

## Roy's sermons in Malachi Part 4

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

In our last look at Malachi chapter 1:10-14 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 verse 10 "oh that one of you would shut the temple doors."

Yes, there was a lot of stuff which was being done supposedly in the Name and worship of God, but it all added up to nothing! Because unless in our hearts and in our minds we have come to the foot of Christ's cross, and witnessed the pain and suffering which our sin 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.

No, 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. In contrast, the priests and people in Malachi's day were the opposite. From the outside looking in all was well, but 1 Samuel 16:7 says "for the Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance but the Lord looks at the heart." "Oh that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar." Yes, 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: well they were wrong. Verse 11 "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."

Verse 14: "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, yes, all of your offerings are between you and Him. 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 world around us? Or are they useless fires!!

Well, now to today's text. I've entitled this talk: 'Malachi 2:1 -8 A Man Reaps What he Sows'

Verse 1: "and now this admonition is for you O priests." So where did the problem lie? Well as we saw throughout chapter one this was a case of, in a sense, 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 suggested otherwise, they were not blind, they were just derelict and apathetic in their duties! You see, they had most, if not all, of the Old Testament: all of God's instructions from Genesis to Zechariah. Yes, they had it all. Yet the important thing is what they did with it, or perhaps better put, what they *didn't* do with it. They had all of the head knowledge, or all of the information about God, and yet it had never penetrated their hearts. It is clear then, as we saw in chapter one, 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. What I mean is, doing *things* which the laws required, whilst those same practices had never had any effect upon their own *hearts and souls!*

In Isaiah 29:13-16 we read <sup>13</sup>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. <sup>14</sup>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." <sup>15</sup>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?" <sup>16</sup>You turn things upside down, as if the potter were thought to be like the clay! Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, "You did not make me"? Can the pot say to the potter, "You know nothing"?"

Yes, verse 13 of Isaiah 29: "The Lord says these people come near to 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 this is in the context of chapter 1:2 "I have loved you says the Lord." We have seen that His love is an all-encompassing love, and God's evidence (or proof) of that love was expressed in this simple truth: that He had chosen *them* while rejecting *others*.

Yet those whom He had chosen, (as we have seen before), were all about outward appearances. Isaiah 9:13 addresses their acts of worship and devotion. Similarly, much of which does go on today throughout Christendom, looking from a purely human perspective, from the outside looking in, all looks good and exciting. In many places of worship there are big crowds and much noise being made. But the question is: how much of it is of the heart?. Only God knows. And just as in Isaiah and Malachi's day: He does know!

God is condemning chiefly the priests, those religiously privileged ones. But Luke 12:48b "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." So again, making a show of being a Christian will not get you into heaven. Look at the way God speaks in Malachi 2:2. He starts saying something to the priests and yet in the same voice it is as though He says 'but it's all too late for you anyway. I've 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 the curse up on 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 '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 priests means nothing to Me and furthermore, because of your leadership (or 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 your own hand had the power to do so), and yet your words are as poison, even as a curse upon their heads!'

Of course in Jesus' day He called them "blind guides", "a brood of Vipers", "hypocrites" and "whitewashed tombs". Yet again we see that religiousness is not what God is looking for from us. He wants simple heartfelt devotion!

In verse 3 God says to them 'this is how much of a blessing you are to your people': "because of you, I will rebuke." And in another translation it says "I will cut off", meaning to cut off from the land of the living. Yes, 'because of you I will cut your descendants off from the land of the living'. So

those priests then are the very reason why their own descendants are, in a real sense, 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. ‘Do you remember those ordinances of sacrifice which have been handed down to you from Levi, the father of your priesthood?’

Leviticus 4:7-12: <sup>7</sup>The priest shall then put some of the blood on the horns 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. <sup>8</sup>He shall remove all the fat from the bull of the sin offering—all the fat that is connected to the internal organs, <sup>9</sup>both kidneys with the fat on them near the loins, and the long lobe of the liver, which he will remove with the kidneys— <sup>10</sup>just as the fat is removed from the ox<sup>[a]</sup> sacrificed as a fellowship offering. Then the priest shall burn them on the altar of burnt offering. <sup>11</sup>But the hide of the bull and all its flesh, as well as the head and legs, the internal organs and the intestines— <sup>12</sup>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 there in a wood fire on the ash heap.”

So this 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, that the priest themselves would also be carried out. They would even have those parts of the animal which were to be disposed of, those least desirable parts, 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 who should have been pointing all the people toward what Jesus, THE Great High Priest would go on to do for Sin once and for all upon that true altar, 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 preach, and as he does so he 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 entrails of some 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 to Israel, the chosen people of God, what a clear message this would be of His displeasure and eventual rejection of them on the whole, as a nation!

So what do we learn from this? Well, simple: to take the mercy of God for granted, and to treat Him as some long lost distant relative whom we call upon only when absolutely necessary; because we are in dire straits, and because we have nowhere else to turn, 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 for us. 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 tract used to say, there are only two ways to live. For self and hell, or for Christ and heaven. Look at what God says of the great ancestry of the Levites in Malachi 2:5,6: “My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for

reference 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. Exodus 32:25-29: "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 reference and he revered my name." Yes "reverence": it seems to be another one of those words among Christian circles today which have been lost in our modern times, along with Sin, Hell, Judgement and "the fear of the Lord." To revere; to stand in awe of; to hold that One, in effect, far above all else. Above all things, above all places, above all people, indeed above all gods!

In Philippians 2:5-11 we read <sup>5</sup>Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

<sup>6</sup>Who, being in very nature<sup>[a]</sup> God,  
did not consider equality with God something to be grasped;  
<sup>7</sup>rather, he made himself nothing  
by taking the very nature<sup>[b]</sup> of a servant,  
being made in human likeness.  
<sup>8</sup>And being found in appearance as a man,  
he humbled himself  
by becoming obedient to death—  
even death on a cross!  
<sup>9</sup>Therefore God exalted him to the highest place  
and gave him the name that is above every name,  
<sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,  
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,  
<sup>11</sup>and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,  
to the glory of God the Father.

Can you see: this is what those descendants of Levi did. Now obviously they didn't see *this* picture of Jesus as we have 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! So 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 chapter 24, when renewing the covenant between the people and God, Joshua told them it was time to choose. 'Whose 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 house 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. Yet now, here in Malachi after 1000 years of the patience and providence of God

since Joshua's day, it's all falling apart! As the Lord said in Isaiah: 'It's all lip service. Their worship of Me is just about going through the motions. You O priests should know that your father Levi was never like that, because his service of me came from the heart! Malachi 1:6 "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. His heart did what My Word called for. True integrity was on his lips, true devotion was in his life.' "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 promises 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 this "Royal priesthood". Jesus has made us so. It is no longer about butchering animals in service to God, it's all about serving Him in the ministering within our life. Using our life as an offering, and making Him known, as we take His Word to those around us!

Look at verse 7: "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, the people came and looked to them, and yet went away more confused and misled than when they sought out their guidance. So they actually caused the opposite response from the people than they should have! Verse 8: "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." Yes, "you have violated", God says. So there was the sense to which the priesthood had even raped that agreement which God had made some 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 from all who witnessed it, down upon the name of God!

Friends, have you ever been there? Knowing that your words or your actions have been the cause of the Name of God being held in contempt or up to ridicule? Well, I'm ashamed to say that I have. And I don't know about you but I do find it a terrible burden to carry when it occurs. And were it not for God's Mercy and Patience, I daresay it would carry me down to the grave!

So what do we learn from these things this morning? Well, among other things perhaps these two: Firstly, God is Merciful and Patient to His People: to us. But that Mercy and Patience lasts only for a season (or a set period of time). So if we continue on in rebellion, and in effect make a mockery of that profession of faith which we make with our lips and 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 which has been proclaimed by Christ! It's not men dressed in long flowing gowns and wearing weird hats on their heads and carrying golden staffs and swinging balls of smoke in finely carved buildings. Or by doing any other strange things like eavesdropping into people's lives through confessionals, no.

We all are Christ's priests. "We are a chosen people a Royal priesthood." And when people look to, or look at us, they should see that priesthood, because they should see Jesus! What He has done. And what He continues to do in our lives, as we are journeying by God`s Grace to heaven.

Let's pray.