

1 15th January 2012
Malachi 1:6-2:9

Talk: Malachi 1:6-2:9

Last week we began to look together at the last book in the Old Testament.

Malachi's burden came because the people of God had turned so quickly away from living as the Lord had laid down.

Their godly governor Nehemiah had only been gone a few months, and already they had rejected the reforms he had put in place.

Malachi has to call them back to the Lord, but, as we saw last week, wonderfully, he does so not by simply throwing the rule book at them, but by reminding them of how much the Lord loves them.

That statement in **1:2a** is the context for all he goes on to say, and it should be the foundation of all **our** attempts at holy living too.

The Lord loves us!!!

Having established that fundamental truth, though, Malachi has to continue by pointing out how inconsistent their lives were with that great fact.

For all the love which the Lord has for them, they treat him as nothing, they sideline him and pay him the least possible attention.

This first section of challenge to them is addressed especially to their religious leaders – he begins with those who really should know better!

Put positively, his challenge is a call to honour God; the challenge is needed, though, because it is clear that they were absolutely failing to do this.

Read 1:6-14

Great to hear a sermon addressed to someone else!

Sit there all smug and nod in agreement.

The leaders, the priests (**v6**)

Don't we love to be cynical in our day?

Especially about those in authority.

The government, security services, police, religious leaders...

This passage could seem to be about me speaking to myself (I hope you feel for me; most sermons start off like that!!!)

Or maybe it's also at the other elders too!!

Oh, perhaps the Church visitors, and the teachers out there, they should listen online!

Well, I'm afraid I have to break it to you that although these words do have the most direct application to those in recognised positions of leadership, the New Testament gives them an extra twist:

Doesn't our verse for 2012 remind us that all believers are viewed as priests!!! **1 Peter 2:5,9**

Even were that not so, isn't it true that each one of us is looked up to by someone, is watched by others, is called to be a good example?!!

So, no smugness, no applying these challenges to someone else... the challenges are to us all:

where is our deep honour of God evidenced in our everyday lives?

It isn't enough to have a busy church life – Sundays, midweek, groups etc.

not enough to sing loudly, pray eloquently, know Bible passages off by heart...

Do you hear what the Lord says so clearly (**v10**)?

Better the temple be shut than be abused as it is.

'You act as if you are honouring me, but it is worse than empty – it is insulting!'

The priests were accepting the runts, the crippled, the diseased – the animals which would have been culled anyway.

That made them very popular, of course, like a massive tax cut. However, they had forgotten that the demand for quality in the sacrifices was not a whim of Moses, but about honouring the God who (remember!) **loved** them!!!

In the case of their father, a master, a governor (like Nehemiah!), the people wouldn't dream of bringing them tack, but when it comes to the Lord who loves them and has saved them, well, the rubbish will do.

The problem was that they were simply bringing the left overs! Imagine the insult if you invite someone for a meal, their having paid a big debt you had, and all you serve them is stlops! It was like that.

The concept of cost, of true sacrifice, had been totally forgotten.

There is a very clear question we need to ask ourselves, then: what do **we** bring to God?

Is it the best we have, as he deserves, or the left-overs?

Surely, you say, sacrifices aren't part of New Testament godliness!

Well, listen to this: **1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 13:15,16**

What is our sacrifice of praise like?

How do we plan our Saturday evenings?

Partying, watching the late film, filling our minds with stuff which is totally at odds with the concept of worshipping our God?

What does that say of our view of our times of corporate worship?

How do we manage our Sunday mornings?

Roll out of bed at the last possible moment, race around in a state because we have those people coming to dinner after church...?

What does that say of our view of our times of corporate worship?

We are priests, called to offer sacrifices of praise!

Who is excited about the prospect of being here for our praise and prayer evening? Or if they can't attend, is really upset they can't be?!

'Oh, I need to get ready for work?!'

Come on, it's 6.30–8pm, are you really in bed by 8.30?

What of the sacrifice of good deeds?

If I have the time when I have done all my personal jobs, then I might give a little time to a needy cause or person, but otherwise, tough.

What does that say of our view of our brothers and sister, of those in great need?

That is without even beginning to mention the call to give out of our money to the work of the Lord (the subject of our financial giving has a section all to itself later in the message of Malachi), but I ask myself, do I merely give what I can afford when all else I want has been covered?

Our giving to God – time, energy, ability, money;

it isn't about pleasing the pastor or looking good to others, it isn't about doing the minimum possible to keep the work going,

it's about honouring the God who has done everything for us!!

Not only is it the **love** of our God we are snubbing;

our God is the great King, Lord Almighty!

It isn't that he needs us if he is going to be honoured –

he will receive honour from others **v11,14b**

it is that we will than be left behind.

Oh, the temple had never been busier, but it all stank in the Lord's nostrils.

'I am not pleased with you!!!' v10

We should be horrified that this might be the case with our worship, too.

There is no honour of God if we only give the left-overs of our time, our energy, our minds, our money.

Romans 12:1

Stop and think!

Prayer

Malachi hasn't finished with the priests, though.

They failed in what they brought to God,

and they failed in how they taught the people.

Read 2:1-9

The priests loved the fact that they had this special position among the Israelites.

They were especially favoured by God;

ever since the Levites had stood up for the right, in the face of all the other tribes going wrong

Exodus 32:30; Numbers 3:12; Deuteronomy 33:8ff; Numbers 25:9ff

They had a particular blessing.

The priests didn't only have the privileged role of offering sacrifices in the temple,

but also that of teaching the people the way to live under God.

But that generation had failed, oh how they had failed!

They were making assumptions because of their heritage:

'We are descendants of Levi, we have the blessing pronounced upon Phinehas.'

Is there a sense in which this might be true of us?

Can we become presumptuous about our position?

'Well, I have been born again, I am saved, God loves me, and so it doesn't really matter how I live, I'll get there in the end – that's the doctrine of assurance, isn't it?!'

I would ask anyone with that attitude:

'How do we know we are born again?'

By the promise of God (assurance),

and the presence of the Spirit (holiness)!

We can focus so much on one, we forget about the other.

What marked out the Levites, especially Phinehas, was not only the fact that God had chosen them,

but also, and equally, that they had lived in reverence and awe of their God;

they walked with God, in peace and righteousness,

they turned people away from their sin.

These priests were doing the opposite,

they were **condoning** sin,

they were themselves **promoting** unrighteousness.

They were proving that they were not true descendants of their godly ancestors.

They were violating the covenant God had made with their forefathers.

We can do that.

We too can violate the relationship we have with God.

The only way to be sure we are the Lord's is by trusting now in God's promises, and living now in the light of his commands – not perfection, none of us reach that,

but having the intention, the longing, seeking to become like him by his grace!

These priest were causing people to stumble, the very people they should have been nurturing and guiding and teaching. Some of Jesus' most severe words were addressed to exactly these failings: **Matthew 18:6**

There are people watching you!

I'm not speaking of CCTV, Smart cards etc...

I'm speaking about your neighbours, who are wondering if there is anything in this Christianity thing,

your work colleagues, your class mates, your unbelieving family members, those children you know - here, at home...

We have a wonderful blessing: new life in Jesus, but that brings with it an immense responsibility:

to live as his witnesses, his priests; his people.

Our primary role is to bring glory to our heavenly Father as we revere him and lead others to do the same.

It is a role in which we will frequently and regularly fail, but the need is to strive continually, to work towards that goal.

We could feel overwhelmed at the responsibility, but as we draw to a close, I would encourage you to take heart – as I must.

Yes, we must examine our hearts regarding our failures, our offerings, our testimony to others, but we are assured that we don't struggle in our own strength – the New Testament declares that we have a great High Priest who is praying for us in our weakness.

He is the antithesis of all that was wrong with the priests in Malachi's day.

When our Lord Jesus brought an offering to God, an offering for sin, that offering was perfect, unblemished, pure, and acceptable.

Hebrews 7:26; 9:14; 1 Peter 1:19; 2:22;

His offering has dealt with our sin and guilt once and for all! The Old Testament priesthood was a shadow of the future ministry of Jesus Christ; surely, **v6** is true of him as no one else:

'True instruction was in his mouth, nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with the Lord in peace and righteousness, and turned many from sin' (2:6)

As a kingdom of priests, we are not called to break new ground, but to follow our leader, to model ourselves on him.

No longer do **we** have to sacrifice to cover our sins, that is dealt with, once for all, but we are called to praise, to do good, to give, to serve, to witness...

Let us make sure we are bringing him the best we have, not the dregs;

Let us truly be followers he can be proud of.