

An Offal Way of Service

Text: Malachi 2:1-9

By Sterling C. Franklin

Proposition: We should follow in Levi's blessed way of service.

Organizational Sentence (Interrogatives: *How & Why?*): As ministers of the LORD, let us follow in the example of Levi, which leads to blessing, and not in the example of the Priests addressed in Malachi, which leads to cursing.

Scripture Reading (Malachi 1:6-2:9)

Text (NIV)

Malachi 1:6-14 ⁶ "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' ⁷ "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. ⁸ When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. ⁹ "Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"-- says the LORD Almighty. ¹⁰ "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 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, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. ¹² "But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled,' and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' ¹³ And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. 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. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

Malachi 2:1-9 "And now this admonition is for you, O priests. ² If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor 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 honor me. ³ "Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will spread on your faces the offal from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. ⁴ And you will know that I have sent you this admonition so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the LORD Almighty. ⁵ "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. ⁶ 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. 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. 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. ⁹ "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."

Proposition: We should follow in Levi's blessed way of service.

Prayer

- **Get rid of any mediocrity of our view of You**

- Give us clean hands and pure hearts, that we may ascend Your Hill in confidence.
- Thank You for Your Blessings. Give us the strength to bless You with our service.
- Speak Your Words through me, Lord. Help me be a blessing to my brothers in Christ, in Jesus' Name, Amen.

We have a small view of God. This is true for everyone, as we see the Lord as through dark glass, but I think more directly of the spiritual state of our Nation. Spirituality is seen as a plus, but Jesus is not. According to a Gallup poll, only 40% of people in the US claim to attend a generic place of worship on any given Sunday. Much less actually follow through. Indeed, well over 60%, and perhaps as high as 83% of all so-called Christians in this nation would prefer going to church with Pastor Pillow and Reverend Sheets or are members of other faiths.

Indeed, we have a small view of God. We have the means by which to serve God wholeheartedly, but I am reminded of Revelation 3 and the example of Laodicea when it comes to most churches on the landscape today. May God have mercy on this nation and may He bless us with an unquenchable passion as we minister to a lost culture.

In Malachi 2, we see that the people of the nation of restored Judah also had the means by which to serve God wholeheartedly, and yet they chose against it. They did not just choose against it, either – they utterly violated God's standards. We see God's People ever drifting from Him, as their hearts become more and more as an icy brick.

Malachi is a good book. It's not 'Muh-law-chee,' as he was not an Italian prophet. His name means, "My Messenger," and in this short book of 55 verses, the message of the LORD cuts to the heart continually. The picture of God that Malachi paints is utterly different from mediocrity.

Malachi is structured around 6 Disputations, each beginning with an interrogative plea to the people addressed. Malachi 1:6 through 2:9 is a disputation about honor and respect. A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master, but the priests addressed in Malachi brought contempt to their Father and Master, as opposed to the utter Glory due His Name!

Outside of this section, we see elsewhere in Malachi that the people and priests were guilty of corrupt sacrifices, idolatry, perverted justice, ill-treatment of wives, and robbery of God through the withholding of their tithes. The book of Malachi was written in the mid-400s BC (or mid-5th Century BC), so let's put this into context.

Throughout the prophets, the LORD, as a Hosea to a Gomer, pursued His unfaithful people persistently. He punished them through Exile – Israel to Assyria, and Judah to the neo-Babylonian Empire. Judah was delivered into Exile in 586 BC. Decades later, the LORD, as He promised hope throughout the prophets, delivered His people back to their land, and there was much reason to praise God for His restoration.

However, decades after that, we get to Malachi. How desperately wicked is the heart?

Jeremiah 17:9 (KJV) ⁹ The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, and desperately wicked: who can know it?

'Who can know it': Or 'Who can understand or know the depth of the heart's wickedness?'

And in the time of Noah...

Genesis 6:5-6 ⁵ The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. ⁶ The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.

And as Jesus mentioned about the heart...

Mark 7:20-23 ²⁰ He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'"

And over a period of a few decades, after the LORD had miraculously delivered His people, the people had become so careless as to offer blind, crippled, and diseased sacrifices.

Without blemish...

Leviticus 22:21 When anyone brings from the herd or flock a fellowship offering to the LORD to fulfill a special vow or as a freewill offering, it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable.

Numbers 19:2 "This is a requirement of the law that the LORD has commanded: Tell the Israelites to bring you a red heifer without defect or blemish and that has never been under a yoke.

The Church as made without blemish...

Ephesians 5:27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

We are made without blemish...

Colossians 1:22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation--

We are redeemed...

1 Peter 1:19 with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

And we see in Malachi 2 that even the priests, who were set apart for God's service, were offering meager sacrifices at best. What if we went up to a Salvation Army donation bin and dropped a moldy, diseased grilled cheese sandwich? How much of a slap in the face would that be to those who desire edible food? Yet the priests were doing much worse, slapping the LORD in the face with their corruption.

The people had a small view of God. They were corrupt. As we see from Malachi 1:14, as well, they were referred to by the LORD as 'cheats' as well, since they had an acceptable male of their flock that they could offer as a pleasing sacrifice before God.

These people were giving God their very worst. They were doing empty ritual, so much so that the LORD stated that He would rather they shut down the Temple completely (see 1:10).

How much do even we go 'through the motions?' We have the same desperately wicked heart. Fortunately, we have redeemed by the Blood of Christ, but we still struggle in many ways as humans with a sinful nature.

Many people have legacies, or they ask the question of others, "What do you want your legacy to be in life?" Would our legacy be defined as,

- I want to glorify God with my whole being!
- I want to please God by serving Him wholeheartedly!
- I want to bless God's people by proclaiming the message of Truth, that is, the Gospel!

Or would our legacy fall short as,

- I want to live a comfortable life.
- I want to give God whatever I feel is a comfortable amount.
- I want to be my own person and live my own life.

And oh, may the legacy which we present before God be as a pleasing fragrance to Him! May we be proven to be faithful stewards of the flocks God gives us and the opportunities God presents us to display His glory. As in Malachi 1, we glorify God through our very best, and as a result, His Name is made great among the nations!

We see from the text in Malachi 2 that at the very least, we should follow in Levi's blessed way of service. As ministers of the LORD, let us follow in the example of Levi, which leads to blessing, and not in the example of the Priests addressed in Malachi, which leads to cursing.

The text features an ideal example of service to the LORD, and this ideal example is sandwiched in between the negative example of the corrupt priests in Malachi's time. First, let us focus on the positive example – Levi, in Malachi 2:5-7.

(Read Malachi 2:5-7)

- *Exegetical Issue #1: Covenant with Levi*

There were many covenants explicitly stated in Scripture –

The LORD makes a case against the corrupt priests. The case against the priests is rooted in the Covenant of Levi. There is a definite mention of a few occurrences in which the LORD makes a covenant with Abraham, and reinforces it (cf. Genesis 12-17). He also makes covenants with Adam (initially), Noah, Moses and the people of Israel, David, and eventually a New Covenant written on hearts of flesh. There does not seem to be a specific covenant between the LORD and Levi that is explicitly written and defined as a ברית between the LORD and Levi. This seems to be a point of interest among commentators and scholars, so what was this covenant of Levi referring to? Was it general, specific, and where was it defined or when was it made?

The covenant with Levi is not formally announced in the Old Testament. A few brief mentions of possible candidates for the formal covenant are...

- Exodus 32, Moses announced that the Levites were “set apart to the Lord today.”
- Numbers 25:11-13, a ‘covenant of peace’ is mentioned in Numbers 25:11-13, though this was more to Phinehas than to all the Levites.
- Jeremiah 33, likely to the Urim and Thummim. This was a means of communication between priests and the LORD (and David and the LORD, in one textual instance).

From these passages, at the very least common denominator, the Levites were to be set apart, dedicated to living a life of holiness in their life of service before the LORD. What we know from Malachi 2, however, is that the Levites were corrupt and had defiled the agreement they had with the LORD. Whether it referred to the ‘set apart’ announcement in Exodus 32 or whether it was simply not mentioned explicitly in the Old Testament but instituted in the Israelite camp, it is most simple to state that we know that the priests were in poor standing at the current moment.

But how should we minister before the LORD?

I. Let us follow in the example of Levi... (2:4-7)

A. Characteristics (2:5-6)

1. Reverence (2:5)

a. Levi feared the LORD (2:5).

b. Levi stood in 'awe' (was dismayed) of the LORD's Name (2:5, cf. Joshua 1:9).

2. Truth (2:6)

a. Levi held true instruction in his mouth (2:6).

b. Levi did not have anything false on his lips (2:6).

3. Uprightness and Peace (2:6)

a. Levi walked with the LORD in peace and uprightiness (2:6).

b. Levi turned many away from sin (2:6).

B. Results (2:4-7)

1. The covenant was continued (2:4)

2. The covenant was upheld on both sides (2:5-7)

3. Life and peace were given to him by the LORD (2:5)

May we live this life, having true instruction, so that when we stand accountable for our words, our work will stand the test of fire, as in 1 Corinthians 3. Let us walk in the peace and good pleasure of the LORD, turning many away from sin as a result of our work. May we revere the LORD and reflect on the utmost glory of our Maker, Redeemer, and Savior. Let us uphold our end of our call by being faithful and obedient to His calling and Messengers of the LORD, as we are intended to be. Amen?

Well, now that we have the positive example covered, let's see the negative example embodied in the priests addressed in Malachi:

II. Let us not follow in the example of the Priests addressed in Malachi... (2:1-4, 2:8-9)

...and we will read the entirety of our text, Malachi 2:1-9

(Read 2:1-9 – verse 8: “BUT YOU”)

- *Exegetical Issue #2: LORD of Hosts (Uhdonai Tsuhva'ot)*

This title for the LORD is mentioned four times in this passage, and in Malachi, with respect to Divine Name references, the LORD of Hosts is used 24 out of 46 times altogether. Overall, the Name of the LORD is mentioned over 7,000 times, and out of those occurrences, only 249 include this entire Name. It's clear that Malachi has a much higher proportionality of the occurrence of this Name. Instead of having about a 3% occurrence, Malachi has just over a 52% occurrence of this specific Name. Interestingly, the LORD is making His case against His people, so in Malachi, it is definitely significant to understand the LORD as the 'LORD of Hosts.'

The general use of צבא: “Armies, Hosts”

Uses as 'LORD of Hosts' – 279 times in the Old Testament.

- This term calls to attention the fact that His people were people of His army.
- This term also calls to attention the covenantal nature of the title – that the LORD of Hosts would be faithful to His army unless they were in rebellion (as in Malachi).

The LORD of Hosts can also refer to the Sovereignty and supremacy of God, as the LORD commands hosts (armies) of angels as well as the armies of His people. Thus, this is translated in some versions, such as the NIV, as 'The LORD Almighty' or 'The LORD Omnipotent.'

Thus, the LORD of Hosts seems to be a title denoting the majesty and power of the LORD, as well as the distinctiveness of the LORD as commander of His people. In oracles of judgment, the LORD of Hosts comes down hard on His people in order for them to turn to repentance. This was a perfect example of such.

- Exegetical Issue #3: What is Offal?

פֶּרֶשׁ, - Entrails and bodily waste from animals during a sacrifice. "Offal"

Lemma: Used 70 times in the Old Testament (Masoretic Text) – refers to sacrifices (5 times in the context of sin offering sacrifices in the Pentateuch) or something 'in the midst' (e.g. Exodus 14:23: The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.).

These sacrifices involving פֶּרֶשׁ, were to be taken outside the camp to be burned. Spreading "offal" on the faces of the priests was obviously a sign of disgust and displeasure, and direct justice, taking what they were rubbing in the LORD's face and putting it in theirs.

A. Characteristics (2:2, 2:8-9)

1. A Closed Ear (2:2)

2. An Impure Heart (2:2, 2:8-9)

a. They did not seek to honor the LORD's Name (2:2).

b. They turned from the Way (2:8-9).

3. Corruption (2:8-9)

a. Many stumbled at their teaching (2:8, cf. James 3:1).

b. They showed favoritism in Judgment (2:9).

B. Results (2:2-3, 2:9)

1. They received curses (2:2-3).

a. A curse on their blessings (2:2)

b. A rebuke on their descendants (2:3)

c. A humiliation on their own faces ('offal', 2:3)

2. The LORD causes them to be despised and humiliated before all the people (2:9).

And when considering Levi's lifestyle and these priests' lifestyles, it is clear that one is preferable. When we stand and give an account for what we teach and exhibit in our lives, may we receive blessing. Praise the Lord for grace since we will mess up in various ways throughout our human lives. But let us strive to follow in the ways of Levi – peace, righteousness, truth, justice; and NOT in the ways of the priests of Malachi.

But in final application, what can we take from this passage?

Application

1. In our ministry, let us seek to follow in the ideals of Levi's way as faithful servants of the LORD Almighty (2:4-7).

2. In our ministry, let us keep watch lest we drift away (cf. Hebrews 2:1).

3. Let us keep clean hands and pure hearts as we minister before God's people (cf. Psalm 15, Psalm 24:3-6; cf. Matthew 5:8). One Method: Accountability.
4. Let us keep true Instruction by studying to show ourselves approved before God (2 Timothy 2:15).
5. Let us model a walk of peace and closeness to the LORD in our ministry.
6. Let us keep a grand and worshipful view of the LORD, that the LORD's Name might be Great among the nations (Malachi 1:11, 1:14).

Closing Prayer