

Malachi 2:1-8 A Man Reaps What He Sows!

In our last look at Malachi 1:10-14 'It's All About The Heart; and Useless Fires,' we saw that God was telling His ungrateful people that enough is enough. Their outward forms of empty hearted religious practises meant nothing to Him, and were also doing them no good! He says in v10 "O that one of you would shut the temple doors." There was a lot of stuff being done, supposedly, in the Name and worship of God, but it all added up to nothing! Unless in our hearts and in our mind's eye we have come to the foot of Christ's Cross, and witnessed the pain and suffering which our sin has caused, then all of the stuff which we supposedly do in Christ's Name is just stuff, and God doesn't need our stuff, He has enough stuff of His own.

Changed hearts and lives are what God has always been looking for from His people! Remember in Zechariah 3:1-4, Joshua the high priest looked filthy on the outside but was pure of heart, by God's grace, on the inside. Whereas the priests and people in Malachi's day were the opposite. From the outside looking in all was well, but 1 Samuel 16:7 "For the Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looked the heart", "O that one of you would shut the doors so that you would not light useless fires upon my altar." Far from doing the people any good, those robot-like religious practises were actually bringing God's condemnation down upon their heads!

Friends, we cannot have Christ's cross on our own terms. It just doesn't work that way. The Jews believed that because of their ancestry and their history, that they had exclusive rights, and even ownership, of God; but they were wrong. V11 "My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun in every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name." He was talking about the true church. Not the church in name only but the church in both heart and soul! Matthew 28:19 "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." Malachi 1:11 "My name will be great among the nations." V14 "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord." So your time, your efforts, your commitments, your finances, and all of your offerings are between you and God. The question is, are those investments in your eternal life real? And are those commitments worthy of the Name which we would carry to the perishing world around us?

Well, so to today's text. Malachi 2:1-8 'A Man Reaps What He Sows!' V1 "And now this admonition is for you O priests." So where did the problem lie? As we saw throughout chapter one this was a case in a sense, of "the blind leading the blind." But do you see? It was even worse than that, because these leaders, (these priests) although their actions may have stated otherwise, they were not blind, they were derelict and apathetic in duties! Do you see? They had most if not all of the Old Testament. So all of God's instructions from Genesis to Zechariah: yes they had it all. Yet what's important here's what they did with it, or perhaps better put, what they didn't do with it. Yes they had all of the head knowledge, or all of the information about God, and yet it had never permeated their hearts. It is clear then, as we talk in chapter that they were priests in name only, in reality they were just glorified butchers. And instead of being those guiding lights of God to His people, they were leading them down the roads of apathy, half-heartedness and legalism. Doing that which the laws required, (while like themselves) those same things had never penetrated their hearts!

In Isaiah 29:13-16 we read: "The Lord says, "These people come near to me with their mouth and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of

rules taught by men. Therefore once more I will astound these people with wonder upon wonder, the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish. Woe to those who go to great depths to hide their plans from the Lord, who do their work in darkness and think, who sees us? Who will know? You turn things upside down, as if the Potter were thought to be like the clay. Should what is formed say to him who formed it, he did not make me? Can the pot say of the Potter, he knows nothing?"

Verse 13 of Isaiah 29: "The Lord says these people come near me with their mouths and honour me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men." But in light of chapter one v2 of Malachi, "I have loved you," says the Lord," and as we saw that "Love" was an all-encompassing "Love," and God's evidence, or proof of that "Love," was expressed in this simple truth, that He chose them while rejecting others. And yet those ones which He had chosen, (as we have seen before) we're all about outward appearances. And in Isaiah in verse 13 of Chapter 29, He is addressing their acts of worship and devotion or the lack thereof. And I guess similarly, much of which does go on today throughout Christendom! Because looking from a purely human perspective, from the outside looking in as it were, all looks good and exciting. In many places there are big crowds and much noise, but I wonder how much of it is of the heart? Well only God knows! And as in Isaiah and Malachi's day, He does know brothers and sisters! And remember, God is condemning chiefly the priests; those religiously privileged ones!

But Luke 12:48b says, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded, and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." and Beloved here is the thing, we today in our modern world "have been given much" from God. Even the complete revelation of Himself to mankind, His Word the Bible. So "we are without excuse." So again, making a show of being a Christian will not get you into heaven! Look at the way God speaks in v2. He starts saying something to the priests and yet in the same breath it's as though he says, *'But it's all too late for that now anyway. Because I have already acted in this matter. If you do not listen, and if you do not set your hearts 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."

Friends can you see? God is saying that it's already too late. *'Your actions have moved My Hand. If you think that I will put up with such things forever think again. Your lip service O priest means nothing to Me and furthermore, because of your leadership, (or the lack thereof) the people are lost and suffering! Do you think that I am hard of hearing? Do you think that I am blind and do not see? You pronounce a blessing on the people, (even as though you had it in your own power to do so) and yet your words are as poison, even as a curse upon their heads.* And of course in Jesus' day, He called them "blind guides." A "brood of Vipers." "Hypocrites." "Whitewashed tombs" "Snakes" And yet again we see that religiousness is not what God is looking for from us, no. It is simply heartfelt devotion! God is saying to them; *'This is how much of a blessing you are to your people.'* V3 "Because of you I will rebuke (and another translation is I will cut off, meaning cut off from the land of the living) yes because of you I will cut off from the land of the living your descendants." So those priests then, are the very reason why their descendants in a real sense, are being rejected by God!

And now He gets really personal with them. "I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices and you will be carried off. And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the Lord almighty." *'Do you even remember your duty?'* God is saying to them. *Do you remember those ordinances of sacrifices which have been handed down to you from Levi the father of your priesthood?*

Friends, we read in Leviticus 4:7-12 "The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns all of the altar of fragrant incense that is before the Lord in the tent of meeting. The rest of the bull's blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering at the entrance to the tent of meeting. He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering, the fat that covers the inner parts or is connected to them, the kidneys with the fat on them and the loins, and the covering of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys, just as the fat is removed from the ox sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as their head and legs, the inner parts and offal, that is, all the rest of the bull, he must take outside the camp to a place ceremonially clean, where the ashes are thrown, and burn it in a wood fire on the ash heap."

So that is what the priest was supposed to do, (when he had done something which he shouldn't have, or not done something which he should have) which caused the people as a whole to sin. But so far from that have they wandered, yes so far from God's original covenant with their ancestor Levi have they come. That instead of just the rest of the sacrificial animal being carried out to that place of disposal by burning, the priests themselves would also be carried out, and even have those parts of the animal which were to be disposed of, (those least desirable pieces such as the offal) spread on their faces as a crystal clear declaration by God, of His utter disapproval and contempt, for the hypocrisy, of His so called priestial representatives, before His people on earth. That very same priesthood, which should have been pointing all of the people toward what Jesus, that Great High priest would go on to do. Once and for all, upon the true altar that is His Cross!

Brothers and sisters, think of the imagery here. It is very powerful and damning at the same time! Just imagine, the Pastor or visiting preacher gets up to speak, and as he does so, he literally drops dead of a heart attack. And so the people on the door rush in, pick him up, take him outside the city walls, (perhaps to Ulladulla tip) and throw him on the smouldering fires while placing the end trails of some dead animal on his face, and then setting it all alight! What a message it would be to all of the people in the church. But in Israel, (the chosen people of God) what a clear message this would be of His displeasure and eventual rejection of them on the whole. So what do we learn from this? Well simply, to take the mercy of God for granted, and to treat Him as some long lost distant relative whom we call upon only when we absolutely need him, because we are in dire straits and because we have nowhere else to turn to. And the rest of the time, we are like those who gossip and slander that same relative by our words and actions, will have dire and eternal consequences!

Galatians 6:7-8 "Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature from that nature will reap destruction, the one who sows to please the spirit, from the Spirit will receive eternal life." So as the old Christian handout used to say, there are only two ways to live. Look at what God says of the great ancestry of the Levites. Malachi 2:5-6 "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him, this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin."

And where did this "covenant of life and peace" receive its confirmation? Well it was after an act of absolute devotion to God, forsaking all else for Him! In Exodus 32:25-29 we read "Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies. So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, 'Whoever is for the Lord, come to me. And all the Levites rallied to him. Then he said to them, "This is what the Lord the God of Israel says, "Each man strap a sword to his side, go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbour." The Levites did as Moses

commanded, and that day about 3000 of the people died. Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and He has blessed you this day."

So this was the foundational act upon which the priesthood was built. "This called for reverence and he revered my name." Yes Reverence. It seems to be another one of those words among Christian circles which has been lost in our modern times, along with Sin, Judgement, Hell, and "the Fear of the Lord." To revere. To stand in awe of. To hold that person as far above us. Above all things, places and people! In Philippians 2:5-11 we read, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Who, being in the very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death even death on a cross. Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the father" Amen!

Can you see? This is what those descendants of Levi did. Now obviously they didn't see this picture of Jesus as we've just read in Philippians but nonetheless, it is as though they did. Because that is how they responded. They put everything and everyone, including themselves behind them, and God in front of them, regardless of the consequences! No they didn't care what people thought of them, they only cared what God thought of them. They put all pride, vanity and self-serving aside, to give themselves to a total devotion of God. In Joshua 24, when renewing the covenant between the people and God, Joshua said them to them, 'It's time to choose, who's people will you be? Will you worship other gods as your forefathers did before we crossed the Jordan? Will you worship the gods of the nations whose land you are about to enter? Well you must decide now, what you are going to do. "But as for me and my household we will serve the Lord." Joshua 1:16 "Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other gods."

And they would actually go on to declare God's great miracles and mercies to them and yet now, here in Malachi, after 1000 years of the Patience and Providence of God since Joshua's day, it's all falling apart. Just as the Lord said in Isaiah it's all lip service. *Their worship me of me is just about going through the motions. You O priest should know that your father Levi was never like that. Because his service of me came from the heart!* V6 "True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips." 'What a contrast there is between him and you,' God is saying to them. 'What your ancestor spoke of Me was true. He did what My Word called for. True integrity was on his lips. "He walked with me in peace and uprightness and turned many from sin."

Brothers and sisters, what should our goal be? Firstly to live as God calls us to live by abiding in His Word the Bible and next, to serve, to minister for Him, yes to make known His goodness even to our whole world and in doing so, to "turn many from sin." 1 Peter 1:9 "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." See the words? "But you are a chosen people a royal priesthood." All Christians are part of that "royal priesthood." Jesus has made us so. It's no longer about butchering animals in service to God, it's all about serving Him within the ministering of our life and using it as an offering. And the making of Him known, as we take His Word to those around us!

Look at v7 "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty." Yes this is what those priests were called to and yet their mouths and lives were full of contradiction and hypocrisy. And far from

preserving the knowledge and instruction of God, when the people came and looked to them, they went away more confused and misled, than when they had sought out their guidance! So they actually caused the opposite response from the people of God than they should have. As we read in v8 "But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble, you have violated the covenant with Levi' says the Lord Almighty." So there was this sense that the priesthood had even raped, "violated" that covenant which God had made 1000 years earlier with Levi's descendants. In Malachi's day, the priest's very presence and manner in which they performed their duties, brought nothing but contempt for all who witnessed it, down upon the Name of God!

Friends have you ever been there? Knowing that your words and actions have been the cause of the Name of God being held in contempt or up for ridicule? I'm ashamed to say I have. And I don't know about you, but I do find it a terrible burden to carry at the time it happens, and were it not for God's mercy and patience, I dare say it would carry many down to the grave!

So what do we learn today? Well among other things, perhaps two main concepts. Firstly, yes God is merciful and patient with His people, with us. But that mercy and patience lasts only for a season, or a set period of time. But if we continue on in rebellion, and in effect making a mockery of that profession of faith which we make with our lips, by our actions, then in God's time, that season comes to an end. And then there is a price to pay! Galatians 6:7 "Do not be deceived, God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

And secondly 1 Peter 1:9 "We are a chosen people a royal priesthood." So the only true priesthood, which remains today is the Royal priesthood of believers! Not men dressed in long flowing gowns and wearing weird hats on their heads, swinging bowls of smoke, seeking falsely to give people absolution of sin(which of course only Jesus can do) and doing many other strange things, no. We, are all Christ's Priests. And when people look to us, or look at us, they should see Jesus reflected in us. What He has done, and what He is doing in our lives, as we are journeying by God's Grace to heaven! Yes Beloved by God's Grace, let it be that we sow unto Christ's Glory and we reap the harvest of heaven!

Let's pray!