We’re having a look at the OT book of Malachi. Last week we saw that the people Malachi was speaking to were going through all the outward signs of faith, but weren’t taking it seriously. They were doing all the things God’s people were expected to do, but their heart wasn’t in it. God had quite harsh words for the people and their leaders. It is a reminder to us that it’s good to come to church on Sunday, but it’s best if we genuinely come to meet with God – and also a reminder that worship is not something we do for an hour and a quarter on a Sunday morning, it’s a whole of life thing.

Some people are like the salesman I read about. He was waiting to see the Purchasing Manager so he could submit his Company’s bid. While he was waiting, he couldn’t help but notice that his competitor’s bid was sitting on the Purchasing Manager’s desk.

Unfortunately, the actual figure for the Competitor’s bid was covered by a coke can.

He got to thinking: How could it hurt if he took just a quick look? No one would ever need to know. So he reached over and lifted the coke can. But his heart sank as he watched thousands of BB’s pour out from the bottomless can and scatter across the desktop.

It was a test of integrity set up by the Purchasing Manager … and he failed it. He didn’t get that company’s business. That's about morality and integrity.

A bridge has integrity when it does what it was designed to do. Cars, trains, or people can travel across the bridge without it collapsing. In this sense, integrity isn't about morality, but about the ability to function according to an intended design.

The prophet Malachi had to speak to a variety of sins among the clergy and the people. In chapter 1, he focused on their “cheap” worship and contempt for the sacrificial ritual. In the second half of chapter 2, he talks about their problem of divorce and marriage to unbelievers. Somehow the people had the idea that such things were not serious sins, or that they could do them and get away with it. They had grown comfortable with their sin. It all relates to the main problem identified today.

Malachi turns in this passage to lay the blame where it belongs: with the priests. Blaming the priests for the problems doesn’t let the rest of the people off the hook; they too were responsible for their sin even if they were unaware of what the bible said about it—ignorance is never an excuse for breaking God’s law. But the guilt was greater for those who by their wrong teaching, or lack of teaching, caused God’s people to stumble. The priests were not functioning with integrity, according to their intended purpose. And it was going to cost them.

Malachi’s message begins with the bold confrontation: “And now, you priests, this warning is for you.” Imagine the temple filled with priests, lawyers, and people—and all of a sudden, the prophet stood up to speak directly and bluntly to the spiritual leaders. They might have anticipated that he would be critical of something, as prophets often were, but I'm sure they had no idea what was coming!

This announcement would have incensed Malachi’s priestly audience, probably present in clean white garments. They thought they were doing everything correctly, as their earlier protests indicate. But God was saying they were unclean, disqualified, and not welcome in the holy place.

GOD REMOVES HIS MINISTERS WHO REFUSE TO HONOUR HIS NAME (1-4, 8-9)

The message is about integrity and honouring God. There have been many books written about the name of God, and it’s too complicated to get into today, but God’s name is tied in with his identity, and this is a different way of saying they were not treating God properly.

The priests no doubt thought they were giving God the glory because they were saying and doing all the right things in the worship ritual, but their heart was not in it to do it in a way that honoured and exalted God.

There were three basic duties the priests were to perform: teach the Law of God, burn incense (which was done when priests made intercessory prayer), and make the atoning sacrifices for the people. It looks as if nothing the priests do is being done appropriately.

Malachi 2:2 If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honour my name…….

God’s will regarding priestly duties has been presented numerous times previously, so they had ‘heard’. This phrase is used four more times in the OT, and it carries the thought of caring about or understanding the things of God so that your life honours him. So, they were not honouring God because they were not listening properly. ‘Listening’ results in action.

The lack of this attitude results in a curse. The word “curse” essentially means to remove or banish from the place of blessing. In this text, God made it clear that He would “curse their blessings.”

If God ‘cursed their blessings’, it meant that He would render them unfit for ministry, or that they would have no effective ministry even though they might remain in office. This passage ends with God making them contemptible in the eyes of the people (9).

Malach1 2:3 Because of you I will rebuke your descendants;

Because of the sins of these priests, their family line would be stopped from being priests. This had happened before, in the early days of Samuel when God removed Eli and his corrupt sons from the priesthood and chose another family line to be priests.

The second half of the verse is graphically clear. God said to the priests, “I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.” (3b).

I really hope this vivid language is figurative—that God will not literally give the priests a “manure makeover!”

It’s hyperbole, but also an implied comparison, for they were to be treated the same as the unclean parts of the sacrificed animals. God was saying that since the priests were spiritually unclean, they were unfit for the sanctuary, and deserved to be carried out with the dung to the rubbish heap.

Their ministry was over!

Because God is already full of glory, the only way humans can properly glorify Him is by extending and expanding the knowledge of God in the world, by causing Him to be seen in everything that we do.

If His people habitually sin or fail to do what God wants them to do in worship and service, we do not glorify Him but give people the wrong impression about God.

I have no idea how often I’ve sat in a service making no effort to engage with what’s going on or being critical of what is said, or the way things are done. None of that has brought glory to God. I give David a copy of the reading, and he chooses appropriate things for us to sing. It works amazingly well, but, to be honest, this week I looked at the order and thought, “This doesn’t fill me with joy. I don’t like these songs. I want some more modern songs.”

There are two things wrong with that attitude: First, it must be difficult to find music to fit in with Malachi, so it is disrespectful to the effort David made in choosing the songs.

Second: It’s all about me, and what I want and not about how we honour God in our praise. It was a bad attitude to approach worship.

It’s easy to look around and see Christian leaders and criticise things we say and do. Sometimes that criticism is justified, but sometimes it comes from our own bad attitude.

The thing is that if you’re asking what on earth this has to do with us in 2019, the Bible teaches that you and I are priests. We are set apart to be involved in wonderful worship and sacrificial service.

1 Peter 2:9: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Revelation 1:6: “And [Christ] has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father…”

Here’s how this passage relates to our lives today: Every believer is a priest and as such is set apart for worship and service. And, just as priests in the Old Testament were to point people to God, each of us is called to lead others toward today.

The description in 5-6 of what a priest should be simply did not fit the priests of Malachi’s day. My covenant was with him, 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. **6**True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin.

 “Life and peace,” “reverence,” “awe”, “true instruction,” and “uprightness” were to be the hallmarks of those serving the people. They are to be identifying marks of God’s people today too!

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

We spent months in the early part of the year thinking about how we could encourage people to move a little bit closer to God and it happens when we stop only listening, and put our faith into action. This nonsense of, “I don’t know enough” – you’ll never know enough because there are always things to learn. Or, “I’m too old” – Moses was 80 when God told him to go to Egypt and free the Israelites. Or, “I don’t have time.” Don’t have time for God!

As believers our worship, whether that’s here on a Sunday, at work on a Monday, on the beach of an evening or wherever we are, should be from the heart. It should engage body, mind and spirit and it should make a difference in our lives.

We teach by our words, but we also teach by our lives and, sometimes, our life undermines our message: “I can’t hear you because I see you.”

God’s people must know, teach, and obey His word so that we bring honour to Him and life & peace to the people.

That's me, you, and all of us.