

Hurst Green
8th Sep 19
Malachi – Keeping Commitments with God
Malachi 2:1-16

We have been looking at aspects of God as well as our response to them but this week we are going to look firmly at us!

I have called this week “Keeping Commitments with God” because that is what our passage today was all about.

Now the first bit was called “Admonition for Priests” and there is a great deal in there for those of us who are called into the role of formal teaching but it also applies to every Christian and the reason for that is one of those phrases we can carelessly toss out “The priesthood of all believers”.

Now this is an important statement for all Protestants in the world and one we need to understand and so I am going to start with that.

When Luther pinned his 95 Theses on the door of his Church in Wittenberg on Oct 31 1517 he started what would become a revolution in Christianity.

The Catholic Church had established this system, or hierarchy, where the priest stood in for Christ and everything was done through him and this is still how many catholic churches operate today. It is all based on the incident when Christ tells Peter that he was the rock on which he would build his Church and Peter then goes on to be the first Pope.

Luther grew up in this faith but became convinced that the only true authority was scripture and that is why we place such an emphasis on bible based teaching. Scripture is God’s word for us today although written down many years ago.

The priest system when applied rigorously over turns such things as the doctrine that we are saved by grace through faith. If you have a body of men that holds the keys to heaven and hell then you have men who can say who is saved and who is not. This stops salvation being personal.

Now I am not saying that all Catholic Churches apply this – as we know there are many deeply spiritual Catholics and also there are protestant churches that have slipped back into this model that seems to appeal to the heart of man.

If you want a quick test of where a church stands look at how they say the absolution prayer after confession. A priestly Church will announce the forgiveness of **your** sins as if a man can forgive sins whereas other churches will announce the forgiveness of **our** sins reminding us that God forgives the sins of those who truly repent.

So that was some history but what does it mean in our daily lives for it would be chaos if, on a Sunday, we all tried to come to the front and run the service.

Part of it is of course the emphasis I have been placing recently on everyone having a role to play in the Sunday service based on 1 Cor 14:26 which also says

1 Corinthians 14:26 (ANIV)

²⁶ ~~What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church.~~

And that strengthening of the Church is what is important for we cannot rely on the strength of one or two of us to hold the whole Church up. We are all the body of Christ and we all have our own part to play.

While I could talk for ages on this and it is very important part of our faith let me today give you four aspects to consider as we get back to Malachi and his message for the modern Church.

The first is **the privilege of direct access to God.**

Under a priestly system access to God is through the priest who is of course closer to God than you are. That is not biblical.

Ephesians 3 unpacks this very well but let me only give you a snippet of what it says

Ephesians 3:6 (ANIV)

⁶ *This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus.*

You are included!

Ephesians 3:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,*

And that is a role I will come back to

Ephesians 3:12 (ANIV)

¹² *In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.*

And that him is Christ and no one else. Through Christ we each have direct access to God and that means we each stand as priests in our own right with no one standing between us and God.

And verses 19 & 22 from Heb 10

Hebrews 10:19 & 22 (ANIV)

¹⁹ *Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,²² let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, ~~having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.~~*

The second is **the privilege of Spiritual Sacrifice.**

We don't have to sacrifice unblemished animals to gain God's attention but we continue to offer sacrifices that still need to be unblemished.

Hebrews 13:15 (ANIV)

¹⁵ *Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.*

And that passage goes on

Hebrews 13:16 (ANIV)

¹⁶ *And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

And Romans says

Romans 12:1 (ANIV)

¹ *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.*

And elsewhere the New Testament talks of faith and love as sacrifices.

So our unblemished sacrifices are Praise, Doing Good, Sharing with others, Our lives, our faith and our love.

That covers almost everything we do – we are the living sacrifices.

The third is **the responsibility of the prophetic role.**

Now just that title could make us shy away from this with the image of stern men saying “Thus says the Lord” before delivering words of judgement.

As I have been trying to encourage you to see throughout my time here the prophetic role is simply making Christ known.

We had that earlier verse from Hebrews

Ephesians 3:10 (ANIV)

¹⁰ *His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,*

But note that the rulers and authorities are not the secular ones but heavenly realms – this is what we do when we pray. Particularly when we pray with God’s word in our mind and our mouths. Let these rulers know God’s promises to you; let them see you praise him as he answers your prayers.

To some it is given to apply our principles in the worlds of politics, business, law etc and when I worked as a Christian in the various roles God gave me I ensured that I worked to God’s principles not the secular principles of the businesses around me. And all who work do the same.

And fourthly **the responsibility to be agents of reconciliation.**

As priests we have a responsibility to be the agents to reconcile others to God. That is the great commandment.

But it is also 1 Tim 2:1

1 Timothy 2:1-2 (ANIV)

¹ *I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—² for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.*

We are here to pray for everyone and also for those in authority (and they seem to need it at the moment) but note that God throws in a blessing for us here that we may live peaceful and quiet lives.

And also Jeremiah

Jeremiah 29:7 (ANIV)

⁷ *Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."*

More blessings for us for doing what we should be doing anyway.

So two privileges and two responsibilities of the priesthood of all believers and I hope I have convinced you of that tenant of protestant theology that we are all priests before God and no one can stand between you and God and none of us are closer to God than anyone else.

So let us turn to Malachi and our reading for today for it holds some warning for us today that we need to be alert for in our lives.

Malachi – the message for the modern church.

So here we have this admonition to the priest and this discussion of Judah being unfaithful. Just a generation or so after the signing of that solemn covenant.

So to ensure that we do not follow in the same way lets learn some lessons from Malachi.

1. You have a responsibility to respond in obedience.

Malachi 2:2 (ANIV)

² *If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honour my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honour me.*

God wants us to listen and obey him. We have spoken before of the ways that God speaks to us. Obviously the bible and we need to be getting regular doses of the bible to keep God's word alive in our hearts but also he speaks through each other as we teach one another.

But listening is not enough you have to take it into your heart and do it to honour Gods name. James says this as well

James 1:22 (ANIV)

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

Dear James who has so much to say about how we should live our lives.

So are you listening, are you obeying and are you honouring your God?

Look at your lives – what evidence is there that this is true for you? What evidence should there be that is missing because you are not doing this?

Some things from Malachi to consider:

V5 – Revere God.

This should come from your direct access to the awesome creator God. We should live with an enormous respect for God and what he has done for us and that should be reflected in our lives as part of our prophetic role.

V6 – Receive the Truth.

Accept God's instruction for your life. Listen and hear for God is talking to you. Some of it is about things that need to change but there are also words of encouragement and blessing for you to receive into your life.

V6 – Righteous living.

This plays into most of those four points I raised earlier. We should lead upright lives that honour of God and forms such a key part of our witness as the first church in Jerusalem showed us.

V7 – Represent God

You are God's messenger. Both as an agent of reconciliation bringing people to see God because of your life and words but also in your prophetic role of making Christ known

Those are four commitments we should make on a daily basis: Honour God, Receive his Truth, live righteous lives and Represent God.

2. Recognise the downside

Malachi does not let this slip by and neither should we. Right in verse 2 God says if we do not do this he will send a curse; verse 9 You are despised and humiliated for showing partiality; verse 12 – the Lord cuts him off; v14 God acting as witness to all our sins.

That is a bit of a hairy list but it comes about by not keeping your commitments to God – your personal solemn covenant with God. These things you took on when you accepted Christ's salvation for you and became one of his priests.

3. Remember the benefits.

There are a few here in v5 peace and uprightness.

But then we also have that direct access to God; his promise to answer our prayers, his Holy Spirit in our lives; the fruits of the spirit; being transformed from one degree of glory to another; the peace of God which passes all understanding; God making his ways and plans known to us.

There are many more and these are things to use when you are announcing the manifold wisdom of Christ to the rulers and authorities in Ephesians 3. Christ in his wisdom has done and is doing all these things for you!

4. Don't resort to unfaithfulness.

In this passage the priests have failed in their teaching and the people have failed in not revering God, receiving his word and living distinctly from their non-believing neighbours. They have failed in their commitments.

The passage focusses on marriage because one of the commands from God to Israel was not to marry people from the tribes around them.

They did not listen and time and again it caused all of Israel grief – just read any of the history books.

What it means for us is about that personal covenant with God. Are we keeping our promises? Are we doing what God has commanded? Are we living a different life? Or are we just blending in?

The commitment is two sided and God is keeping his side – we need to keep our side.

5. Guard Ourselves

Twice in verse 15 & 16 are we told to guard ourselves:

Malachi 2:15-16 (ANIV)

¹⁵ ~~Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.~~

The Lord was speaking about the covenant they had made back in Nehemiah 10

Nehemiah 10:30 (ANIV)

³⁰ "We promise not to give our daughters in marriage to the peoples around us or take their daughters for our sons.

And now they were doing just that. But Malachi gives us a sound principle to guard the things we have committed to. To guard ourselves.

To do that set boundaries; lines which nothing can cross.

But be sensible. You have to take responsibility for your own lives for we are told:

1 Peter 5:8 (ANIV)

⁸ Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

Remember that self-control for while others can help only you can set the boundaries in your life. And:

1 John 5:21 (ANIV)

²¹ Dear children, keep yourselves from idols.

I have spoken before about the idols that can take over your lives; money, status, family itself. This is where boundaries are important. Anything you have you have from God and in this country we have it in abundance.

In your heart honour him and:

Proverbs 4:23 (ANIV)

²³ *Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.*

Guard your heart, set boundaries around it that you will not let things cross and do the same in life. Decide how you will lead your life and live it that way. If you try and decide on the fly you will fail. Set boundaries in your life.

Conclusion

We are the priesthood of all believers; we each stand before our God as a priest for God does not run a hierarchy we are each children of God.

That gives us the privileges of direct access to God and giving ourselves as a spiritual sacrifice but also gives us the responsibilities of a prophetic role in making Christ known and of working as agents of reconciliation.

But Malachi teaches us five things to help with this:

- A responsibility to respond in obedience to God
- We must recognise the downside of disobedience
- We must remember the benefits of obedience
- We must not resort to unfaithfulness
- We must guard ourselves; our hearts and our lives

Keep your commitments and remain faithful to the Lord you God.