

Place: Lurgan Baptist 29:1:2012

MALACHI'S MIGHTY MINISTRY

3. IS THY HEART RIGHT WITH GOD ?

Reading: Malachi 3:1-9

There is an old invitation hymn written by Elisha Hoffman that goes like this.

**Have thy affections been nailed to the cross ?
Is thy heart right with God ?
Countest thou all things for Jesus but lost ?
Is thy heart right with God ?
Art thou now walking in heaven's pure light ?
Is thy heart right with God ?
Is thy soul wearing the garment of white ?
Is thy heart right with God ?**

This passage before us this reminds me of that hymn. It's like Malachi is asking his generation and subsequent generations this question. "*Is thy heart right with God ?*" Now the objects of Malachi's words are the priests, the spiritual leaders of the nation. Some of us be tempted to check out at this point because the passage is obviously not for us or is it ? The connecting point is the term "*priest,*" because it was not only used to identify a certain group of people in the Old Testament but it's also used to describe every believer in the New Testament. In the Old Testament priests were descendants of Moses brother Aaron, who was from the tribe of Levi. They were

called Levites and their job was to serve in the Tabernacle. (Ex 6:16-20 Num 26:59) They were set apart for two primary purposes's to sacrifice animals and to serve God. Amazingly, the Bible teaches that you and I are priests, We also are set part to be involved in wonderful worship and sacrificial service. Do you recall Peter's words ? "*But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation that ye should show forth praises of him who hath called you of darkness into his marvelous light.*" (1 Pet 2:9) Here's how this passage percolates into our lives today. Every believer is a priest and as such is set part for worship and service. You see, just as the priests in the Old Testament were to point people to the Lord, so each of us is called to lead others upward today. Sadly, its so easy for us to forget our function and to see our duty as drudgery rather than a delight. Is this not exactly what was happening in Malachi's day ?

Malachi is the last of the Old Testament prophets if you leave out John the Baptist, and he has the distinction of being the last of the minor prophet's and also being the last of the post exilic prophets. Do you recall that Judah had been carried down into exile for seventy years ? *God wanted to rid them of idolatry once and for all and so He sent them to Babylon the land of idols.* When seventy years had rolled their course, the Lord brought back a remnant to their own land again. Under Ezra and Nehemiah they rebuilt the temple, they rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem. Those days of restoration were days of gladness and joy. In fact, they were days of revival for the people of God. But after some time in the land they

became cold, careless, and casual about the things of God and God had to raise up in their midst three prophets after they came out of exile. These prophets are called post exilic prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, and of course Malachi is the last. Here he is burdened about what God had laid on his heart. In effect he was saying he was saying to the priest of his day “ *Is thy heart right with God ?* ” Now there are three words that flow out of (2:1-9) The first word is Commandment, the second word is Agreement, and the third word is Judgment.

(1) A COMMANDMENT THAT IS SPECIFIC

Look if you will at (2:1) The commandment implied in (2:2) was to reform their wicked ways. I am here to tell you that God’s commandments are not “ *helpful hints for happy living,* ” similar to articles you might find in Readers Digest. No, God’s standards for right and wrong are not a matter of personal preference for the Lord tell us with authority how we should live and we violate his commandments at our peril. Now why was the Lord commanding them to reform their ways ? Because,

(a) THEY WERE DISHONOURING GOD’S NAME:

Now remember God’s name was a revelation of Himself. It was A. W. Tozer who said, “ *What you think about God is the most important thing about you.* ” These priests did not honour God, they did not reverence God. The word “ *hear,* ” means to hear intelligently with the implication of obedience. The phrase “ *lay it to heart,* ” refers to an active decision of the will. We know from (Ch 1) they

did not honour God for they were giving him garbage for sacrifices. What a contrast this remnant were with the early church when the Holy Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and baptized those believer units into the body of Christ. Do you recall what it says of the early church ? “ *And they continued steadfastly in the apostle’s doctrine and fellowship and in breaking of bread and in prayers and fear came upon every soul.* ” (Acts 2:42-43) Do you see that word “ *fear,* ” It means “ *reverence.* ” There was no profanity among them. They met in the Lord’s presence at the Lord’s Table, at the Lord’s Throne, guided by the Lord’s Word through the Lord’s servants and there was reverence. Do you see the contrast ? The priests in Malachi’s day profaned the name of the Lord. The people in Peter’s day hallowed the name of the Lord. Then one day sin raised its ugly head in the early church and Ananias and Saphira were guilty of hypocrisy. And the Spirit of God came in mighty power as Peter said, “ *Thou hast not lied unto men but unto God. And Ananias hearing these words fell down and gave up the ghost, and great fear came upon all them that heard these things.* ” (5:4-5)

Reverence came back into the assembly. They were afraid to open their mouths and slander, but what about you ? They were afraid to do anything that would harm the work of God, but what about you ? My if God dealt in the same way today as He did in that day we would be having funerals every week. My do we not need to get back to reverencing God ? To Hallowing His name ? (a)

(b) THEY WERE DESPISING GOD’S WORK:

Why they despised the very privilege of being priests. Do you see what they say in (1:13) ? They were taking for granted the high calling God had given them and treating the temple ministry with contempt. You see, serving at the altar was a job, not a ministry and they did it to please themselves, not to please and glorify the Lord. I wonder has that attitude crept into the church today ? My are we doing the same things as these priests ? As we go about public worship do we give the impression that the things of God are precious and glorious ? Or do you give the impression that you are engaged in something burdensome that must be taken out of the way as quickly as possible ? I mean, what is your attitude to service for the Lord ? *Is it an irksome duty or a joyous delight ?* Here were priests who didn't want to get about the work of the Lord at all. Now all of us understand weariness. We remember the Lord Jesus Himself. "*And He must needs go through Samaria Jesus therefore being wearied with his journey.*" (Jn 4: 4-6)

Now there is a difference between weary in the work and weary of the work. These priests were weary of the work. Sometimes we get weary in the work but never of it. My are you coming under the fire of the devil ? Do you know something of being weary in the work.? (a) (b)

(c) *THEY WERE DISOBEYING GOD'S LAW:*

God says "*But ye are departed out of the way,*" (2:8) That "*way,*" is described in (2:7) You see, they were to be a reservoir of the knowledge of God and were faithfully to declare that message to others. They were to

be God's messengers delivering God's Word. But while the priests of Moses day walked this path, the priests of Malachi's day were straying. "*But ye are departed out of the way.*" I tell you once a leader stops walking with God they must get back in step with Him, or their ministry is finished. "*But ye are departed out of the way,*" could that be written over your life ? Once your walk with God was close, intimate and sweet "*but ye are departed out of the way.*" Once Christians sought the Word of the Lord at your mouth "*but ye are departed out of the way,*" once you knew how to wield the weapon of prayer "*but ye are departed out of the way.*" My what is wrong ? Some of you used to come and you had the rafters ringing with your prayers, and you were crying for your children and for your father and mother and you're a dumb priest today. What is the matter ? Have you departed out of the way ? Have you capitulated ? Is the devil giving you a rough time ? Are you finished with the praying ? Are you finished with the serving ? Are you finished with the soul winning ? Have you departed out of the way ? (a) (b) (c)

(d) *THEY WERE DAMAGING GOD'S PEOPLE:*

For the Lord says, "*ye have caused many to stumble at the law,*" (2:8) Instead of guiding the people into righteousness they had "*taught,*" in such a way as to lead them into error. But there is more here than wrong teaching. They also lived in away as to encourage wrong doing. My since we all influence someone when we grow cold other will ice over too. (Rom 14:7) Let us leave these words "*at the law,*" out for a moment. Now could this be written about us ? "*Ye have caused many to*

stumble ?” My are you causing some businessman to stumble because you owe them money and you won't pay it ? Could it be that some of these business men and shop-owners will go to hell over the head of you ? Do you need to go and pay your debt and then come and shout Hallelujah ? Do you know what W. P. Nicholson did once ? He was walking down York Street in Belfast where he was having a mission. A button came off his coat so he walked into the tailors shop and said, “ *please sew that button.*” The tailor got the needle and thread and started sewing the button on. He said, “ *You're Nicholson.*” “ *That's right I'm Nicholson. Have you been at the meetings yet ?*” “ *No,*” he said, “ *I haven't been at the meetings. There are five deacons up in that church who own me money for suits, and I'm not going.*” “ *Is that right ?*” said Nicholson. “ *Give me their names.*” He took their names and wrote them down on a piece of paper.

He went into the pulpit that night and said, “ *I've got five names of five men in this church who owe the wee tailor up the street for suits and if they're not paid by Friday I'm reading out the names on Friday night.*” The wee tailor up the street got all his money on Thursday. Do you know the sequel to the story ? The wee tailor got saved on Sunday. My are you causing someone to stumble ? No wonder the Lord says in (2:1) (1)

(2) AN AGREEMENT THAT IS HISTORIC

For in (2:4) God referred the priests to His original covenant with the tribe of Levi, the tribe chosen by Him

to be set apart for His service. The Covenants of God are very wonderful truths. There is the Abrahamic Covenant, (Gen 12:1-3) The Palestinian Covenant (Deut Ch 27) The Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 7:8-19) and there is the New Covenant (Matt 26:27-28) but here in this passage there is brought before the Levitical Covenant, the covenant that God made with Levi. Now remember a covenant is an agreement between two or more people in which each pledges to do or not to do certain things. Now think with me about,

(a) THE BACKGROUND OF THIS AGREEMENT:

Do you recall when old Jacob was dying ? He called his twelve sons to stand around his bedside, and he gave a prophecy, which we find in (Gen Ch 49) concerning each of them. He combined Simeon and Levi into one Prophecy, “ *Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall.*” They felt justified in doing it because their sister had been raped, but they were murderers. Jacob's prophecy continues, “ *Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*” (Gen. 49:5-7) Now how was God going to scatter Levi in Israel ? They would become the priestly tribe. They didn't get any territory of the land but were scattered among the tribes. But how could they become the priestly tribe when Levi himself was such a rascal and a murderer ? Well, do you recall when Israel sinned so

grievously in making the golden calf ? Moses came down the mount and threw down the gauntlet. “ *Who is on the Lord’s side ?*” he demanded. “ *And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves unto him.*” (Ex 32:26) Will you remember that it is who is on the Lord’s side. Its not who is on the Baptists side, or who is on the unionists side. Here is the decision that divides. My are on the Lord’s side ? But this thing goes deeper than that. Do you recall that later Israel where led into idolatry by joining themselves to Moabite women ? The men of Israel were indulging in sexual immorality which involved the worship of a false god named Baal. In broad daylight an Israelite named Zimri brought a Midianite prostitute named Cozbi into his tent and committed fornication with her. When Phinehas the priest saw this he jumped up took a spear and drove it through both of them. (Num 25:8) God was so moved with what Phinehas had done that he said, “ *Behold I give unto my covenant of peace and he shall it and his seed after him, even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood.*” (Num 25:12-13)

Just because this priest took his stand for God, God consecrated the whole tribe of Levi to the ministry. (Deut 10:8-9) It was a covenant of life and peace. The Levites job was to go in before the Lord. He represented the people before the Lord and he represented the Lord before the people. Now that was the (a) But look at,

(b) THE BLESSINGS OF THIS AGREEMENT:

The Levites in Moses day had a belief that behaved. The priests in Malachi’s day were heirs of the Levites but their

ministry had degenerated into a well paying job with fringe benefits and social security. My ... professionalism in the things of God nearly always degenerates into dead orthodoxy or faith denying liberalism. But what a difference there is in the consecrated priest, the spiritual leader, and the godly believer. For he is an example,

1. In his Words:

Look if you will at (2:6) The “ *law,*” refers to the Mosaic law which the priests taught to the people (Deut 33:8-11 Neh 8:7-8) who in turn taught it to their children. (Deut 6:6-9) It says, “ *For the priests lips should keep knowledge,*” in this case it’s a knowledge of God’s Word. The word “ *keep,*” has the idea of storing up or treasuring in the mind the principles of God’s Word. Elders, are we example to the rest of the flock in our thirst for, our knowledge of and our obedience to God’s Word ?

2. In his Wisdom:

“ *Iniquity was not found in his lips,*” (2:6) The word “ *iniquity,*” means “ *unfair decision.*” You see, the priest not only taught the law but served as judge and was expected to make fair judicial decisions between people. (Deut 17:8-9 19:17-18 Is 11:3-5) But God rebuked these disobedient priests for showing partiality in the instruction. (2:9) Do you recall that Micah faced the same problem ? “ *The heads thereof judge for reward and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money.*” (3:11) In other words for a price they would tell people what they wanted to hear not what they

needed to hear. I tell you a man who teaches God's Word will not soften the message to cater to the wealthy or the influential in the congregation. I mean we are "the messengers of the Lord of hosts," and we dare not tone down or tweak the Kings message to make it popular with the people. My are we faithful expositors of the Word of the living God? Remember its God's Word not ours.

3. In his Walk:

"*And he walked with me in peace and equity,*" (2:6) Because he ruled his life by God's law he lived a godly life resulting in personal peace. The phrase "*To walk with,*" God is used only of Enoch and Noah. (Gen 5:22 6:9) To walk with God implies close, intimate communion with God and obedience to His laws or ways. (2:9) My is this your life? Is the constant cry of your heart "*O for a closer walk with God?*"

4. In his Witness:

"*And did turn many away from iniquity,*" (2:6) In other words, he brought men and women to the Lord. What a life. Now is this your life? Are you example in your words, your wisdom, your walk and your witness? I said there were three words that summarized this passage. The last word is Judgment. (1) (2)

(3) A JUDGEMENT THAT IS DRASTIC

For do you see what God says in (2:2-3)? In effect the Lord was saying, that apart from getting their hearts right

with Him they would expect drastic judgment. Do you recall that this is a constant Old Testament theme? God says, if you obey Me I will bless you, if you disobey Me I will curse you. (Deut 29:9-26 28:15-68) "*Trust and obey for there's no other way,*" What happens if we don't? Well, look at the context and notice there will be,

(a) A REMOVAL OF GOD'S BLESSING:

God says, "*I will send a curse upon you,*" The word simply meant "*to ban.*" They would be banned from being blessed of the Lord. Do you recall that when Adam sinned God cursed the ground? (Gen 3:17) I mean out of the ground came thorns and thistles. In other words its productiveness was hindered and its usefulness was retarded. Do you remember when Christ cursed the fig tree and it withered? (Mk 10:21) Its whole sap, its whole strength, its whole life withered. Isn't it wonderful to realize that Christ bore the curse for us at Calvary? (Gal 3:13) I believe I will never be cursed yet the Lord can cast me away. I don't mean that I will be lost again. I will never be lost again, for I am eternally secure in Christ, but He can set me aside. He can remove His blessing. The Lord can get on without you or me.

Do you recall that sad refrain in the book of Judges? A warning about Samson, who lost his power. The Bible says "*And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him.*" (16:20) Is that where you are spiritually? Under the discipline of God?

The blessing of God is being withheld from your life because your heart is not right with Him. (a)

(b) A REJECTION FROM GOD'S SERVICE:

Do you see what the Lord says in (2:3) The Law demanded that an animal's unclean organs and dung be burned outside the city. (Ex 29:14) God said He would smear it on their faces. Do you know what these priests were doing ? They were trying to keep up their image as important and influential men, but God is going to expose them for what they are defiled and unclean. (Num 32:23) And God is going to remove them from office. (2:3) You see, if your heart is not right with God, then He will not bless you and neither will He will use you. Paul says, "*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use and prepared unto every good work.*" (2 Tim 2:21)

Do you what God was doing here ? He was judging the ministry of these priests and they were found wanting ? I wonder will that be true of us ? You see, as believer priests our ministry and service is going to be judged. Paul says, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ every man's work shall be made manifest for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.*" (1 Cor 3:13) Think of this. In one sweeping review our entire life of service will be reviewed and revealed, I wonder will we discover then that we thought was gold is but wood, what we thought was silver is but hay, what we thought was precious stones is but stubble. How dreadful

will it be to pick up the ashes of our worthless service and press them into the nail scarred hands of the Saviour.

**Shall I empty handed be
When before the crystal sea
I shall stand before the everlasting throne
Will I hang my head in shame
As I answer to my name
Not a thing that my Redeemer there can own**

What's to be our response in light of Bema Judgment Seat ? Is it not to be this. "*Is thy heart right with God ?*" Or in the words of Paul "*For if we would judge ourselves.*" (1 Cor 11:31) That is, if we would erect a mini judgment seat in our hearts to judge ourselves before that great day. You see, my life is now dictating, word-for-word, into Christ's lips what He is going to say to me at Beam Judgment Seat. I am writing it now, with my life. Oh, that today we would live in the light of that day. Someone has put it like this,

**He would have me rich, but I stand here poor,
Stripped of all but His grace,
And memory will run like a hunted thing
Down the years I cannot retrace.
And my penitent heart will well-nigh break
With tears that I cannot shed.
I'll cover my face with my empty hands
And I'll bow my uncrowned head**

