

Malachi 1:6-2:16

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[0 : 0 0] let's pray, let's ask for God's help as we hear his voice. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you are a speaking God. We ask that this morning you will open your word to our hearts and open our hearts to your word, that our love will abound more and more in knowledge and in depth of insight, and that love will overflow and bear fruit. For Jesus' name's sake, amen. Well, I don't know whether you've ever been in a situation before where you're representing not just yourself, but something bigger or somebody bigger, somebody else, an ambassador. It's the ashes going on at the moment, and lots of you have no interest in cricket, right? But it is the biggest cricket event in the world, and England had a terrible night last night, but basically it's in Australia, Australia playing England, and that means that England have their traveling fans, and they're called the Barmy

Army, right? So if you travel to watch English cricket, you're part of the Barmy Army, and when people see the Barmy Army, they think they represent what English people are like, basically. Now, the first test is at the Gabba. It's sort of virtually finished, and Australia this time gets quite different weather to us. So if you went to the Gabba this week, you could watch the test match like this, okay? Extraordinary. Isn't that the best way you've ever seen in your life, to watch cricket? How do you get to watch the match? But from by the pool, sunbathing. Well, you just have to turn up for the test match in your best swimming kit, and you just tweet a picture of yourself, sitting ready for the pool, and they selected people. But of course, so that's sending a message, isn't it, about Australia to the world? But the Barmy Army have got their reputation, so they've got in on the act, and representing your typical English bloke. Here was an example.

Kieran Shue, there you go, in his best swimming kit. So you can see he's representing England, and giving an impression. And of course, for the Scots, if you go on tour as a Scot, there's a uniform, isn't there?

We just have a picture there. If you're overseas, and you're with friends, and you go out dressed like that, and you're Scottish, how you behave will give an impression to people around you, not just of yourself, but about Scotland. And sometimes you can't even help it. You know, if you're from Edinburgh, and you come to St. Silas, the moment you do something rude or unfriendly, someone will say to me, I told you that's what they're like. It's because they're from Edinburgh, etc. Okay? So we know what it's like to be representatives, where how we live either enhances or tarnishes something else's reputation. And we're thinking this morning about how we might do that with the Lord. A key theme running through this section in Malachi, I don't know if you noticed how often the name of the Lord was mentioned. And God's name isn't just what he's called, it's his character. And we're called as his people to think so much of him, that our principal concern in the world today is that his name is given the recognition it deserves. It's the first line of the prayer. Jesus taught us to pray, isn't it? Hallowed be thy name. That's what we long for.

[3 : 2 3] Now Malachi is the last book in our Bibles before the coming of Jesus, nice easy one to find, just before Matthew's Gospel. And the message they're receiving from God accuses them. In chapter 1 verse 6, he talks about a son and a father, servant and a master. And then he says, it is you priests who show contempt for my name. That's God speaking through Malachi. And they argue back. But you ask, how have we shown contempt for your name? We heard last time, the people have forgotten that God loves them. And we see in the rest of the book that because they've forgotten God loves them, they're giving God second best. And so Malachi at times is a very negative book.

But there are also these moments of light. And one of them is that in this section, God contrasts the behavior of their priests with a good priest from the past, from Levi. So we're going to use that positive light to kind of see what's going wrong and apply it to ourselves today. So our first point, Levi never offered me roadkill. Mind your sacrifices. So we get the positive example in chapter 2.

Levi was the son of Jacob. And he was the first in Israel, as God built the nation, to be given the priestly line. And God says of him in verse 5 of chapter 2, my covenant was with him, in verse 5, a covenant of life and peace. And I gave them to him.

This called for reverence. And he revered me and stood in awe of my name. So in Levi's heart, his attitude towards God was one of reverence and awe. He shows us the way.

But in Malachi's time, that's all gone upside down, a complete turnaround. They ask how they've shown contempt for God's name. And you can see in chapter 1, verse 7, if you have a look, what God says.

By offering defiled food on my altar. But you ask, how have we defiled you? By seeing that the Lord's table is contemptible. When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong?

[5 : 38] When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? So the people of God, they're back in the land around Jerusalem. And they've rebuilt the temple. And that's the place where God is specially present in the whole world.

And they have this sacrificial system given to them, where they bring sin offerings. And the animals are brought and killed to bear the sins of the people and ensure that they're in a right relationship with the holy God.

But they also brought other sacrifices and offerings. You could bring thanksgiving offerings, fellowship offerings, where you bring into the temple the first fruits of your harvest or the best things you've got.

And you offer them to God to show God how thankful you are for fellowship with him, that all good things come from him. That was the idea anyway. So what happens when the people of God fall out of love with God?

Well, in this case, they don't stop making sacrifices, but they're just going through the motions. So they keep, well, they sort of keep the rule that God's given them.

[6 : 45] But look what they say in verse 13. And you say, what a burden. And you sniff at it contemptuously, says the Lord Almighty.

And they're meant to bring unblemished animals, but they're still bringing animals, but it's not their best animals. It's just roadkill. They keep the valuable ones for themselves.

In verse 14, he says that they're cheating God. And God is not fooled when we try and cheat him. We cheat God when we go through the motions of what he asks of us, and our hearts are not in it. And we should expect that would offend God, because it would offend us, wouldn't it? In our relationships, we don't want people to just go through the motions with us.

We want people whose hearts are in the right place, whose behavior is authentic. We see it in the business world. There was this chap, Samuel Crisp.

[7 : 45] I don't know whether you saw him on the news. He worked for Apple. And he got woken up one day at three in the morning by his iPhone. His iPhone had got its time zones mixed up. So he went on social media slagging off the iPhone, because it had woken him up at three o'clock.

And they sacked him. It didn't matter if he was keeping his contractual obligations to Apple, because he clearly didn't like the iPhone. And Apple don't want him to work for them, because he doesn't like the product.

Or there was Tatiana Kozlenko, an aero flight attendant. She posted on social media a photo of herself, giving the finger to the entire cabin of passengers.

And they sacked her. Now, it wouldn't have mattered if in response she said, but I serve the tea and coffee, when people ask. When they put their little lights on, I come and ask them what they need. It doesn't matter. She hates the people on the plane. So they don't want her to work for them anymore. And so it is for God with his people.

[8 : 51] He looks for his people to worship him with authenticity, not just ticking boxes, going through the motions, and all the while grumbling in their hearts that it isn't what they want to be doing.

And he says, mind your sacrifices. Now, so what you offer to God isn't just the thing that you offer. It's your heart as well, as you offer things.

Now, today, living after Jesus has come, we don't have that same sacrificial system. But in the New Testament, that language of sacrifice is used about how we as Christians live our lives differently for the honor of God's name.

So in Hebrews 13, we'll get it on the screen, it says this, Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices, God is pleased. We offer sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving by professing God's name.

[9 : 58] In other words, when we speak about Jesus to not yet believers, when we do evangelism, it's a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving to God. When we speak to a Christian friend about God and his goodness to try and encourage them, again, it's a sacrifice to God.

And then that verse 16 there, that when we do good to each other, when instead of wanting more than other people, which is kind of what the ambition is in the world, is you want to have more than the next person, instead of that, as Christians, we share what we have with those in need, and we do good for other people, these are the ways that God's people in Christ sacrifice in the way that those guys would have gone to the temple with an offering.

And if we do them wholeheartedly, those things, we enhance God's name. And if we do them halfheartedly or begrudgingly, resentfully, then we tarnish God's name.

So the question for us is, are you seeking to honor God's name with your words and with your life? Or are you just giving him roadkill, giving up what you don't really value and holding back for yourself what you really do value?

So that's our first contrast between Levi and the priests and therefore the people in Malachi's time. And second is again related to the priests because they didn't just offer sacrifices, they had this teaching role.

[11 : 26] So our second point, Levi never had a bad mouth. Mind your teaching. If you look at the positive again, it's in chapter 2, verse 6. Again, talking about Levi, God says, true instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips.

And the result at the end of verse 6 is that he turned many from sin. God's people trusted God and they obeyed God because they were well taught by God's priest. And that's in stark contrast with the priest in Malachi's time.

If you have a look at verse 8, it says, but you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble. The Lord needs good teachers for his people.

And good teachers are good listeners. If you look at verse 2, it says, and now you priests, this warning is for you if you do not listen. We need to listen if we want to be a good teacher.

Listen to God. And then the second requirement, and if you do not resolve to honor my name. Then in verse 7, he tells us why it's so important. He says, for the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.

[12 : 48] And no wonder God is so concerned for this because we're concerned about truth as well, aren't we? We're people who want truth. You get these disappointing articles, I don't know whether you've seen these, where things you've believed, they're kind of myth-busting articles, things you've believed your whole life, that it turns out aren't really true.

And we want to know the truth. So there's, you know, what's the only man-made object that you can see from outer space? Well, most of us know the answer, don't we? It's the Great Wall of China. Except it turns out it's not. You can't see it from space. And when I lived in London, we were told in London, everyone used to say this in London, you know, in London, you're never more than 10 feet away from a rat.

Turns out it's not true. And apparently the 10-second rule, you know, when you drop something, and as long as you get it within 10, apparently it's not true.

Although I think that we didn't really ever think it was true. We just want to eat what we've dropped. But anyway, more concerningly, what's been named Word of the Year, this year in the news, fake news.

[13 : 58] I know it's two words, but that's got the award, name of the year, because we are concerned about the false stories that go around social media and influence us, perhaps even shape the way people vote in elections and referendums.

And then it turns out they're not true. You know, whether it's social media accounts against, that they were speaking about Brexit, it turns out they were being run from St. Petersburg. There was the Brexit bus, and people are wondering whatever happened to the figures on that Brexit bus.

During the US election, there were these articles going around about Hillary Clinton, and Donald Trump says that the New York Times is fake news. And it shows us that deep down, we are a society that's still deeply concerned about truth.

We want true truth. Well, the living God's message through Malachi was that the teachers of the people at that time, the priests, they're pumping out misinformation about God.

And today, God uses us as his people to make himself known in the world. In 1 Timothy chapter 3, it describes the church as the pillar and foundation of the truth.

[15 : 07] Not that we can, as the church, invent the truth, but that by sticking to the apostolic truth in the Bible, we can be the pillar of truth for the world.

And we don't have priests today. I know some church leaders are called priests. It's quite unhelpful. But we do have presbyters, or pastors, or elders, who are responsible for being God's messengers, bringing God's word to bear on people's lives faithfully.

And so, for example, in Titus, which is a great letter in the Bible for church leaders, Titus, as a church leader, gets told, to teach what accords with sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it. That's what our church leaders are to do. So that's what we should pray for our bishop. It's what I hope that you would pray for me as your minister. We prayed, led by Michael earlier on, in that way, didn't we?

That in verse 7, our teachers will preserve knowledge, preserving the truth by teaching it faithfully, that they'll be good listeners to God's word themselves in the Bible.

[16 : 14] That their principal concern is not going to be popularity and filling the church, bringing in a good crowd, but it would be the name of God, honoring God. In verse 6, they will instruct people in truth and walk with God in peace and uprightness.

Otherwise, people distort the truth. Church leaders distort the truth. Happens in churches today. It goes on all over today. And so you hear that the Christian message, it's been summarized before as the distortion, as you hear about a God without wrath who brings men and women without sin into a kingdom without justice through the ministry of a Christ without a cross.

That's liberal Christianity. It's not true. But as well as teaching, applying this for our ministers, lots of us are in teaching roles in a church.

In one sense, we all are because we're all called to speak the truth in love to one another. That's something we all do for each other so that we build one another up in faith and godliness.

And at St. Silas, of course, many of us have specific roles in teaching. Leading Bible studies and growth groups and roots. Teaching children and kids zone.

[17 : 34] Leading and teaching in a youth zone and in the youth fellowship. Teaching at the international cafe. Mentoring a couple. Preparing for marriage. Opening the word one-to-one with a friend over coffee, a non-Christian friend, to get the Bible open.

And we might feel that we're not equipped to do that kind of work. You might feel that you're not funny enough. You're not charismatic enough. Or with the kids work. You're not kind of down with the kids enough to do that kind of work.

But what matters to God is, could it be said of us that we listen well to God's word and so true instruction is found in our mouth. That our lips preserve knowledge.

That what we say about God is true. You can think about it if you're a mum or a dad. For mums with your children. And let me especially just address the dads for a moment about this.

Men, if you're a dad, we saw when we looked at Ephesians earlier this year that you're clearly given a particular responsibility towards your children to be their pastor if you're a dad.

[18 : 43] To raise them in the training and instruction of the Lord. I was talking to a friend last week about he's in a prayer triplet. He meets up regularly with a couple of guys. And he was just talking to me about the challenge and the busyness of life with these three men as they meet together.

Having to challenge each other to prioritize opening the Bible with their kids and initiating prayer with their kids. Now we're not all going to be particularly gifted at teaching God's word.

But men, don't underestimate the impact that you are having or the impact that you could have by what you model and what you teach to your own children about Jesus.

We've got better resources available to us to open with our kids than people have had for generations. And if you've never done that before, you could start that this week. Just opening the Bible simply with your kids.

So be a man and resolve to live a life in front of your son or daughter that fits with verse 2 of chapter 2 of Malachi. Malachi, where they know when they look at you, whatever they think of Jesus, my dad listens to God's word and he wants to honor God's name.

[19 : 57] Jesus comes first for my dad. So that's our second little section in Malachi about teaching. But there are some crucial differences between us and the people back then in Malachi's time.

And that brings us to our third point this morning. So we've seen Levi never offered me roadkill, mind your sacrifices. Levi never had a bad mouth, mind your teaching. And thirdly, Levi brought his people peace.

Look for another. These people are under the old covenant and in verse 4 of chapter 2, God promises that his covenant brings life and peace when his priests are faithful.

He says that happened under Levi, that he gave life and peace. But the law of Moses promised blessings if you obey and curses if you disobey.

So that if the priests didn't sort things out in Malachi's time, it was going to be a disaster in chapter 2, verse 2. If you do not listen and if you do not resolve to honor my name, I will send a curse on you and I will curse your blessings.

[21 : 09] Yes, I have already cursed them because you have not resolved to honor me. So with unfaithful priests, the blessing of God is taken away.

And here we're reading from the very end of Old Testament history. And Israel's history through the Old Testament proves to us that we are not capable of keeping our side of the covenant with God. that we should stand under God's curse. So what's the solution? Well, in chapter 3 and chapter 4 of Malachi, as we get there in the next couple of weeks, we see the promise that one is coming.

Someone is coming. The Old Testament closes with this book waiting eagerly for the first Christmas. And our section this morning shows us that we need a faithful priest from God.

Somebody to stand in the gap between God and ourselves. We need a priest who can offer the right sacrifices for us. And in Hebrews 7, we read this about Jesus in the New Testament.

[22 : 14] Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself.

And we need a priest who won't mislead people. And Christ gives us true instruction. He is true instruction because he says, I'm the way and the truth and the life.

And what was Levi's greatest problem? Why couldn't they count on Levi to sort them out in Malachi's time? Because he was dead.

Even good priests died. And in Hebrews 7, we read this. Now there have been many of those priests since death prevented them from continuing in office.

But because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. Therefore, he is able to save completely those who come to God through him because he always lives to intercede for them.

[23 : 21] So as we come to the Lord's table together shortly, let's remember that in Christ, we now have a faithful, truthful, eternal priest. And that's what we needed.

So that even when we fail God, we never need to fear that we would be cursed by God. And we need to remember that because the biggest problem in Malachi's time was the people have forgotten God loves them.

How do we make sure we don't forget that God loves us? Well, let's remember that in love, God has provided for us a priest, the one who offered up his own life for our sins so that his blessings to us are secure and we can respond by offering up our lives to him joyfully as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving.

Let's pray together. Father in heaven, we praise you for your name. The Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

We marvel at your name. We thank you for the new covenant in Jesus' blood, for his eternal priesthood, that in him we have found from you the offer of salvation, atonement, truth and continual prayer for us.

[24 : 52] so help us now, mindful of your love, to offer our lives to you wholeheartedly in lips that confess your name to the world and to one another, in lives renewed by your spirit, living your way, not resenting your commands, but joyfully seeking to live acceptably in your sight.

we ask this for the sake of your name, that the world around us might know through our words and our lives that you are a great king. In Jesus' name, Amen.
Amen.