

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Malachi 2:1-9

Introduction.

I have already said that one of the reasons I decided to slow down and preach through Malachi is that it's a mirror of our age, of these times we live in. Nothing mirrors our day like the unfaithfulness of pastors and spiritual leaders.

Last week in Malachi 1:6-14 we read that the priests were rebuked for their practices, in this text they are rebuked for their preaching. Before it was how they handled the sacrifices, now it's for how they handled the Scriptures. Before they were trivializing the people's offerings, now they are trivializing the truth.

2:1 “And now, O priests, this command is for you.”

Malachi 2:1, “And now, O priests, this command is for you.” Then in verse 4, 5 and 8 he refers to a covenant with Levi. These are OT things we are unfamiliar with, so a little background is in order.

Moses and Aaron were brothers of the tribe of Levi. Moses was the leader of the people and God made Aaron and his sons to be the first priests. Let me relate two stories from the early days of the priesthood.

First, following the Golden Calf incident:

Exodus 32:25-29 When Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), 26 then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, “Who is on the Lord's side? Come to me.” And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. 27 And he said to them, “Thus says the Lord God of Israel, ‘Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.’” 28 And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. 29 And Moses said, “***Today you have been ordained for the service of the Lord***, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, ***so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day.***”

Then later after another terrible slide into iniquity and sexual immorality, Phinehas, out of jealousy for God's honor and glory took matters into his own hands and stopped a wicked deed by killing an immoral couple.

Numbers 25:10-13 And the Lord said to Moses, 11 “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, son of Aaron the priest, has turned back my wrath from the people of Israel, in that he was jealous with my jealousy among them, so that I did not consume the people of Israel in my jealousy. 12 Therefore say, ‘Behold, ***I give to him my covenant of peace, 13 and it shall be to him and to his descendants after him the covenant of a perpetual priesthood***, because he was jealous for his God and made atonement for the people of Israel.’”

Hear again how close this sounds to Malachi 2:5-6:

Malachi 2:5-6 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. 6 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.

Phinehas was jealous for God and God's name and God's honor. He held God in reverential awe and he turned back iniquity.

To Aaron and his sons and all the priests and Levites that followed God gave the Aaronic Blessing, the priestly blessing.

Numbers 6:22-27 The Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 23 "Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them, 24 The Lord bless you and keep you; 25 the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. 27 "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them."

What happens when a people become bored with their blessings and begin to take them for granted and maybe even despise them. What happens when a people lose their fear of the Lord?

Can we imagine a time when the Lord turns our blessings into curses? It's painful enough when God removes His blessing, but how much worse when He turns our blessings into curses? What happens when the ones who lead this rebellion and rejection are the priests, the ones entrusted with the covenant and the covenant blessings?

The covenant is one of God's greatest blessings with His people. It's a gift of supreme value. The priests had been charged to preach and teach God's covenant faithfully to the people and see that it was passed on from generation to generation.

They were charged with the responsibility of calling the people to orthodoxy and for maintaining that orthodoxy. They were to watch their life and doctrine and call others to do the same.

The role and responsibility of the priest was to be a guardian and proclaimer of the truth of the glory of God committed and safeguarded to him.

The two central callings of an OT priest and a NT pastor.

I am leaving aside the OT priestly responsibility for the sacrifices which is fulfilled by Christ (see Hebrews 7:23-25 and 9:11-12).

First, the Glory of God.

Malachi 2:2 ... take it to heart to give honor to my name...

In the OT the priests handled the things related to the tabernacle/temple, and safeguarded the glory of God associated with the tabernacle. In the NT a faithful pastor must have a whole

hearted desire for the honor, respect, reputation, and status of God, or in a word, to safeguard, promote and declare the *glory* of God.

True knowledge of God begins with a reverential awe, a holy fear, a glimpse of God's great glory. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Psalm 111:10).

The chief end of every pastor is to glorify God and enjoy Him and to call the people to do the same. This should be laid on a pastor's heart and this he should lay on the people's hearts. To glorify is to supremely value, as a precious treasure.

Failure to do this leads to disaster as we see Malachi 2:2-3.

The priests failed to honor God and to glorify God. They failed to seek and listen to God, to put God first. The test of this for us is does the pastor take this to heart? Does He strive to see God increase and himself decrease? Does he want this more than he wants anything else? Does He point to God in everything and give God all the credit and all the glory?

God's curse and punishment is meant to drive us back to our purpose.

Second, the Word of God.

Reverence for God is shown through meticulous study and attention to the Word of God and careful exposition of it. The pastor must not only know the Word of God but live by it. He must walk with God (vs. 6). He must have a personal commitment to the truth of God's Word.

This is why I declare regularly my fundamental understanding and commitment that the Bible is the true, eternal, holy, unchangeable, trustworthy, infallible, inerrant Word of the living God. This truth is true for all people in all times and in all places in every circumstance.

My role and responsibility and calling is to preach the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Furthermore, the pastor must be an influence for good, turning many from iniquity and to holiness.

If my preaching only makes you feel good then I have failed and am unfaithful. If my preaching only makes you comfortable then I have fallen short of the mark. If my preaching only earns me praise and nice complements, I have not honored my calling.

My preaching in order to be faithful must call you out of iniquity and out of sin. It must call you to repentance and to turn away from evil and immorality.

Failure to do this leads to disaster as we see in Malachi 2:8-9.

Malachi 2:8-9 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, 9 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.

Verses 8-9 show how far the current priests had fallen from the standard, how far short of the mark they had fallen. The failure was in their personal lives and it reflected in the lives of those they lead.

They had turned aside from the way and caused others to stumble. No wonder James warns of the danger of being a teacher, of being in a position of influence and causing others to stumble.

They are blind guides. Jesus warns of this in the NT church. He calls them false shepherds, false pastors, wolves in sheep's clothing.

Matthew 7:15-16 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits.

Matthew 24:24-25 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. 25 See, I have told you beforehand.

Acts 20:28 Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. 29 I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; 30 and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. 31 Therefore be alert ...

II Timothy 4:3-4 For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, 4 and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

The true shepherd/pastor is not a speculator, inventing new truths and new doctrines. The preacher is not an editor, cutting and pasting as he pleases. A preacher is like a steward, taking care of what has been entrusted to him. He is only free to say what it says.

II Timothy 4:1-2 I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.

Application and conclusion.

Why should you care about a sermon about pastors? Isn't this a text really just for pastors? You should care for at least three reasons.

First, without a shepherd the sheep are scattered. Jesus wept over the issue of shepherds and pastoral leadership.

Mark 6:34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And he began to teach them many things.

Your spiritual well-being depends on having a faithful shepherd over the flock. The future of this flock depends on it.

Second, I will not always be your pastor, and you need to have a clear understanding of what a pastor is called to do and you need to be discerning in choosing a good pastor.

You need to be able to ask the right questions to get to the heart of the pastor. You need to get to the heart of his personal and moral life and his doctrinal and theological life. Is the glory of God

supreme to Him? Does He affirm and uphold and preach the absolute authority of the Word of God in all areas of life? Does he show his submission to the Word in what it teaches about creation, the order of the sexes, sexual morality, marriage, sanctity of human life?

You have to know his commitment to the glory of God and the Word of God.

Third, you should be more aware of the dangers that face pastors from the temptations of Satan and the world. Just look at how bad it was in Malachi's day.

You should be more intentional in your prayers for pastors. I am not immune, Satan is a very great enemy and I am vulnerable to His attack. It's unrelenting, and without your prayers I am especially vulnerable. I need your prayers. You need to know how strongly Satan targets the shepherds. If He can take down the shepherd, He can scatter the flock.

Are unfaithful pastors a problem only in Malachi's day? Is it a problem today? Is it uncouth to even ask the question? The moral and doctrinal failures in the pastorate today are epidemic.

It's not hard at all today to find pastors and preachers, even famous ones who are unfaithful in the high calling of being a pastor.

There are many pastors in many churches who deny the inspiration and authority of the Word of God. There are many who deny the fully deity of Jesus Christ. There are many who deny the Trinity. There are those who deny the existence of hell or that anyone goes there. There are those who deny that Jesus Christ is the only Savior from sin and the only one through whom we go to the Father. There are many who actively practice sinful lifestyles, or live double lives.

But so far I have only named those who would be considered by modern terms as liberal. The problem is broader and deeper and worse than that.

Paul urges the elders in Ephesus of the twin duties of a spiritual leader, watch your life and your doctrine closely. Paul reminds Timothy of the same two-fold responsibility of spiritual leaders, personal piety and faithfulness in teaching.

I Timothy 4:12-13 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

How many of us who are spiritual leaders live up to the standard? How many of us fall short of the high calling? How many of us say one thing and do another?

Pray for your pastor, pray for the pastors in Lynden, pray for faithful pastors to not shrink back from the task. Pray God will make those He has called faithful and pray that the message God speaks through them may be heard and followed. Nothing discourages a pastor so much as closed ears and hard hearts.

II Thessalonians 1:11 To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power, 12 so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.