

Introduction:

In Malachi for this Lenten series called Return. It's about returning to God, and returning to the purposes He has for us in our world. I've gotten a few questions about why the twofold emphasis: returning to God, returning to His purposes for us in our world can seem a little disconnected perhaps, or little too much. Two reasons:

- It's biblical. God's purposes are always about loving Him and loving those around us. Malachi, along with other prophetic books in the Bible, call Israel to both of these things.
- It fits the emphasis of lent.

I wanted to get started today with a video. It will probably be offensive to some of you, but for some it may not be due to your culture and point of reference. After we watch this, I'm going to ask two questions: what we find problematic, what we find that is good.

Show: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3N3_Q2FsJ5M&feature=related

What do we find problematic?

What good do we find?

One thing that I think we can all agree on is the need to properly communicate and speak on behalf of God. That's are theme today, and I'm glad our brain is working.

Let's take a look at our passage for today. We'll read it, I'll discuss what it was saying back when it was written, and then we'll take a look together at the implications it has on us today.

Read Text: Malachi 2:1-9

Malachi's Context:

Our passage is about priests: religious leaders of the day who were like bridges between God and people- they represented God to the people, and they also represented the people before God in religious ceremonies and such. Our passage gives a bleak assessment of how they're doing; God is not too happy and is bringing judgment on them (cursing them) because of their lack of honoring God. This is clear as things get started (v.1), and God gets a little poetic with it all, talking about how he will smear the dung of the sacrifices on them and take them out with the dung- the image is of the sacrificial system back then, and how the intestines and the waste of the intestines would be taken outside the city to be burned up as trash.

Now, a quick aside: this may seem really harsh and all, especially as we have seen other aspects of God that express his compassion and unrelenting love. I think it's something to wrestle through for sure- God is definitely not in a box, and it takes time for all of us to wrestle through this. For our purposes here, let me just say I think it's important to note when we see God as he is, we begin to see how worthy God is, and there is this element of wow, we need to honor this God. Every encounter in the Bible someone has in the Bible with God, they literally fall on their faces feeling like they want to merge with the dirt.

As the passage continues, we see that God is upset at this because a covenant- a relational agreement- is being broken, one with the Levites, the family clan from which the priests came from. There are details about this in your extra study notes, but as you read on you get a picture of what this covenant was like- the Levites revered God, and God gave them a life of peace.

But there's one important part to this covenant that Malachi wants to focus on, and we see it starting in v.6- the need for the priests to give true and complete instruction/teaching on behalf of God. In fact, in this passage, this is the main issue. Note the phrases used from here to the end of our passage.

And so, we could say, that there was a lack of honoring God, and this was in particular seen in their failure to speak properly on behalf of God. More specifically, they simply said things that were wrong- either through lying or not telling the complete truth. And God was calling for change.

Our Context:

Now how does this apply to us? We may think immediately that this applies only to people like me, religious leaders of today who stand up here and try to communicate what's in the Bible and what have you. But the

reality is, the word “priest” as it is used for the community of Jesus followers later in the Bible is used to describe not me, but two different people.

The first is Jesus. Text: Hebrews 3:1

The second, is all of us who are followers of Jesus. Text: 1 Peter 5:9

The implications are huge.

In regard to Jesus: that means he communicates with us about what God is like. We ought to listen to him.

Text: Hebrews 1:1-2, 2:1

Some of us today really need to consider this.

In regard to those who follow Jesus: we have an obligation, a call, to communicate with others on behalf of God, both those who follow Jesus and those who don't. Text: 1 Peter 5:9.

And how we do or don't do this is something God takes seriously.

This is frightening because for a number of reasons:

- a. We don't want to be seen like a street preacher: arrogant, know it all, better than you, condescending, etc.
- b. We live in a world where a lot of damage has been done in the name of God and Jesus, and there seems to be, for some of our circles, specific things that people hate about God and Christianity that may make us timid.
They Like Jesus but Not the Church (Caucasian, mainstream culture)
 - The church is just an organized religion with a political agenda
 - The church is judgmental and negative
 - The church is dominated by males and oppresses females
 - The church is homophobic
 - The church arrogantly claims all others religions are wrong
 - The church is full of fundamentalists who take the whole bible literally

Summary: We are afraid of misrepresenting God, Jesus.

But there's a need isn't there? There's a need to correct the misconceptions, to help people understand what's true and not true about these statements. And beyond this, there's a basic need for us, in the proper context, to communicate what God and Jesus are about; there's something about the goodness of God that you know is good and worth talking about. Obviously we don't do this is arrogant know-it-alls, but there the message of the Bible is called “good news” for a reason.

If you've been around, you know we take this seriously. We in fact have just gone through some material in our CGs to think about this. Can I just remind us of a few things in terms of continuing with this? Before we get there, though, questions or comments?

How do we move forward?

1. Get right with God.

This is not about me or Ethnos. It's about God and Jesus.

2. Study, learn details of some of the things people bring about God and Christianity.

Each of the misconceptions can be corrected.

3. Learn how to be affirming of truth wherever it may be found.

4. Talk and pray about it with someone else.

5. Take the jump and trust God.