

November 16, 2025

Return: Do You Keep Your Commitments?

Malachi 2:1-16

Vernon Advent Christian Church

Introduction...So far in Malachi, the prophet, as the mouthpiece of God, has dealt with some very tough issues that have made us think. To begin with, God says that he still loves his covenant people Israel despite their failures. And Israel responded, "How have you loved us?" God reminds them of how he graciously chose the family of Jacob, their ancestor, to become the carrier of God's covenant promises instead of his brother Esau and that same covenant faithfulness belongs to them as well. But right from the start Israel's heart is exposed as doubting God's faithfulness and love which was reflected in their attitude towards worship.

And in the passage we looked at last week, God accuses the people of despising him and defiling the temple, while the people fire back, "How have we despised you?" God responds by focusing on how the people are bringing shameful offerings of sick, blemished or sometimes even stolen animals. It shows that they don't value or honor their God. And the priests are part of the problem too, because they not only tolerate but also participate in these corrupt forms of worship. From top to bottom, God's people have proven themselves totally faith-less.

And this should challenge us to think about where we're at in our relationship with God and what we bring to Him as our acts of worship with the motivation to repent and return to a true heart of worship.

Well, the passage we're going to look at today is another one where Malachi doesn't pull any punches. It is full of strong warnings and powerful declarations from God. Again, as we've seen so far, Malachi is speaking to a people who have grown complacent, casual in their worship, and casual in their relationships. The core message of this passage is about integrity, namely, the integrity of the priests and their leadership of the people and the integrity of the home, specifically in marriage.

C.S. Lewis is quoted, some believe mistakenly so, as once saying, "Integrity is doing the right thing even when no one is watching." For the Christian, keeping our commitments with integrity means reflecting God's own faithfulness by being a person of your word, which includes being honest, trustworthy, and keeping promises even when it is difficult. This involves being authentic, living consistently by the word of God, and understanding that keeping your commitments is a way to display God's love and truth to the world around us.

Now, we're going to break today's passage down into two sections. The first section is a warning to the priests in vs. 1-9. And the second is a warning to all the people regarding their commitments, specifically in marriage in vs. 10-16. We'll look at each of these sections individually, so you can remain seated this morning as I read the first section, Malachi 2:1-9 [Read Passage]

The Integrity of Priests (Malachi 2:1-9)

The first part of our text is directed squarely at the priests of Israel. They were the spiritual leaders, the ones responsible for guiding the people in the Law of the Lord. Picking up from where we left off last week in his warning against not bringing acceptable sacrifices and profaning the name of God, in vs. 1-2, God says to the priest, "If you will not listen, and if you will 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."

This is a shocking statement. God is essentially saying, "I will curse the very things you believe are signs of my favor." Why? Because, as we saw last week, the priests were just going through the motions. Their hearts were far from God. They were not "taking it to heart."

In the Bible, the "heart" is the core of a person's being, representing the mind, emotions, will, and conscience. The heart is where feelings, thoughts, and understanding originate. Proverbs 4:23 says, "Guard your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life," meaning it is the origin of everything a person does. So the "heart" is the focus of a person's desires and loyalties. Which is why the greatest commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, signifying a complete commitment of your entire being.

However, the Bible also acknowledges that, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9) Biblically speaking, the heart is where all our evil thoughts and actions come from. And because of its corruptible nature, passages like Ezekiel 36:26 call for a renewal of the heart, asking God to remove this "heart of stone" and give us a "heart of flesh". Unlike us, who look at outward appearances, God looks at the heart to see a person's true character. And in our passage, the heart of the priests were far from Him.

Now, I want to apologize in advance for these details I'm about to share, but the analogy used in vs. 3 describes the seriousness of what was going on here. Sacrificed animals still had dung in their systems, and because it was unclean and could lead to contamination and illness that would threaten the whole camp, God gave specific instructions and said it should be taken out of the sanctuary and burned. (Exodus 29:14)

Here, God said He would spread that dung on their faces, so that they would have to be taken outside the sanctuary. This graphic imagery symbolizes that the priests and their offerings have become so defiled and worthless that their worship will be treated with the same utter contempt as the filth from their sacrifices, which was removed and discarded outside the camp. Remember what God said in 1:10, that He would rather have one faithful priest shut the doors of the Temple so that the priests could no longer offer these unacceptable sacrifices and profane the name of God.

This verse is a direct condemnation of the priests who have failed their duty to God and the people. God is saying that their "solemn feasts" and sacrifices are so hypocritical that they are no better than the dung from the sacrifices, which was considered unclean. This judgment on the priests was a warning to the people, showing that disobedience to God's covenant has serious consequences, leading to disgrace and removal from His presence.

The unstated question then is this, "why does God put up with this? Why not just wipe them all out?" and God answers, "...so that My covenant with Levi may stand," or

continue. (vs. 4) This shows the motive for God's discipline against these ungodly priests. The LORD's judgment was intended to warn the priests, and the people, back to a proper respect of His covenant, back into a loving relationship with Him. God, in his mercy, is giving His people opportunity to repent and to return to him.

God describes His original covenant with the tribe of Levi in vs. 5-7. It was a covenant of "life and peace." God promised Levi in Deuteronomy 18:1-2, that they would have a very special inheritance from God. "The Levitical priests are to have no allotment or inheritance with Israel. They shall live on the food offerings presented to the Lord, for that is their inheritance."

The other tribes of Israel received a land inheritance in Canaan, but the Levites received no land. Instead, the Levites were given certain cities within the other territories allotted to the tribes (Num. 35). The Levites' inheritance was God Himself in the sense that they were the ones chosen as priests to oversee the worship of the entire nation of Israel. The Levites were responsible for the tabernacle and its implements as well as overseeing the sacrifices and offerings of the people.

Here in our passage, God used His covenant promise to the Levites as an example for the priests in the days of Malachi. Levi was shown to be an example in these verses of reverence. "He feared Me and stood in awe of my name." (vs. 5) As an example of knowing God's Word: "True instruction was in his mouth and no wrong was found on his lips."(vs. 6) As an example of Godly character: "He walked with Me in peace and uprightness."(vs. 6) And of preserving and promoting God's Word: "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD."(vs. 7) This is the standard for spiritual leadership, walking in peace and uprightness, and leading others to God.

But the priests in Malachi's day had fallen short of this standard. Look at vs. 8-9:
[Read]

The priests had failed in two significant ways. First, they had "turned aside from the way." Meaning they compromised their own integrity. They had forsaken their call from the LORD to lead people in acceptable worship to God and had actually done the opposite.

Which leads to the second failure, they "caused many to stumble." Their lack of integrity had a ripple effect. When spiritual leaders compromise their calling, the whole community suffers. When pastors, elders, Sunday school teachers, or ministry leaders are hypocritical or teach a watered-down version of the truth, it confuses people and leads them away from God instead of toward Him.

The very people who were meant to be the messengers of the Lord were leading the people astray because they were showing "partiality in the law" (v. 9). They were picking and choosing which parts of God's truth applied based on who was listening or what was convenient, all to their benefit. God makes it clear that He will expose this hypocrisy.

And so, the application for us is clear. Those who lead in the church, both here and elsewhere, must take God's word seriously. We must live what we preach. We must not be partial with God's truth. James says in James 3:1, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness." Every person in a leadership role must constantly examine their heart and ask: "Am I truly honoring God's name? Am I leading people to Him or causing them to stumble?"

Now, this doesn't mean that if you are not in a "so called" leadership position, this doesn't apply to you. This isn't just about ordained leadership. In a broader sense, every believer is called to be a "messenger" of God's truth to those around them. Our integrity matters because our actions affect others. We all must keep watch to make sure our lives reflect the gospel in which we believe and know to be true. May the Lord help us.

The Integrity of Marriage (Malachi 2:10-16)

In the second half of ch. 2, the focus now shifts from the corruption within the temple leadership to the direct result of these actions, the corruption within the homes of the people. [Read vs. 10-16]

In vs. 10, Malachi uses a powerful rhetorical question to set up this section: "Do we not all have one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" The point that is being made here is because we are all made in the image of God, we must respect and deal honorably with everyone. If that is so, the question is asked here, "Why are the Israelites mistreating one another? Malachi will apply this specifically to marriage, but their sin of betrayal and infidelity went beyond their unfaithfulness in marriage. There is a sense in which all betrayal, from the slightest unkindness to the grossest injustice, grieves the heart of God.

But specifically, the people were being faithless in two ways. First, they were intermarrying with the pagan nations around them, harkening back to the days of old when they first entered the promised land of Canaan. This was a violation of God's law designed to keep Israel pure in their worship of the one true God (v. 11). This act was seen as a betrayal and a defilement of God's holiness, as it diluted the people's devotion to Him and threatened to corrupt their children with idolatry, as forbidden in verses like Deut. 7:3-4.

Secondly, they weren't only intermarrying with pagan nations but they were divorcing and leaving their Israelite wives to marry these pagan women and this is the core issue of vs. 13-16.

Malachi highlights the pain and sorrow this caused. In vs. 13, he says people were covering the Lord's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because God was no longer accepting their offerings. They were asking, "Why?"

God's answer is direct in vs. 14: "Because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant."

The people had forgotten the sacredness of marriage. They saw it as a temporary contract, not a divine covenant. Malachi reminds them that God Himself is the witness to the marriage vows. The "wife of your youth" is a "companion" and a "wife by covenant." These are deep, meaningful terms. God designed marriage for partnership, for companionship, and for life. By acting unfaithfully with the "wife of your youth," they are also acting unfaithfully against God, who is the divine witness to their marriage. This action is a reason why their offerings are not being accepted by the Lord.

Vs. 15 contains a crucial thought that ties the two parts of this passage together. It speaks of God seeking "godly offspring." This suggests that another important purpose of marriage, beyond companionship, is the creation of a stable, covenantal environment where children can be raised to know and love God. When marriage covenants are broken, the foundation of the home is destroyed, and the spiritual well-being of the next generation

is jeopardized. The concept is tied to the idea of passing faith down through families, so that each new generation can set its hope in God.

We need to remember that is God's intention for marriage, but we also know the reality. I myself am a product of divorce. And God did a miraculous work in my life to save me in spite of the circumstances of my family history. Some of you can say the same. But I would have preferred, if I actually had a say, that I was a product of a loving stable home with generations of Christians each passing down the faith to the next. This was God's intention for marriage and for the home, but as was stated earlier, the heart is desperately wicked and it wants what it wants, and we have an enemy that seeks to destroy the very heart and strategy of God's mission to the world, the Christian home.

Vs. 16 continues this thought, "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts." The meaning is clear and powerful. Divorce is a violent tearing apart of what God has joined together. It inflicts deep wounds on the spouse, the children, and the community, but it seems to have become common place in Malachi's day as it has in ours.

Malachi's final instruction in vs. 16 is a command we desperately need today. He says, "So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

"Guard your spirit." Where does faithfulness begin? It begins in the heart, in the mind, in the spirit. It starts with a commitment to honor our covenants, our commitments, before temptation even arrives. It's about making a conscious decision every day to honor God both in and outside of the church and definitely in our homes.

We live in a world where commitment is often seen as optional, where leaving a difficult relationship is, too often, the first solution offered rather than being the last resort. But God calls His people to a higher standard, to reflect His own covenantal faithfulness in our lives. [Remember Hosea]

Malachi 2 is a stark reminder that our faith is not just about what happens in this building on a Sunday morning. It's about how we live our lives the rest of the week. Are we living with integrity, whether as spiritual leaders or as faithful witnesses in the world? Are we guarding our hearts and keeping the commitments we have made, especially in regards to the sacred covenant of marriage for those of us who are married?

God is a God of covenant. He is faithful to us even when we are faithless. 2 Tim. 2:11-13 says, "the saying is trustworthy, for if we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; if we are faithless, he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself."

This passage, though severe in its warnings, is ultimately a merciful call to return back to God, a call to reflect on our own lives and display His character to the world. Let us be a people who honor God's name in our words and our actions. Let us take our vows and commitments seriously. And let us guard our hearts in full submission to God and respond to his merciful call for us to come back to a true heart of worship. Let's pray.

Benediction: "May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." Amen. – 2 Corinthians 13:14