

Unit I: God Requires Justice

Justice for All

DEVOTIONAL READING: Psalm 50:1-15

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Malachi 2–3

PRINT PASSAGE: Malachi 2:1-9; 3:5-6

Key Verse— If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart. (Malachi 2:2, KJV)

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“If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.” (Malachi 2:2, NIV)

Lesson Aims

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Understand the significance of justice for spiritual leadership.
- Affirm the value of covenanted reverence of God for leadership.
- Practice just spiritual leadership.

*Key Terms

Covenant (2:4)—Hebrew: *bēriyth* (ber-ēth’): league; treaty; alliance; agreement; pledge.

Oppress (3:5)—Hebrew: *ashaq* (aw-shak’): to wrong or extort; defraud; get deceitfully.

Priests (2:1)—Hebrew: *kohen* (ko-hane’): chief ministers; principal officers.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

Life Happens

Bruce is in his first year of college. When he arrived, his goal was to act like any new college student would. Bruce decided early that he would do what he wanted to do and forget the lessons of his youth.

He attracted the pretty, sassy girls, and they performed what he commanded. He partied repetitiously and drank hard liquor to keep up with the upperclassmen. On his way to class, Bruce drank caffeinated coffee and took drugs to appear alert for instruction.



Overview

The book of Malachi is the last book of the prophets in the Old Testament. Malachi was active during the time Nehemiah was governor of Jerusalem in 445 BC. The book of Malachi is none other than a scene where God has put His people in a courtroom on trial for their sins. Malachi's main focus was on the priests and the people's attitudes toward God. In addition, the leaders had dishonored the covenant that God had made with them by Nehemiah. The priests in the nation were divorcing their Jewish wives and taking foreign wives, neglecting to pay their tithes, and offering unholy sacrifices and worthless worship to God. Malachi wanted them to know that God still loved them; however, he also warned them to repent of their unjust ways. The priests were disrespectful and unfaithful leaders of God's great nation.

His grandparents, who raised him, had sacrificed everything for him to be in college. They took out a second mortgage on their home, worked extra shifts to get overtime, and practically ate beans and rice for dinner during the week, with a nice meal on Sundays. So, imagine how they felt when they surprised Bruce and saw how dirty he looked and smelled. It was clear that he was squandering their hard-earned money, and it broke their hearts. With crushed spirits, they left.

Bruce had no idea that he could feel this bad. The disappointing image of his grandparents replayed in his dreams whenever he slept. He had damaged something sacred, and he vowed to make it right.

Questions

1. Who has sacrificed a great deal for you? Did you make good on their sacrifice, or did you squander it?
2. How do you think God feels when we treat Him like Bruce treated his grandparents?
3. How can you repair the sacred bond with God and others who love and care about you?

COMMENTARY ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Warning to Honor (*Malachi 2:1-4*)

KJV

AND NOW, O ye *priests*, this commandment is for you.

2 If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the LORD of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings: yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart.

3 Behold, I will corrupt your seed, and spread dung upon your faces, even the dung of your solemn feasts; and one shall take you away with it.

4 And ye shall know that I have sent this commandment unto you, that my *covenant* might be with Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

NIV

“AND NOW, you *priests*, this warning is for you.

2 “If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me.

3 “Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it.

4 “And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my *covenant* with Levi may continue,” says the LORD Almighty.

In **verses 1-4**, God is speaking to the priests about their wrongdoings. They were not doing what was required of them. As priests, they were to be the middlemen between God and His people. They were to honor God and lead by example. They were to teach God’s holy Word (see Deuteronomy 28:15). However, the priests’ actions were not reflecting the piety of their positions. They were neglecting the Temple, and their behavior and attitudes toward God were unacceptable. The priests felt like God did not love them and owed them something because they were His people. They were totally disrespectful, and God called them by name—“ye priests” (**verse 1**). If they refused to listen, obey, and honor His name, God said, “I will send curses upon your blessings.” The blessings to which God was referring were things such as the special care that He gives to His anointed ones and His messengers. God always takes care of the ones He calls (which were the priests, in this case). He was going to exchange their blessings for massive destruction (**verse 2**). God not only was going to curse them, but also was going to curse their children and their grandchildren. Then He was going to wipe their faces with animal waste. This would be a time of great humiliation for the priesthood. “Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it” (**verse 3**, NIV). God meant business. He was warning them to take heed to what was to come if they did not honor Him. God wanted to bless them with the covenant of peace which He gave Levi and his seed after him (**verse 4**). God gave the priesthood the privilege and authority to lead the Israelites in worship. Therefore, He was expecting them to be just and fair; however, they were disobedient to the covenant.

As we know still today, we must honor God and give Him all the praise that is due Him. As human beings, we may fall short; however, God will always send us a warning to get us back on track when we mess up. Whether God sends a messenger or speaks to us with a small still voice, we must take heed to His warning. We must meditate and put into practice what God has spoken to us. We must honor Him for what He has done for us and for who He is.

 **What Do You Think?** We honor God just by staying in close communion with Him. What are some additional ways in which we can honor God in our daily walk with Him?

The Lips of a Godly Priest (*Malachi 2:5-9*)

KJV

5 My covenant was with him of life and peace; and I gave them to him for the fear wherewith he feared me, and was afraid before my name.

6 The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity.

7 For the priest’s lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

8 But ye are departed out of the way; ye have caused many to stumble at the law; ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi, saith the LORD of hosts.

9 Therefore have I also made you contemptible and base before all the people, according as ye have not kept my ways, but have been partial in the law.

NIV

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, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.

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.”

God explained to the priesthood (while they were on trial) how priests are supposed to behave. God reminded the priests about the covenant with Levi as well. He reminded them that it was a covenant of life and peace because Levi was so full of zeal for God and His righteousness. Levi paid reverence to God and honored His most holy name (**verse 5**). Levi and his sons acknowledged, respected, and paid reverence to God daily. They were godly priests, and their daily walk with God was pleasing to Him and glorified Him. They were consistent in their walk and talk with God; as a result, Levi and his sons turned many away from sin (**verse 6**). They helped and guided the lost to God. God used Levi and his sons as perfect examples of how He wanted His leaders to conduct themselves. They spoke the truth, which was God’s instructions. They were the mediators between God and His people. They were preaching and teaching the knowledge that God had instilled in them, which was His most holy Word (**verse 7**). However, this generation of priests was not doing what was required of them. They were not taking God’s covenant seriously. They had turned and departed from the righteous way (**verse 8a**). These priests may have reminded God of Nadab and Abihu, who were two unfaithful priests (see Leviticus 10). They, like these priests, missed the mark because they had lowered their standards. As a result, the priesthood had caused many to fall short of the standards and demands that God has set for His people (**verse 8b**). God’s standards were much higher than their walk. The priests lived by low moral standards, even manipulating the poor to take advantage of them. It was an awful, disgraceful time. God had guidelines and boundaries set, but once again the leaders were not obeying God’s covenant and not living a righteous lifestyle. They were not following the roadmap that God put in place for the leaders. However, they had changed and were following their own laws, failing to remember God’s promises to His people. God was going to punish them through humiliation and become execrated (put under a curse) as dangerous and corrupt before all the people (**verse 9**).

As Christians, we are all leaders in some form or fashion, whether it be as father, mother, mentor, coach, or teacher. We are supposed to be a higher group of individuals—set apart—displaying just and respectful attitudes that are pleasing to God. Our lips are to speak words that purify not pollute our environment. The priesthood during Malachi’s time as well as some spiritual leaders and followers of today had wandered away from God’s commandments. We must continue to pray for

one another as well as our pastors, teachers, and leaders—that we will all remain godly. We must say a special prayer for our leaders of the church and their families, marriages, actions, speech, and attitudes, because Satan’s main goal is to tear down our leaders and cause them to become corrupt. Remember, church leaders, that you are examined by your church members, people outside the church, other pastors, and God. You are responsible for maintaining a close relationship with God so your life will honor God before saints and sinners.

? **What Do You Think?** We are to live a lifestyle continuously that is pleasing to God. When people see your life, can they recognize that you are in awe of God?

Judgment Is on the Way (*Malachi 3:5-6*)

KJV

5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that *oppress* the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts.

6 For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

NIV


5 “So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who *oppress* the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.

6 “I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”

The people of Judah doubted that God would bring judgment upon them. They were so caught up in their own sin and arrogance of being “God’s chosen” that they did not believe that God was going to bring justice to them. In addition, judgment was going to come quickly (**verse 5a**). God was going to be swift against four kinds of people: the sorcerers (witchcraft), adulterers (cheaters), perjurers (liars), and the oppressors of others (unjust to the less fortunate) (**verse 5b**). These wicked people did not believe that God was going to judge them. These evildoers did not fear God (**verse 5c**). God was going to summon a star witness to the stand: none other than Himself! God was going to come quickly and charge the people for participating in the four prohibited acts. Also, they had no fear of God. The fear of the Lord is vital and would preserve them in the Day of Judgment. But they had no fear of the Lord. They were too busy being corrupt and unjust leaders of God’s great nation. **Verse 6a** states that God does not change. No, He does not ever change. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Malachi reminded them that they needed to change their evil ways and that judgment was not a day to look forward to—as they were doing. The Day of the Lord was not going to be a good day for them. Instead, it was going to be a day of refining and of difficulties for the people. God was saying that He would purify them but not destroy them completely (**verse 6b**). They had sinned, and they deserved judgment. They must be washed and cleansed in order to get

back on track and not question God about His judgment for justice. God is going to extend mercy because of the promise He made to Jacob.

Even today, it is essential to show reverence to God and fear the Lord because doing so helps us become mature Christians. It shows us how to live in the realms of God’s grace and mercy and not go astray. If you feel as though you have wandered away from God, confess your sins with an honest heart and ask God for a fresh start. He always hears the cries of the pure in heart. We will all be judged one day, and there is no better time than now to give your life to or renew your life in Him.


 **What Do You Think?** As a church, we are to follow our leader, who is the head of the congregation. However, there will be times when our pastor needs encouragement. List some encouraging ideas to uplift your pastor during times when the pastor is down.

Your Life

As believers, we should be examples of what God requires of His people. We should always try to walk upright and help others who are in need. This kind of behavior is pleasing to God, and He will judge and reward us accordingly.

Your World!

There are so many unjust leaders in the world today. We have to stay mindful that God has given believers discernment to keep us from being victims in our society. Listen and obey!

 **Closing Prayer** Heavenly Father, we pray for our leaders and pastors on today. Keep them encouraged and on the right path as they stand in the gap as our messengers from You. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Home Daily Bible Readings		
MONDAY, March 30	“Faith Heroes Acted Justly”	(Hebrews 11:29-35)
TUESDAY, March 31	“Your King Comes Humbly”	(Matthew 21:1-11)
WEDNESDAY, April 1	“A House of Prayer for All Nations”	(Mark 11:15-19)
THURSDAY, April 2	“Neglect Justice at Your Peril”	(Luke 11:42-44)
FRIDAY, April 3	“Jesus, God’s Servant Messiah”	(Matthew 12:15-21)
SATURDAY, April 4	“God Will Not Forsake the People”	(Isaiah 42:10-17)
SUNDAY April 5	“God’s Servant to Establish Justice Everywhere”	(Isaiah 42:1-9)