

- As we noted last time, the prophet Malachi is the author, the date of writing is around 460 BC or so, and this book closes the OT canon...it is God's final word to his people before the coming of the Messiah, preceded by the forerunner, both prophesied in this book...the primary theme of the book is a challenge from God to his people regarding their broken relationship with him...they were guilty of dishonoring and disregarding their God in many ways, including worship, marriage within the covenant community, stewardship, and the coming day of the Lord...and the prophecy also gave them a divine mirror to reveal to them their own sin, so they might forsake it and return to a right relationship with God...the setting is Jerusalem in the region of Judah, as the people, the exiles who had returned from Babylon more than seventy years before, were trying to rebuild their lives back in their land...this period was just before Ezra and Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem, but at the moment, all of Judah remained under the control of the Medo-Persian empire...it was a difficult time for God's people...
- As to its structure, Malachi is unique...almost all the content is a series of six short dialogues between Yahweh and some or all of his people...this form of literature is called a "disputation" – Malachi records these short "disputes" from 1.2 to 4.3 in a series of statements or responses from Yahweh, and questions from the people...you can tell that the chapter breaks aren't placed according to the content...I've grouped the text into four parts, which we'll cover on these dates...let's get started!

### **Disputation #2: 1.6 through 2.9**

- Having been challenged by the Jews' disbelief of his love for them, God speaks again, this time to the priests of Judah...

- Let's keep the context in mind...God just affirmed his pledge of covenantal love to Israel, despite their skepticism...he follows that pledge with pointed criticism of how they are responding to his loving grace and mercy...

### “Where is my honor?”

- Yahweh begins by questioning Israel...
 

<sup>6</sup>**“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ <sup>7</sup> By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the Lord's table may be despised.** <sup>8</sup> When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts. <sup>9</sup> And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts.
- In the OT, Israel related to their God through the ministry of Moses and Aaron...God gave the Law through Moses and the institution of the priesthood through Aaron...and in **Exodus 19.5-6**, God says, <sup>5</sup>**Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; <sup>6</sup>and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.** ...essential to the eventual fulfillment of this promise is the Levitical priesthood...
- But sadly, as sinful men, the priests of the line of Levi did not always rise to the high standards expected of godly priests...and by the time of Malachi, God had had enough...
- God was father to Israel, as noted in **Isaiah 64.8**, and God was their master, as he says in **Leviticus 25.55**, yet they did not honor nor fear him...

- The priests' problem wasn't ritual, it was their hearts...they had lost their sense of the honor and fear they rightfully owed to their covenant God...they no longer respected and valued him...they treated him lightly, and that internal heart sin was expressed in their administration of Temple worship...
- In fact, they, as God said, despised His name...this was the cause; the effect was the polluted and sinfully inadequate offerings the priests made on the Lord's altar...they permitted, or perhaps encouraged, the sacrifice of animals prohibited by the Levitical law...blind, lame, or diseased animals were regularly offered to God, while the owners kept the best animals for themselves...these defiled offerings showed the state of the hearts of both the priests and the people...they no longer loved or even respected their God...
- To make the point, God challenged the people: try this with your Persian governor and see if he will accept the offerings you're giving me...the obvious answer is certainly not...no governor would accept a request accompanied by an offering of a sick sheep or goat...

### God's Challenge

- Now comes one of the most surprising statements in Scripture...  
<sup>10</sup> **Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.** <sup>11</sup> **For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.**
- The Lord says that he would prefer that one brave and honest soul would shut the doors of the Temple and simply stop the "vain" and useless worship rituals...in fact, to put it in more human terms, the whole thing was infuriating and an insult to him...he no longer had

pleasure in their worship, because not only was it offensive due to the wretched sacrifices, but even more so because of the detestable hearts of the priests overseeing them...God made it clear that such futile attempts at ritualistic "worship" are unacceptable...

- Then the Lord resets our priorities from the meaningless things we value to what really matters...<sup>11</sup> **For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations...**...from east to west, in all places and times, pure incense will be burned, pure offerings given, and God's name will be glorified...it echoes verse 5: <sup>5</sup> **Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!"**
- Verse 12 continues the Lord's correction...  
<sup>12</sup> **But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food, may be despised.** <sup>13</sup> **But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord.** <sup>14</sup> **Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.**
- The priests "profane" the Lord's table, a serious charge...our English word is derived from the Latin "profanus" meaning "outside the temple"...in other words, the priests were treating the Lord's table as common, not sacred...
- The irreverent and uncaring attitude of the priests even spills out in their speech...while they're polluting the Lord's table, they're complaining...sighing, moaning, groaning, "oh, how weary this is!" ...what a drag to worship the Lord, to follow his law, to lead the people in praise...instead of worship and praise bringing life to the priests and the people, the priests are bitter about their work, as if it's just a job, and an unwanted job, at that...

- The phrase, "snort at it" also tells us quite a lot...it means to blow air from the nose, but over time it became a figure of speech meaning to put into a rage, to make angry, and to undervalue something...here, the act of worship causes this strange combination of anger and disdain to well up in the priests' hearts...
- And God pronounces a curse upon those who say they will obey the requirements of the law but then sacrifice an animal that is diseased or crippled while keeping a better animal for themselves...and he repeats his declaration from earlier, but with a change... **For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.** It's clear the priests, and likely the people as well, did not honor God, but it's even more shocking that neither did they fear him...Richard Taylor quotes Eichrodt when he says, "although the fear of God does not involve 'a naked feeling of terror,' the term 'reverence' alone "may be too refined to keep one aware of the intended element of inward terror."<sup>1</sup> In our relationship with God, there should be a fair-sized dose of terror...
- In the C.S. Lewis epic, the Chronicles of Narnia, one conversation about Aslan, the lion who is the Christ-figure, helps to illustrate: "Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."
- We must honor God...but we must also certainly fear him...

### Two Examples

- Having castigated the priests for their casual and careless service to their God, the Lord follows the disputation by giving Malachi a good example surrounded by a curse and an indictment...

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<sup>1</sup> Richard A. Taylor and E. Ray Clendenen, [Haggai, Malachi](#), vol. 21A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2004), 264.

<sup>1</sup> **“And now, O priests, this command is for you. <sup>2</sup> 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. <sup>3</sup> 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.**

- He curses the priests for their superficial, sinful service...God will curse even the blessings given by the priests to the people... Why? Because the priests weren't paying attention to the Lord's correction...God's patience has finally come to an end, and he names a judgment as shameful as it was inescapable, and poetic in its application...the Lord will cause the priests to suffer the humiliation of being smeared with, completely identified with, the dung of their offerings, and thrown out with it...fecal matter would be bad enough, but the primary meaning of this word is actually “offal,” which means the unclean internal organs of the sacrificial animal, their intestines and everything inside them...these parts of the sacrifices were thrown outside the camp...what the Lord is saying is that the priests were to be dishonored by their own sacrifices as they had dishonored the Lord...those who should have been clean would be the most awful kind of unclean...
- And the priests not only ignored the Lord's command, but also the good example of their ancestor, Levi...

<sup>4</sup> **So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. <sup>5</sup> 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.**

- What makes a good priest? Or in our day, a good preacher, teacher, and pastor? Let's see Levi as the good example Malachi says he is...
  - He feared God...Levi understood who God was, the Almighty, the great God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, the King...and Levi rightly responded to God's glory: he stood in awe...
  - He spoke truth...Levi gave the people true instruction, giving the law but also the spirit of it...he was no false prophet or false teacher, but lived and spoke the truth...
  - He spoke no wrong...Levi was careful to stay inside the word, not to add nor to delete from what God said...
  - He walked with God...Levi wasn't just a good priest, he was a good man...he understood that there are two requirements: one must be a faithful teacher of God's word, and one must faithfully practice it himself...
  - He had a redeeming impact on others...by his authentic teaching, others were brought to faith or closer to the Lord...
  - He guarded the word...he treated it as precious, of inestimable value, and dedicated his life to accurately handling the word of truth, so that people would gain instruction from hearing it...
  - He understood his role...Levi knew he didn't need to get too cute or clever with God's word, he only had to proclaim it...his job was to be a messenger...not to originate the word, but to speak it for the Lord...
- That's being a good minister of the gospel...but that isn't what the priests did...
 

**<sup>8</sup>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."**

- Instead of walking in wisdom, these priests turned aside from the way...instead of people gaining understanding from listening to them, the people stumbled...these priests were both corrupted and corruptors, so God rightly judged them...as they abased the people with their false teaching, showed partiality, and disobeyed God's law, so they themselves would be abased...

### Disputation #3: 2.10-16

- All of that was just the second disputation...now we come to the third disputation... the Lord identifies two specific ways that the people have violated his instruction...
- First, the people have broken God's command forbidding Jewish men from marrying foreign, non-Jewish women...

**<sup>10</sup> Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? <sup>11</sup> Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!**

- This prohibition against intermarriage between the people of Israel and the people of the surrounding nations was clear from **Deuteronomy 7.1-4** because of the negative effect of those illicit relationships on the spiritual purity of the nation...nevertheless, King Solomon was guilty of that sin, as were the leaders of Judah in Malachi's day, and extending into the period of Ezra and Nehemiah (**Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 13**)...
- Why was this practice important enough to the Lord to forbid it? He explains in verses 3 and 4...<sup>3</sup> **You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons,** <sup>4</sup> **for they would turn away your sons from following me, to**

**serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you, and he would destroy you quickly.** ...it was intended to prevent idolatry...

- There is a parallel NT passage expressing the same truth of covenant fidelity...**II Corinthians 6.14...**<sup>14</sup> **Do not be unequally yoked with (or bound together with) unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?** ...Moses and Paul are saying a similar thing: believers and unbelievers should not be bound together...it's true in marriage and also in other close relationships...a Christian should cultivate relationships with unbelievers through which the gospel can be presented, but be very careful about close, especially binding, relationships with those who do not know Jesus...when we examine the impact on marriage, children, and our own walks of faith, we'll see the truth of God's word here...
- The second specific sin is in verses 13 through 16...  
<sup>13</sup> **And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.** <sup>14</sup> **But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was 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.** <sup>15</sup> **Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth.** <sup>16</sup> **"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. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."**
- The first problem was wrongful spiritual intermarriage...the second is the wrongful dissolution of marriages within the covenant community...

- The Lord makes clear the link between this violation of His Law and its impact on the spiritual life of the nation, and the men of Israel were guilty...God witnessed the faithlessness of the Jewish men and identified it as the cause of the problem...they had ignored their responsibilities to their wives, even to the point of divorce, evidently for false or insufficient reasons...it mattered not just for the families, but for the health of the nation, for the failure of these marriages within the community tore at the very fabric of Israel...
- The OT law regarding most divorces is in **Deuteronomy 24.1-4**, and it's from that context, and **Genesis 2**, that Jesus speaks in **Matthew 19.3-9**... <sup>3</sup> **And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?"** <sup>4</sup> **He answered, "Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female,** <sup>5</sup> **and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?** <sup>6</sup> **So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."** <sup>7</sup> **They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?"** <sup>8</sup> **He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so.** <sup>9</sup> **And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery."**  
His teaching sets the standard for the NT church...and Paul adds another nuance in **I Corinthians 7.10-13, 15** on the issue of abandonment...<sup>10</sup> **To the married I give this charge (not I, but the Lord): the wife should not separate from her husband** <sup>11</sup> **(but if she does, she should remain unmarried or else be reconciled to her husband), and the husband should not divorce his wife.** <sup>12</sup> **To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever, and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her.** <sup>13</sup> **If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her,**

**she should not divorce him. ...<sup>15</sup> But if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases the brother or sister is not enslaved. God has called you to peace.**

- While the teaching is fairly straightforward, applying it can be challenging...there is always some complexity, and we all stand in need of grace and mercy...obviously, a complete treatment of this topic isn't possible tonight, but the text in Malachi is a vivid reminder: God's people are always called to faithfulness and fidelity in marriage within the covenant community...

### Application

- There's a lot to apply here...
- Remember the priests who despised God's name? The problem wasn't so much what they did, it was their heart...a heart that refused to sacrifice, that tried to do the minimum possible, that found joy in everything else except God...like the priests, probably, we would all say "no, that's not me...I love the Lord" ...but where are our hearts? ...what if:
  - We evaluate the opportunity to go on a missions trip not by how much good we can do, but by how much it will cost, or how much of our vacation time it will take...
  - We reduce our giving to the church so we can maximize our retirement savings...
  - We find more joy and excitement in going to a concert or sports contest than in gathering to worship...
  - We pass on opportunities to serve others in order to sleep in on the weekend...
  - We inwardly sigh and wonder if all our efforts to serve the Lord are worth it...
- Maybe it's just me who was convicted by the Lord's rebuke of people who give less than their best...but I don't think so...

- Let's also think about our own role as priests...for I Peter 2.4-5 says, <sup>4</sup>**As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious,** <sup>5</sup>**you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.**
- What spiritual sacrifices should we offer to God?
  - Our bodies...Romans 12.1 **I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.**
  - Our praise...Hebrews 13.15...<sup>15</sup> **Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.**
  - Our good works...Hebrews 13.16...<sup>16</sup> **Do not neglect to do good...**and Paul would add in Galatians 6.10, <sup>10</sup> **So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.**
  - Our gifts to others...Hebrews 13.16... **"...and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.**
- In short, we offer ourselves: bodies, hearts, minds, thoughts, actions, attitudes, words...everything we have, everything we are, to him and for him...
- In that way, we will both honor and fear God, remaining faithful to Him and to His call...

Close in prayer – final song – benediction: **Numbers 6.24-26** <sup>24</sup>**The Lord bless you and keep you;** <sup>25</sup>**the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;** <sup>26</sup>**the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.**