

Main Idea: In Malachi 2:1-9, the Lord of hosts delivers a message to ministers, and makes it clear that He expects ministers to value two priorities in their lives.

- I. A minister must value the glory of God (1-3).
  - A. The Lord of hosts is zealous for His name
  - B. The Lord of hosts is not pleased when His priests defame His name.
- II. A minister must value the Word of God (4-9).
  - A. The Lord identifies the minister He commends (4-7).
    1. This minister values God's Word in his personal life (5).
    2. This minister values God's Word in his pastoral life (6-7)
      - a. He speaks the truth.
      - b. He lives the truth.
      - c. He leads others towards the truth.
  - B. The Lord identifies the minister He condemns (8-9).
    1. This minister lives an inconsistent life.
    2. This minister speaks partial truth.
    3. This minister leads others away from the truth.

Take Inventory: If we know the Great High Priest, we too are priests (1 Peter 2:5).

1. Who has the Lord placed under our priestly care?
2. What is the Lord's assessment of our priestly ministry?

As we turn to Malachi 2, let's sing the theme song for our series. Our theme song comes from perhaps the key verse of the book, Malachi 1:11. God is great, there is none greater. And He deserves and desires to be great among the nations. This is why He chose Israel, and us, so that He might show Himself to be great among the nations.

*Theme Song of Series: “Great Among the Nations (Malachi 1:11)”*

*My name will be great, great among the nations.*

*My name will be great, great among the nations.*

*From the rising to the setting of the sun, my name will be great,  
great among the nations.*

What happens when the great God isn't great in the lives of His people? This is the heart of the message of Malachi, as we saw in chapter one last week in a message entitled, “*Leftover Religion: When the Great God Isn't Great in our Lives.*”

But how does that happen? How do God's people slide into a leftover approach to God? There's often a contributing factor, which is today's message, and it has to do with leadership. As go the leaders, so often go the people. This is true for a nation, as we'll see. It's also true in churches, in homes, in businesses, and more. In Malachi 2, God gives a stunning message to shepherds who fail to set the pace for His people.

*Scripture Reading: Malachi 2:1-9*

Back in the 90s as a young pastor, I took a class on legal issues facing churches and became familiar with an important term, which I'll share in a moment. We looked at several court cases, one of which involved a couple whose names were Robert and Edna.

In 1979 this couple was living in Colorado, had such severe marriage conflict that they sought the help of a counselor, a clergyman. They trusted the minister, and hoped he

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<sup>\*\*</sup>Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

<sup>1</sup> For a previous look at this passage, see the Malachi series preached in 1994.

could help them restore their marriage. He did the opposite. During the course of counseling, the minister developed a relationship with Edna that went far beyond the scope of professional ethics. As a result of the minister's infidelity, the couple's marriage disintegrated. Robert sued the minister. The case eventually made it to the Supreme Court of Colorado, in October 1988.

Do you know what the minister used to try to defend himself? He pleaded first amendment protection (the first amendment says in part that the church is shielded from civil lawsuits in areas of doctrine and practice). Do you know what the court decided? It said the minister was guilty of a "breach of fiduciary duty".

There's the term. *Fiduciary*. Do you know what that is? The court records state (Destefano v. Grabrian, 284), "A fiduciary is a person having a duty, created by his undertaking, to act primarily for the benefit of another...We (the court) have no difficulty in finding that (the minister), as a marriage counselor to Robert and Edna, owed a fiduciary duty to Edna...As a fiduciary, he was obligated not to engage in conduct which might harm the (couple's) relationship."

It would be bad enough if this was an isolated incident. Sadly, it's not. Ministers are supposed to be "fiduciaries." We're supposed to be able to trust them. But far too often that trust has been violated. And when that happens, people are rightly upset about it. And more importantly, so is God.

This morning, we're expounding a text of Scripture that sounds a lot like a court case. Actually, it is just that. In Malachi 2, God, speaking through His prosecuting attorney Malachi, is bringing a charge against the ministers in Israel. And what was their crime? In short, they were guilty of a breach of fiduciary duty, for they had a God-given duty/responsibility/trust, and they were violating it.

Frankly, it's not easy to preach a sermon about the very position which I hold. And you may wonder why a message about ministers would be of value to you. It is valuable, for three reasons. First, all of God's Word is valuable (II Tim 3:16). Second, you have ministers/pastors, and you need to know what God says you should expect from them. And third, in a real sense, we are all ministers, and the lessons of Malachi 2 apply to us all.

I mentioned last time that Kevin DeYoung describes the book of Malachi as a big argument, with Malachi functioning as the prosecuting attorney for God. The Lord is bringing a lawsuit against Israel for violating His covenant.

It's a love letter. "I have loved you," says the Lord at the beginning.

In this love letter, Malachi uses a dialogue, repeating a phrase again and again. "But you say." It's as if Malachi is raising exhibit A ("But you say" 1:2), then exhibit B ("But you say" 1:6), then exhibit C ("But you say" 1:7), then exhibit D ("When you say" 1:12), then exhibit E ("But you say" 1:13). Then comes exhibit F in 2:14, and exhibit G in 2:17, and exhibits H, I, and J in 3:7, 8, 13. "But you say. But you say. But you say."

What's he doing? Again, he's arguing for God. He's standing in the courtroom and citing the evidence that proves that God's people have violated the covenant He established with them on Mount Sinai.

But Malachi does more than just prove guilt. At the end of the book, he delivers a message that a prosecuting attorney seldom if ever gives in a courtroom in our day. He

offers a message of hope to the guilty. He announces that the offended party (God) is going to come to the aid of the guilty party (His wayward people).

Amazing. Who does such a thing? The great God does, who offered sinners in the fifth century BC a message of judgment *and* hope. As He does with us today.

The message from 1:6 to 2:9 is for the priests of Israel (Malachi will confront the people in 2:10-16). But what was true of the priests was true of the people, for as went the priests, so went the people. Both groups cheapened the worship of God, which happens for them and us in a couple of ways.

First, they cheapened worship by dishonoring God's name (6). Then secondly, they cheapened worship by defiling God's altar (7-14). They gave God what cost them little. Worship had become a burden to them rather than a delight.

Most of us, if we're honest, have been guilty of giving God our leftovers. What do we need to do if we are going to break out of this leftover mode? God tells us in Malachi 2. We need to learn to value four priorities (we'll look at two this week, and two next week, the Lord willing).

The first two priorities apply directly to ministers. In Malachi 2:1-9, the Lord of hosts makes it clear that He expects His ministers to value two priorities in their lives. This is their fiduciary responsibility.

#### I. A minister must value the glory of God (1-3).

Let's put this in historical context. Back in 1440 BC, the Lord redeemed the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt. He entered into a covenant relationship with them and gave them His law so they would know how to live.

But you know what happened. They turned from Him, and time and time again they broke His Law. He sent prophets who urged them to repent, but they refused. So, in 722 BC, the Lord chastened the northern ten Jewish tribes and sent them into Assyrian captivity. Then in 586 BC, He did the same thing with the southern kingdom of Judah, and the Jews spent seventy years in exile in Babylon.

Yet the Lord did not give up on His chosen people. After the exile, He brought a remnant back home to the promised land, raised up Ezra to rebuild the temple (458 BC), and Nehemiah to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem (445 BC). There was jubilation again in Israel. Well, sort of. The truth was that things weren't the same as before.

This is when Malachi becomes a prophet, in the latter part of the fifth century BC. He's a contemporary of Nehemiah, and he served during a time of great disillusionment. Frankly, the people were feeling sorry for themselves. But Malachi said it's time to stop. It's time to take an honest assessment as to *why* life is so hard.

Malachi speaks in verses 1-3, "And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, 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. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it."

Malachi doesn't pull any punches, making two bottom line declarations.

**A. The Lord of hosts is zealous for His name.** And two...

**B. The Lord of hosts is not pleased when His priests defame His name.**

Notice the emphasis on His name. There is one God, but this one God reveals Himself in His holy Book by several different names. He is *Elohim*, the Creator (Genesis 1:1). He is *Yahweh*, “the LORD”, which is His covenant name (Exodus 3:15). He is *Adonai*, the Lord and Master (Genesis 15:2).

Sometimes He uses compound names, such as this one. *Yahweh Tseva’oth*. We’re familiar with Yahweh, His covenant name. Tseva’oth is a military term, meaning army, troops, a host or vast multitude, a horde. As one dictionary suggests, He is both divine Warrior and divine King. He is the Lord who possesses and has authority over an organized body of powerful angels.

LORD of hosts is “a phrase describing Yahweh’s role as the Lord of the heavenly armies, the commander of the cosmic forces, the head of the divine council, and the leader of Israel’s army.”<sup>2</sup>

He is the leader of the heavenly council. He is the ruler of the armies of heaven and of course of Israel’s armies. He is the ruler over human events.

It’s significant that God identifies Himself as “the LORD of hosts” 285 times in the Old Testament. And this is the title He uses in Malachi, twenty-four times in the book (more than any other book), seven times in the first chapter of Malachi, and four times in today’s text. This is His name, and He is zealous for His name. He is the LORD of hosts and has a cosmic army ready to defend His name. And He is not pleased when He sees His ministers defaming His name.

Verse 1 reads, “And now, O priests, this command is for you.” According to Walton, over four thousand members of the priestly and Levitical families returned to Israel after the exile.<sup>3</sup> The priests were essentially the professional ministers. They were paid for serving God. They had three primary responsibilities, according to Deuteronomy 33:8-10.

First, they were responsible for declaring God's will to the people. They were preachers who proclaimed God’s truth. Second, they had responsibilities in religious education. It was their privilege to teach the people the Torah, God's revelation. And third, as servants in the temple, they handled the sacrifices the people brought to God. They were the worship leaders.<sup>4</sup>

God had given the priests quite a trust. But, according to Malachi, they had violated that trust. Nehemiah, a contemporary of Malachi, said this of the priests in his prayer to God (in Nehemiah 13:29, “Remember them, O my God, because they have defiled the priesthood, and the covenant of the priesthood, and of the Levites.”

In verse 1, God says to the priests, “This command is for you.” Yet what follows is not so much a command, as it is a decree or admonition (NIV). It’s as if God is giving His wayward priests another chance. He says to them in verse 2, “If you will not listen...then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings.”

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<sup>2</sup> Acosta, D. R. (2016). [Lord of Hosts](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

<sup>3</sup> Matthews, V. H., Chavalas, M. W., & Walton, J. H. (2000). [The IVP Bible background commentary: Old Testament](#) (electronic ed., Mal 2:5–7). InterVarsity Press.

<sup>4</sup> [Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible](#), 1757.

He's not being harsh. He's reminding them of the covenant stipulations He gave them centuries before at Mount Sinai. If you honor Me, I'll bless you. If not, I'll take action to get your attention.

What was it that God wanted the priests to value? What is it that He wants every minister to value? His glory. Notice verse 2 again, in the AV, "If you will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name." The NIV and ESV say, "Give honor my name."

Beloved, if we are to break out of the leftover religion mode, we must learn to value as our number one priority the glory of God.

This is what priests were supposed to do. The chief end of priests in Malachi's day was to glorify God. The Hebrew word (*kabod*) for "honor/glory" speaks of "weight", of "reputation and importance". The priests were to lead the people in recognizing the sheer gravity of the presence of God. He is holy. He is separate. He is unique. He is important. He is worthy of our adoration and worship. The priest's job was to lead the people in giving honor and weightiness to God in their lives.

But in Malachi's day, the priests did the opposite. They defiled the glory of God. Where? It started in their "hearts" which is the control center of the person. How? They developed a careless, flippant mindset regarding what they did for God. Instead of honoring God and helping others honor God, they thought it sufficient to go through religious motions.

"Hey, at least I went to church today. I'm not like my pagan neighbors." Really? We may be more like them than we care to admit.

My friends, there's much here for us to consider, for so much of what takes place in our day in the name of ministry resembles the priests in Malachi's day. God is appalled when ministers use Him for their own gain.

When the church gathers on the Lord's Day, it is not to honor men. It's to honor God. It's not to hear a good sermon. It's to hear the speech of God through the servant of God. It's not to be entertained by the kind of music we like, but to declare God's worth through the ministry of music. Fellowship is good, but if we come to church merely to see people, we've missed the purpose. We are here to see God, and to adore His glory.

If it's my aim as a pastor merely to make you like me, to please you, to make you feel good about yourselves, I have failed you miserably. My calling is to help you get your eyes off yourself, and certainly off of me, and fixed firmly on God.

God takes His glory seriously. If we doubt that, ponder again what He told the priests who robbed Him of His glory in verse 3, "Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it."

The word *dung* actually refers to the entrails (the insides) of an animal. When a priest sacrificed an animal in the temple, he did not offer the "insides" on the altar. He took the internal waste, along with the hide and flesh, outside the camp, to the dung-heap.

I'm going to do that with you if you keep this up, says the Lord to the priests. I'm going to take you outside the camp. I think the Living Bible captures the sting of God's rebuke with this paraphrase of verses 2-3, "I have cursed you already because you haven't taken seriously the things that are important to me... I will spread on your faces the manure of these animals you offer me, and throw you out like dung."

Friends, the LORD of hosts is zealous for His name, and He's not pleased when we aren't. Are we concerned for the glory of God? Is it our driving passion to see the Lord receive honor from our lives? Parents, do your children know that the most important person in your family isn't them but God? Nothing creates stability in the heart of child like seeing their parents live for the fame and honor of God.

This is the first priority God expects a minister to value, the glory of God.

## II. A minister must value the Word of God (4-9).

These two priorities go hand in hand. When I value the glory of God, I'll also value the Word of God. Obviously, this was not happening in the lives of the priests in Malachi's day. But when it *is* happening, what does it look like? The Lord shows us in verse 4 by pointing the priests' attention back to Levi, their forefather.

“So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts.”

Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. In Moses' day, Aaron, a member of the tribe of Levi, became Israel's first high priest. His descendants served as priests for the next one thousand years right up to Malachi's day. In verse 5, God says He made a covenant with Levi, which He calls both “a covenant of life and peace” and “a covenant of fear”. It's as if Malachi holds up Levi as exhibit A.

In verses 4-7, Malachi contrasts the corrupt priests of his day with the ideal priest, the kind God intended when He appointed Levi. What's the difference? It has to do with how they view the Word of God.

Think of it this way. The Lord through Malachi is showing us that there are two kinds of ministers, the one He commends, and the one He condemns.

**A. The Lord identifies the minister He commends (4-7).** We see them in verses 5-7, “My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. <sup>6</sup> True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. <sup>7</sup> 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 of hosts.”

Simply put, a good minister, one that God commends, values the Word of God. He shows His value for God's Word in two ways.

### *1. The commended minister values God's Word in his personal life (5).*

What was true of the personal life of Levi? At the end of verse 5 God says, “He feared me,” and, “He stood in awe of my name.” Like Levi, the commended minister fears God, reveres God, and is “afraid before my name” (KJV). His personal life is marked by the fear of God.

Proverbs 1:7 says, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” In Proverbs 8:13, we read, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil; pride, arrogance, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, do I hate.”

This is what I pray for our president and other elected officials, whom the Bible calls “God's ministers” in Romans 13:6. Lord, grant them the fear of God, for without Your fear they will lack wisdom in the decisions they make as they lead this nation.

We saw this need in Tuesday's presidential debate. When the question was asked regarding abortion, the candidates talked about they think, and what women think, and what the states think, but neither talked about what God thinks, nor how their policies affect thousands and thousands of His pre-born imager-bearers.

There is a crying need in our day for minister's who fear God (ministers in the church, in government, in the home, and everywhere else) and who refuse to fear men.

Jeremiah was such a minister. Do you remember the account described in Jeremiah 36, when the Lord told Jeremiah to write the Word of God on a scroll? Jeremiah dictated the divine message to his associate Baruch, and then sent Baruch to read the message in the temple (Jeremiah himself was in prison). When the political and religious big whigs heard the message, they were afraid. So they took the scroll to the king, Jehoiakim. When Jehoiakim heard God's Word, He interrupted the reading, took a knife, cut out the parts he didn't like, and threw them in the fire (Jer 36:23).

That was bad enough, but do you know what was worse? Do you remember what the majority of the other leaders in the room did? Nothing. Absolutely nothing. And why not? Because they feared the king more than they feared God.

It's bad to mistreat God's Word. It's just as bad to stand by idly while others do. There are people this very moment who are sitting in churches listening to ministers who are ignoring the Word of God and preaching their own opinions. And yet the people come back week after week. Why? Because they fear man more than God. They think, "This was Grandpa's church, and I can't leave it."

We need to be people like Jeremiah who fear God, and thus value the Word of God so much that it governs our personal lives in every area.

2. *The commended minister values God's Word in his pastoral life (6-7).*

In other words, he shepherds God's people by ministering God's Word to them, and does so in three ways according to verses 6-7.

**a. He speaks the truth.** We're told this regarding Levi in verse 6 (AV), "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips." A commended minister speaks the truth, the torah of truth, God's truth. In verse 7 Malachi says, "For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge..." The minister isn't to be novel, nor clever, nor innovative. His assignment is to take God's truth, speak it clearly, and guard it.

And why? Verse 7 concludes, "For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

I'm convinced if Malachi was alive today and traveled to many churches in our land, he'd say, "Ministers! Stop trying to be cutting edge. Return to the Book! People need to hear what God has said. Their souls are famished for the Word of God."

Shortly after Sherry and I were married, we began looking for a church and found a friendly small church that had lots of opportunity for us to get involved. After attending there for a couple of months, we felt like we were going to shrivel up spiritually, for we weren't receiving any spiritual nourishment there. There was no careful, biblical teaching. The pastor preached sky-scraper sermons (one story on top of another). He preached about the Bible, but he didn't preach the Bible.

I went to him one day, with respect, and shared our frustration. He said, "Oh, I tried that once (careful Bible teaching) and the people got bored with it." I don't doubt the man's sincerity, nor his friendliness. But he didn't preach the Word carefully and

precisely. We left the church and found another that taught the Word. Within a year, the church asked the pastor to leave.

Preaching is hard work. Do you know why? Because if a preacher is going to have anything to say on Sunday, he must spend much time in preparation. Men, if you aspiring to be a preacher, let me say this to you, “If you don't want to study, please stay out of the pulpit.” There are enough hungry sheep in churches today.

The commended minister speaks the truth.

**b. He lives the truth.** Verse 6 says of the commended minister, “He walked with me in peace and uprightness.” So, speaking truth, though necessary, isn't enough. God's kind of minister must do more than talk truth. He must model truth.

I can't tell you how many times (even to this day) that I find myself thinking about Pastor Dernlan (my pastor in high school and college). I ask myself, “What would he do?” It wasn't just His preaching that God used. It was his life too, all by grace.

This is basic, yet critical. If we want to be used by God as ministers, our people must *hear* the truth and *see* it.

Chuck Swindoll tells the story about a man who bought fried chicken dinners for himself and his date late one afternoon. The attendant at the fast food outlet made a big mistake, and inadvertently, instead of giving the man chicken, gave him the money bag of the day's proceeds. After driving to the picnic site, the two of them sat down to enjoy some chicken. They discovered a whole lot more than chicken--over \$800!

Guess what the man did? He put the money back in the bag, drove back to the restaurant, and returned the money. By this time, the manager was frantic. When the buyer arrived, he went to the manager and said, “I want you to know I came by to get a couple of chicken dinners and wound up with all this money here.” The manager was thrilled. He said, “Let me call the newspaper. I'm gonna have your picture put in the local paper. You're one of the most honest men I've ever heard of.” To which the man quickly responded, “Oh, no. No, no, don't do that!” Then he leaned closer and whispered, “You see, the woman I'm with is not my wife. She's, uh, somebody else's wife.”<sup>5</sup>

A little bit of honesty is dangerous. A commended minister speaks the truth and lives the truth. But there's another trait.

**c. He leads others towards the truth.** Look at the end of verse 6, “He turned many away from iniquity.” If you spend much time in the presence of God's kind of minister, this will be the effect. He will help you *turn from iniquity*. And by implication, *turn towards truth*. What a key phrase. The purpose of preaching is not mere Bible knowledge. It's changed lives. A commended minister calls people to turn from sin (repent), and to turn to the truth.

May I speak plainly? My aim when I preach God's Word is not to please you, but to please Him. And to do He says that I must teach you His truth (not my opinions) in a way that will change your life and mine. And here's my confession. I can't fulfill that task in my strength. I need Him to do a work in me, and in you. This is why prayer is essential. Would you pray fervently for this ministry of the Word in this church, that it will result in changed lives to the glory of God?

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<sup>5</sup> Taken from Charles Swindoll, *Growing Deep...*



**B. The Lord identifies the minister He condemns (8-9).** Not surprisingly, he's just the opposite of the minister God commends. Listen to the description of the priests in verses 8-9. "But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts,<sup>9</sup> and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction."

Malachi gives us three characteristics of the minister that God condemns.

1. *He lives an inconsistent life.* In verse 8 Malachi says to the ministers of his day, "But you have turned aside from the way." This would indicate they knew the way, had perhaps taught the way and even walked in the way at one time. But then they had turned from it. Their lifestyle was no longer consistent with their lip-style.

That's a violation of fiduciary responsibility, says Malachi. And so is this.

2. *He speaks partial truth.* It doesn't take long for a minister to find out what an audience *wants* to hear, whether that's a Sunday School class, or a youth group, or a church, or even a nation like Israel. In fact, this was the mark of the priests in Malachi's day. Verse 8 says, "You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts." And in verse 9, you "show partiality in your instruction."

Ministers don't leap into heresy. They skip into it with small steps. They say true things, but they're selective preachers. They show "partiality". Literally, they were not "lifting up faces" in the teaching of Torah.

Commentator A. E. Hill explains:

The priests have not only failed to obey God's law, but they have also been derelict in 'raising faces' in the Torah: that is, they have neglected to demonstrate the grace of kindness and fairness in their administration of the rules of Torah.

The construction may form a type of envelope for the second disputation with the rhetorical question posed in 1:8: 'Will he [i.e. God] lift up your face?' The prophet concludes his second sermon by answering that very question, as the priests are not lifting up the faces of the people in Torah. How ridiculous to suppose that the priesthood might expect God to grant them favour when they could not reciprocate in kind to the very people they were commissioned to serve!<sup>6</sup>

We can show partiality in a couple of ways. One is by neglecting passages. The other is by neglecting the intent of passages.

Regarding the first, be on guard when you hear a minister constantly talking about his pet peeves (like eschatology, or separation, or freedom, or any other biblical truth to the neglect of the whole). Paul said, "I did not shrink back from declaring to you the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)."

Regarding the second, be on guard when a minister neglects, not just passages, but the God-given intent of passages. This is what the priests were doing. They used the Torah, sure, but apparently either to brow beat their people, or control them, or something else. But what they failed to do was *raise faces* and bring hope to their spiritually hungry and hurting people.

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<sup>6</sup> Hill, A. E. (2012). [Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi: An Introduction and Commentary](#) (D. G. Firth, Ed.; Vol. 28, pp. 314-315). Inter-Varsity Press.

When we preach a text, fellow ministers, we must always take people to Christ and greater Christlikeness, or we've missed the intent.

Then Malachi exposes a third characteristic of a minister who misses the mark. Not only does he live an inconsistent life, and speak partial truth, but the result of his ministry is this.

3. *He leads others away from the truth.* Verse 8 says, "You have caused many to stumble by your instruction." What a tragedy. Instead of helping people turn from their sin, these ministers caused people to stumble and remain in sin. Their teaching tripped people and caused them to fall.

Jesus pronounced woe upon ministers who did that in Matthew 18:5-6, saying, "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea."

Many years ago, I sat across the desk from a man who was living with a woman not his wife. It was hard to tell him the truth, but one of the greatest compliments I have received was when he came to me three years later and said, "Thanks for telling me the truth."

"Christ died for our sins," says the Word of God. *Sin* is our problem, beloved. We have turned from God. But Christ has come so we can be forgiven and set free. This is the minister's task, to show people there's a way out of sin and its consequences.

And so I say to you, my friend. Do you desire God's forgiveness for your sin and the free gift of eternal life? He offers it to you even now, if you are willing to repent and believe in His Beloved Son. He is the perfect minister, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give His life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45)."

Oh, that God would raise up ministers like the perfect minister, who value these two treasures. The glory of God, and the Word of God.

You say, "I agree with you, pastor, but what does this have to do with me? I'm not a priest nor a minister." I have good news for you, and it's cause for all of us to take inventory.

Take Inventory: If we know the Great High Priest, we too are priests (1 Peter 2:5).

Listen to 1 Peter 2:4-5, "As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a *holy priesthood*..."

Have you come to Christ? Then you are part of a holy priesthood. Verse 9 says it even more plainly, "But you are a chosen race, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

So this message is for all us. We don't live under the old covenant where the priesthood was restricted to the tribe of Levi. We live under the new covenant which teaches the priesthood of all believers. So, let's ask ourselves two relevant questions.

1. *Who has the Lord placed under our priestly care?* Are you a parent? Then your children are under your priestly care. Are you a grandparent? Then your grandchildren are under your priestly care. Do you teach a Sunday School class? Do you

have a position of service in our children's ministries? Then once again, you have a priestly stewardship. The Lord has placed people under your care.

Do you own a business? Do you coach a ball team? Are you a school teacher? A neighbor? Again, these positions are entrusted to you by God. He desires to use you to make His name great in the lives of the people under your influence.

2. *What is the Lord's assessment of our priestly ministry?* We've just seen what He commends, ministers who value His glory and His Word, who do so in their personal and pastoral life, who speak the truth, live the truth, and lead others towards the truth of His Word. Is that what our children are seeing, and others under our care? And to the degree it's not, let's ask the LORD of hosts for help today.

**Closing Song:** #441 "*Take Time to Be Holy*" (all four verses)

**Closing charge:** Let the redeemed of the Lord...SAY SO.

Community Group Discussion:

1. Today we are continuing our series in Malachi, "*Great Among the Nations*". What do we know about Malachi? When did he minister? What kind of message did he deliver in this book, and why?
2. This morning, we focused on Malachi 2:1-9. Take time to re-read the passage. What effect does Malachi's message have on you when you hear it? How does it make you feel? What thoughts come to mind? What questions?
3. According to verses 1-3, the priests in Malachi's day were dishonoring God's name. How so?
4. In verses 4-7, the priests were instructed to think about Israel's first priest, Levi. What was true of Levi's ministry? What does Levi teach us about ministry that pleases God?
5. If we know Christ, we too are priests. Who has the Lord placed under our priestly care? What are some practical things we can do this week so that God's name will be great in their lives.
6. How does the book of Malachi point us to Christ? After discussing, spend time as a group offering prayers of adoration, confession, and petition.