? God was speaking through the Prophet that the Priests were treating the Word of God with the same disregard as the sacrifices they offered God. These men were giving God their junk. They offered the Owner and Creator of the Universe and the God, Who controlled their next breath, the trash of their flocks. Blind and diseased animals with mange, sacrifices that God said even the pagan Governors of Babylon would have never

received. And *why* did they offer the worst to God? They were bored with God, and they wanted to keep the prize animals for themselves.

America is one of the only nations on earth that teaches that we ought to be proud of ourselves when we give to others what we can't use, what we don't like, and what is broken and of no value to us. All through the Bible, the sacred writings teach that giving ought to mean something. Our giving should actually cost us something. Because only by giving what we value do we honor what we are giving for. So, it is *good* to learn how to sacrifice so we can give God our very best. It is *valuable* to teach children to work hard so they can give to God, and to live their lives *sacrificially* in service to other people. Because never having to sacrifice, and always getting what we want, only makes us *more* self-centered, *more* proud, and *less* godly.

These Priests gave God the sacrifices that left them with the most money. And they "tailor made" their Teaching so that they never offended the people who had influence and money. All through the Old Testament, and even into the days of John the Baptist, one of the most common sins was that the religious Leaders did not condemn the sins of the rich and the powerful. They taught with one thing in mind: how will my Teaching benefit me the most. So, they turned their head and pretended that they didn't see the sins of the ruling class. And the Bible calls these men "Pillow Prophets". They sat with the powerful and they dined at their table, and they wore their fine clothing, and they prophesied Peace and Safety to them. They pronounced great Blessings on evil men, all so they could personally benefit from it. But look what God threatened them with:

I will curse your blessings

So, even though they pronounced wonderful Blessings, God is going to turn those Blessings into Curses. This is what it means to "play to your audience". You say what Daddy Warbucks wants to hear. You step on no toes. You say, "*Peace! Peace!*" when there is no Peace. Or to put it the way **Micah 3:11** puts it:

**Her leaders pronounce judgment for a bribe, Her priests instruct for a price
And her prophets divine for money.**

When the Glory of God no longer satisfies the heart of a Preacher, then he will seek his satisfaction elsewhere. And I don't mean by leaving his pulpit, but just by using the Word of God to get personal gain.

5. Causing Many to Stumble

... you have caused many to stumble by the instruction ...

Are the sins of Teachers and Leaders *more grievous* than the sins of others? Yes, they are! Not necessarily because the Sin, in and of itself, is worse, but because its evil is compounded by the weight of public responsibility that should have restrained it. It is more grievous for the Priests to sin than for the people to sin, because when the Priests sin, they cause many others to stumble.

And when the Priest is living in secret sin, one of two things will always happen: He will either compromise and never mention the particular sin he himself is involved in, or he will denounce it so hard that he becomes unmerciful. So, the hypocritical Priest will either dull the edge of the sword so that it never cuts the sin, or he will use the sword as a weapon rather than as a surgical scalpel.

Back in 1987, David Neff, one of the former editors of *Christianity Today*, wrote:

“The leader who philanders has broken a trust placed in him by a wide community—trust in his vision, reliability, wisdom, and veracity. And the essence of leadership is that trust. So, a leader who violates trust in a fundamental and public manner is ipso facto no longer a leader.”⁵

Now before we turn to verses 5–7 and the Joy of godly Leaders, I want to say a word to those of you who have been the victim of priestly Failure. I have in mind people who have seen in the Christian Ministers so much hypocrisy and expediency and inconsistency and worldliness and partiality and greed and cowardice and pettiness and harshness and insensitivity and abuse, that you have stamped a big question mark on the reality of the whole Christian Faith, or put up a big wall between you and the Ministry of the Word.

⁵ *Christianity Today*; Nov. 20, 1987, p. 20. **Note:** I do not recommend much of what is found in this magazine.

God has something to say to you in this Passage. And I think what God says is this: *"I hate priestly hypocrisy ten thousand times more than you do. And I intend to smear dung in the face of every Pastor who forsakes My Glory, departs from My Ways, teaches for hire, uses My Name to abuse you, and causes people to stumble. 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay!' says the Lord, so do not take it on yourself. Nobody gets away with anything that is wrong. My Eye sees everything and I will judge all who sin without repentance."*

What a tragedy it would be this morning if anyone here is turning away from God and His Glory because of the hypocrisy of some of God's Messengers, when God Himself intends to smear dung in the face of those hypocrites because He loves you and will not suffer His Glory to be profaned forever. Isn't this Passage designed this morning not only to warn me, the preacher, against Failure, but also to warn you, the people, against being the victim of that Failure? God is saying this morning to some of you, *"Don't let the hypocritical Christian Leaders of your past drag you with them to Destruction."*

But now we turn finally to look at Malachi's vision of the Joy of godly Leaders in verses 5–7. And let me do this, by describing the successful Ministry of the Word as a Tree. It has a deep Root, a strong Trunk, broad Branches, and life-giving Fruit. And each of these is in this Passage.

Let's start with the Root of a good Preaching or Teaching Ministry in the Church. The Root of good Preaching is the Covenant that God makes with the Preacher. Look again at verses 4 and 5:

Then you will know that I have sent this commandment to you, that My covenant may continue with Levi," says the Lord of hosts. My covenant with him was *one of life and peace*, and I gave them to him *as an object of reverence*; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

Now remember that Levi was the son of Jacob. And from this one man came all the priests of Israel. And this Passage tells us that there is a Covenant between God and these Ministers of the Word. And the Terms of the Covenant go like this:

From God's Side there comes:

- ✓ The Divine Call to the Office,
- ✓ The Promise of Life and Peace,
- ✓ The Initiative to go ahead and give them the Life and Peace they need to do their Ministry.

... and from Man's side, the Covenant requires that the Preacher:

- ✓ Reverence (Fear) God,
- ✓ Stand in awe of His Name.

And you can see this Requirement clearly in verse 5:

My covenant with him was *one of life and peace*, and I gave them to him *as an object of reverence*; so he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.

This is the Root of all Success in the Ministry of the Word without any exception. Do you see the explicit contrast between the Success of verse 5 and the Failure of verse 2? In verse 2 the Teachers "**will not lay it to heart to give honor [glory] to my name, says the LORD of hosts.**" And in verse 5 the teachers "**he revered Me and stood in awe of My name.**" When the Root is bad, everything coming from the Root will also be bad.

A deep Root has been planted for the Ministry of the Word when a man trembles in the Presence of God, stands in awe of His Name, and has a heart for God's Glory. There is absolutely no spiritual success without this Root. He may have a large church with lots of activity and people, but he will have no spiritual success with God without this being true.

Next let's look at the Trunk of this tree. What is the trunk of the Ministry of the Word? The Trunk is a strong commitment to defend and proclaim the Truth of God's Word. You can see this in two sentences, one in verse 6 and one in verse 7.

Verse 6 says, "**True instruction was in his mouth.**" Then verse 7 says, "**For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge** [that's where I get the idea of defending the Truth; protecting it from distortion and misuse]—he should preserve or guard the Knowledge of God— **and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.**"

... and that last phrase is where I get the idea of *Proclamation* as well as *Defense*. He is not just a lawyer defending his case. He is also a "herald" with Message from God.

And the last phrase is most important: the true Minister of the Word has a Word from God, he is the Messenger of the Lord. What makes the Trunk of this tree of the Ministry of the Word strong is that the Word is not Man's word, it is God's. Unlike the Failure of verse 2, the true Minister of the Word listens to God. And unlike the Failure of verse 9, the true Minister of the Word *refuses* to adjust the Message to show partiality to the rich and powerful. True Instruction is found in his mouth and he guards the Divine Knowledge from all distortion and misuse.

So, the Root is Reverence for the Glory of God and the Trunk is Faithfulness to the Word of God. So, what are the Branches of the Ministry of the Word? The Branches are the Piety and the Personal Holiness of the Preacher. Another way to say it would be that the Branches are the Preacher's own personal life of Devotion to God (that's what I mean by Piety), and the Preacher's private and public Life of Holiness to the Lord. There is no successful Ministry of the Word without both Piety and Holiness. And the middle part of verse 6 makes this plain:

... unrighteousness was not found on his lips; he walked with Me in peace and uprightness ...

A true Minister of the Word simply must walk with God. That's what I mean by Piety and personal Devotion, walking in communion with God. It's just the opposite of the Failure in verse 8: "**You have turned aside from the way,**" and in the middle of verse 9: "**You have not kept my ways.**"

The true Minister of the Word walks with God. And as he walks, he pursues Peace and stands upright in all his dealings. He is transparent and straightforward and faithful in all his dealings. His lips are pure and peaceable, no foul talk, no false talk, no malice. Just Purity and Grace and Truth, even to his own harm.

So, the Root of the tree is Reverence for the Glory of God, the Trunk is Faithfulness to the Word of God, and the Branches are Piety

and Holiness in the Presence of God. Which brings us finally to the Fruit of this tree of the Ministry of the Word.

If you have been following me in verse 6, I'm sure you have this figured out already. The Fruit is that people are saved and are walking in Holiness before God as result of believing what this man teaches. The last phrase of verse 6:

... he turned many back from iniquity.

You've seen the contrast all the way along, haven't you, between the Success portrayed in verses 5–7, and the Failures of the Priests in Malachi's day? This last contrast may be the clearest of all, **“he turned many back from iniquity”** is the opposite of the second phrase in verse 8: **“you have caused many to stumble by the instruction”**.

So, a Ministry can destroy lives or it can save lives. But when your Ministry is rooted in the Glory of God, when your Trunk is strong with the Word of God, when your Branches display the Holiness of God, then the Fruit of your Life is going to be the Salvation of God for the sake of sinners.

And that is why I beg all of you to pray every day with me, that the Glory of God and the Word of God and the Righteousness of God would so fill this Church that people would turn away from Sin, and receive the Salvation of God right here in this room and all over this city.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.