

SETTING YOUR HEART TO HONOR THE LORD - **Malachi 2:1-9** - "And now, O priests, this command is for you. [2] 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. [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. [4] So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. [5] 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. [7] 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. [8] 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."

We don't find it easy to admit that we're not honoring God. Leaders don't repent easily. Most of us readily admit that we all have the *potential* to not honor Him - you know, "**There, but for the grace of God go I!**" - we all know that and agree with the sentiment. But that's not the same as admitting the specific area where we're not honoring God *right now*. That's what today's passage is all about.

- 1) **FIRST, GOD GIVES A LESSON ON HOW HIS WORD IS TO BE HEARD IN THE HEART - Malachi 2:1-2** - "And now, O priests, this command is for you. [2] 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."

God goes back to the *source* of the corrupt worship. "...**You do not lay it to heart**"(2:2). The people and the *leaders* had forgotten how to *hear* God. **Malachi 2:2** - "If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name...." The second clause explains the first. Listening *means* setting my heart to honor His Name. The priests heard what God had said about worshiping Him. They had properly understood all the details of what God has revealed. They had agreed with all of it and said it was right - like we say "Amen!" But they hadn't made sure that God's Words were carried out.

- 2) **THE EFFECT OF NOT PROPERLY HEARING GOD'S WORD - Malachi 2:2-3,9** - "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. [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....2:9....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."

God underscores one of the principles of life in His kingdom. God will not allow any who profess Him to prosper indefinitely in any form of rebellion to His known will. Please understand what I'm saying, and what I'm not saying. If you've never brought your life under the umbrella of God's rule - your not making any pretense to being saved, or born again, or under the Lordship of Jesus - **there are many areas of life where you can still do quite nicely** - at least as far as life in this world is concerned. You can be moral, successful, popular, and make a lot of money. But if you are *pretending* to honor God with some or most of your life, but still cling to rebellion to His known will - and by that I mean something that He's spoken clearly to you about and wants dealt with - if *that's* the position you're in, you need to know that God will not allow you to prosper in that rebellion indefinitely.

Several different phrases are full of meaning for us. *First*, "I will curse your blessings"(2:2). And *second*, "Behold, I will rebuke your offspring...."(2:3). There are two important thoughts captured in these phrases:

- a) **First, this failure to listen deeply to God can't be whitewashed away or glossed over or ignored.** The priest tried to put a *positive message* in front of the people to keep the image shiny. Does this sound at all familiar? The priests would pronounce a blessing on the people. They did it because people *love* blessings. Cursings don't fill auditoriums or sell books. So the leaders tried in every way they could to keep the image upbeat.
- b) **Second, God says He would "rebuke their offspring"(2:3).** That word, "*offspring*", in the Hebrew is literally "*seed*" or even "*grain*". Some translations take it to mean "*seed*" like a seed of corn you would put in the ground. Others, including the NIV, take it to mean *seed like the "seed of Abraham."* So they've translated it "*descendants,*" or "*offspring.*" It's a bit of an open debate because the context doesn't really settle the issue clearly. Either way, the same point can be made. It has to do with God cutting off something that *sustains your future*.
- 3) **IN CONTRAST TO THESE PRIESTS, THE LEVITES ARE MENTIONED - Malachi 2:4-6** - "So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts. [5] 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."

Why did God entrust this priestly ministry to the Levites? What was so special about them?

Exodus 32:19-29 - "And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw

the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. [20] He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it. [21] And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" [22] And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. [23] For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' [24] "So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf." [25] And 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."

Verse 26 is sheer beauty. The Levites stood out because they weren't afraid to distance themselves from any who questioned the authority of God. They chose God over all of the rest who didn't step forward when Moses asked. They listened to God *first*.

4) **TWO TESTS FOR SPIRITUAL HEARTS - Malachi 2:7-9** - "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. [8] 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."

- a) ***Priests should stay grounded in what God has said.*** The warning here is to priests and leaders, but the lesson bears fruit for all of us. The primary force working against that is the *itch of the crowd*. We all find the pleasure of a certain crowd - the love and laughter of friends, the approval of business associates, the admiration of colleagues - but the applause of *some* crowd - to be the greatest pull in the opposite direction of the call and will of our Lord and Redeemer.
- b) ***The people should watch their appetites*** - God says the people should "*seek instruction*" 7 - "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."

How many Christians do you know who are just possessed by a passionate love for hearing God's instruction so they can obey Him at deeper and deeper levels? How many Christians do you know who leave church on Sunday worrying that there may have been *one little thing* they missed - just *one point* of following Christ that they may have overlooked. Which do you think we hear most, concern about *that* or concern about the service being too long, or the music too loud? How many do you know who are looking for three services on Sunday because two sermons just isn't anywhere near enough?