

Malachi Chapters 1-2- John Karmelich

1. Let me open with the fact we're way overdue for some good news. For all of you who've made it with me through Zechariah, and the Minor Prophets to date, we've made it to the last of them. It's now just a matter of getting through one last four-chapter book, and we finish this series. I'll also say that Malachi isn't nearly as tough to digest as Zechariah was. Still he's got plenty of things to teach us especially on how God expects us to live, which is a clue as to what this book is about.
2. Let's also remember that we're reading the last book sent to the Israelites before the 400-year time of "silence" between the Old and New Testaments. The Roman Catholic bible (but not the Jewish or the Protestant bible) has some additional books in that 400-year plus time gap. Without getting into a lot of detail, I'll just argue that those other books are interesting, but not God inspired. My point is if God's going to "go silent" until Jesus comes on the scene, the last message before all this begins must be worth reading. So why does God go silent for that long period, as the Protestants bible scholars argue? I see it as a time of testing. Most of us Christian veterans know that God is going to go silent on us at times to test our faith. This is one of those times. The reasons for it will become apparent as we study the book of Malachi.
3. All of that leads perfectly to my lesson title: "What do we do in the meantime?" If it's going to be 400-plus years until Jesus showed up the first time and an unknown time period until He returns again, what does God want us to do in the meantime? What are we doing right and wrong now, and how should we act until He shows up? Believe it or not, that's Malachi's message. He wrote around the same time Nehemiah was on the scene, and based on some things he wrote, I'd argue along with most scholars that Malachi wrote around the same time as Nehemiah's book.
 - a) OK then, I'm dodging the key question: What God expects of us is to use the time He's given us as a witness for Him. Yes I've been beating that point home a lot lately. Here in Malachi we're going to get specific examples of how those living in Israel around the year 435 BC (yes that's my time stamp, give or take a few years) were acting. What's important is not the specifics of their sins, but what we can learn from their mistakes as to not repeat them. That's one reason why we study the bible in the first place.
 - b) The first two chapters are mostly Malachi firing off insults at the Jewish religious leaders. At that time, the temple was built. Haggai and Zechariah wrote about 80 years earlier as their "job" was to encourage the Israelites to build God's temple as they're His witnesses to the world. Zechariah's visions of Israel's long-term future is proof that God's still "pulling the strings" of mankind's future. Malachi then comes on the scene about 80 years later to say in effect, "If our goal's to worship God as God, let's put our lives where our mouth is!"
 - c) Like James 2:20 says in the New Testament "faith without works is dead" (KJV). My point is Malachi's basic message of his entire book has to do with Israeli's "works" for God. If we are supposed to be using our lives to make a difference for Jesus until He shows up, then I would say our works matter.
 - d) Let me pause at this moment to discuss the idea of "saved by faith alone" versus saved by our works. I do believe we're saved by faith alone. However, who besides God can know if we're saved unless we perform "works" to prove our faith? The other danger is to trust in our works to prove our worth to God. Both are a mistake as far as Christian doctrine's concerned. Now that I got that point out of my system, back to Malachi!
4. Since we're starting a new book, it's time for my "who, what, when and why's of the book. Since I already gave the date, let me discuss Malachi himself. His name means "God's messenger". Some scholars think he's not a real person, but his name is just a title. Jewish scholars said he was "real" and was part of the "Great Synagogue" group, which is simply a group whose job was to preserve the scriptures. Bottom line is I'm convinced he was a real person.
 - a) The where is much easier: Israel at that time wasn't an independent country, but was part of the Persian Empire. So let's just say it was from the "province of Israel" at that time.

- b) To state the "when" again, it's about 80 years after the last prophet Zechariah wrote, and is about 435 BC give or take a few years.
 - c) The "why" is to deal with "dead works" of the Israelites at that time. The why for you and me is not to repeat those same "dead works" so we'll use our lives as a witness for Jesus as that's what God calls us to do.
5. With all that said, time for a quick rundown on the first two chapters: Realize all four chapters is a single vision by Malachi. It is a set of condemnations about the way the Israelites were acting and what God expects them to do about it. The point for us as we study Malachi is learning what the Israelites did wrong as to not repeat their same mistakes.
- a) The book opens with an understanding about how the Israelites have been separated as to be a witness for God. Malachi discusses how God loved Jacob (the common ancestor of all 12 tribes of Israel but at the same time, God "hates" Jacob's twin brother Esau. One reason has to do with being called by God. Another has to do with the "works" of both brothers. I hold the simple view that God is perfect by definition, so therefore, He knows all things. From our "not-all-knowing" perspective we don't know who's saved. That's why God has called us to be witnesses to all people because there is no way for us to know who's saved.
 - i) Bottom line is if we believe Jesus is God, paid the full price for our sins and we do believe He's in charge of our lives, we like Jacob are loved by God, so accept it!
 - b) After God explains the Israelites have been separated, Malachi begins by telling them how they're "blowing it big time" and gives examples of their lukewarm attitude toward God.
 - c) Then Malachi starts focusing on the priests. Remember that the priests were separated by God to be an example to the rest of the Israelites. If you read this section and think, "I am not a professional priest, pastor or deacon, why should I care?" Then you're missing what is the main point: Just as the Jewish priests were separated to be an example to the rest of the Israelites so all of us Christians (big emphasis on all) are called to be Jesus' witness in all aspects of our lives. All I'm saying is when we read these condemnations of the priests don't start thinking, I'm not a professional "priest", why should I care? The right answer is we're all priests in that God expects us to use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - d) Now that I beat that fact over our heads, let's get into specifics:
 - i) The priests were offering secondary gifts to God. I'd be like us telling God, lets see I've got \$5 left after I paid all my bills, so tell you what God, let me give you two of my last five!" God wants to be first, not last in our financial priorities. The issue is our "take home income" or our profit if we're self-employed. He doesn't want what is leftover. He wants to be the center of our lives. I'm not saying God wants exactly ten percent of our income. That's putting us under "works", not grace. However, if He's the center of our lives, we would naturally want to put Him first. That idea is about putting our money where our mouth is!
 - ii) The second main topic is the Israelites were marring non-Israelites. The issue is to make God the center of our lives even in our marriages. That's why Paul says that Christians are not to be "unequally yoked" in both marriage and business. That is from 2nd Corinthians 6:14. There's a lot more to say on that issue, but I'll save that speech until I get into the lesson details.
 - iii) Speaking of details, it's time to start my verse-by-verse commentary on Malachi.
6. Chapter 1, Verse 1: A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. ²"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'"
- a) Verse 1 essentially tells that God's speaking through Malachi. We don't get anything else about his background from the bible itself. Outside biblical sources say he was definitely a real person. Paul quotes Malachi in Romans 9. My point is that if you believe Paul was "God Inspired" and he quoted Malachi as being God inspired, then we must accept that he was a real person. Malachi himself claims that this book itself is God inspired in that first verse. My point is this book has "stood the test of time" and is supported by bible scholars.

- b) After Malachi makes the point he's "God Inspired". The next important point he wants to make is for his audience to realize God loves them. Malachi will offer his historical proof of how God loves them (the Israelites) over the next few verses. Before I get to that, let me discuss the idea of how a perfect God can love some people He created, but not others.
- i) The first thing we must accept is that God is perfect by definition. That's admitting the idea that, "He's God and we're not" so we must accept the fact He's perfect and has every right to love what He loves and hate who He hates.
 - ii) I hold the simple view that since God is perfect, that means He's perfectly loving at all times. He's also perfectly angry at sin all the times. When we do things that are not His will, that's when we sin whether we realize it or not. Even people with no understanding of the bible, instinctively know that murder and stealing are wrong as a concept. My point is that God gave us a built in conscious to know He's real and we're to act in a certain way (treat other people with respect).
 - iii) A related key point is that God gave us "free will". He didn't create us as a bunch of robots who are programmed to worship Him on command. That way, based on our free will, we can choose to love Him or choose to reject Him. The whole point here is simply that from our "stuck in time" perspective, the evidence of how we're living is the evidence of whether or not God loves us or hates us based on how we act. I'm not saying we have to be perfect, but we must be willing to accept the idea of being perfectly forgiven. If we've done that, then that's our evidence that we're loved by God whether we feel it or not.
 - iv) Speaking of evidence, Malachi is about to lay out some evidence to the Israelites to show them that they're chosen by God whether they realize it or not. That leads us perfectly to the second part of Verse 2:
7. Verse 2 (cont.): "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob,³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."
- a) As I stated in the introduction, Jacob and Esau were twin brothers. Jacob was the common father of 12 men who became the 12 tribes of Israel. Esau was the father of the people who are known as the Edomites. Just east of Israel today is the country of Jordan. That country was created after World War 1. The land of Jordan is made up of the territory, which for a long time (Old Testament "biblical times") belonged to three nations: The Ammonites, the Moabites and the Edomites. They each had separate areas that together form Jordan. All I'm saying here is by the time Malachi came around, the land of Edom was pretty much a wasteland thanks to the Babylonian invasion (and possibly other attacks).
 - i) The whole point here is that even though Jacob and Esau were twin brothers, the respective lands of each group was proof of who God loved and who God hated. The Israelites were "still standing" and back in their land. The Edomites land was at that point a "wasteland". For the most part the Edomites were scattered when the Babylonians "rearranged the territory badly" 100-200 years earlier.
 - ii) This is God saying, "Hey you want proof I love you as a people and I show hatred to your cousins? Well let's look at the evidence of who's still standing and who is "down for the count"".
 - iii) I will admit the idea of God "loving one of two twins" and hating the other one is a hard concept to digest. It helps if we realize that God "created time" and therefore He must exist outside of it. It means God knows all things that occur in history as well as in our future. The reason the bible can tell us history before it occurs is that God knows all things and therefore He knows the future. In this context, it means God has watched the Israelites "struggle with God" but still desire to be His people while the Edomites common ancestor Esau, also must have known of the promise that God made to Abraham to give Israel to his descendants and turned from that!

- iv) To finish this strange but necessary theological discussion, it's about us realizing we can only see God's will by "watching history" since we're not all knowing like the God who created us is. That's why Malachi is reciting a fairly recent history lesson to show the Israelites, "Hey, you want evidence that God loves you and at the same time hates the descendants of Edom, well let's discuss what's happening in their land and your land as an example of God's love and God's anger."
 - b) All of that leads us right back to Verse 3. Malachi describes how the land of Edom is now a "wasteland". Time for another quick history lesson. When the Babylonians would go to conquer a land, whoever wasn't killed was relocated elsewhere in their empire. One thing that empire also practiced was to split up families so people wouldn't unite with others to rebel against Babylon. Anyway, when they conquered the land of Edom just east of Israel, they decided to leave that area empty. When the Persian (think Iran) Empire formed, they made a decree that Jewish people could return to their land. That same decree didn't work for the Edomites, so their land stayed barren for a long time. When Malachi wrote this, the land of the Edomites just east of Israel was pretty much a wasteland. Obviously it did get resettled later and there are people there today. Now that you know all of that, I wouldn't worry about it "being on the final exam". It's just a historical fact that backs up Verse 3 as being legitimate when Malachi wrote it.
 - c) Before I move on to Verse 4, also realize that Paul quotes Verse 2 in Romans 9:13. My only reason to mention that is as a simple proof that Paul considered Malachi to be inspired by God and a "real person" when Paul wrote Romans about 40 years after Jesus' resurrection.
8. Verse 4: Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins."
- a) One must think like an Israelite living in that day. The main point of the opening 5 verses is to show proof to those Israelites that God loves them and He chose to be His witnesses to the world whether they liked it or not. (Just as God's chosen you and me as Christians to be His witnesses to the world, as that's what we're required to do as believers!) Verse 4 is in effect a "counterargument". The Israelites could think at that point, "Yes we know the land of Edom is in ruined at the moment, but the remaining Edomites could come back there to rebuild their land just as we Israelites have come back to our land to rebuild what was destroyed. In other words, "How do we know God's real just because we're here and they're not?" The second part of Verse 4 and Verse 5 is God's rebuttal to that idea.
9. Verse 4 (cont.): But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. ⁵You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!'"
- a) This is God saying, "You want more proof, watch and see!" History does record the effort to rebuild that land wasn't successful. I'll just say that by the time the Greeks and then the Romans went through that area, it was a wasteland for a long time.
 - b) A simpler way to look at this is if you want proof that the God of the Israelites is also God of the entire world, consider that governments have come and gone over the ages. All the great empires of the last several thousand years have risen and fallen. The only one that's still standing and still thriving is Israel as a nation and a concept. You might say, well we can see Egypt is still around. How "powerful" is Egypt today? How much power do they have today versus their "hey day"? I'm convinced God keeps Egypt around to remind us that, "They're still standing but they'll never be what they once were no matter how much they may try to change that situation." Besides Egypt, think of all the powers that rose and fell over the millenniums. In spite of all of that, Israel still stands today despite the hatred it receives from people around the world including many of Jewish origin.
 - c) There is a classic saying that goes, "If you doubt the bible is God's word, simply study the history of Israel". My archeological point is the proof of its existence, its history and given it is still standing today is a proof that God's real and He's still "pulling the strings" behind history as it unfolds before us. With that speech completed, we're ready for Verse 6:

10. Verse 6: "A son honors his father, and a slave 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.
- a) Now that we've established the fact that God exists, and whether we like it or not, He has picked specific people to be His witnesses to the world, the next question is, what are the Israelites doing about the fact they're chosen by God? Whether we realize it or not, that is also the key question for our lives: If we're chosen by God, what are we doing about it?
 - b) From this verse through most of the rest of the book, Malachi focuses on that question. It comes down to the "faith versus works" question. Again we are saved by faith alone, but the proof of our faith is what we do about it? That's what Malachi's going to get into here.
 - c) Also keep in mind why Malachi's getting into all of this. God's about to "go silent" for the next 400 years or so until John the Baptist shows up on the scene. A big question is what's our job in the meantime? What should we do until the Messiah shows up? Use our lives as a witness for Him. That's the main purpose of Malachi's book. Speaking of which, I'd say it's time we get back to it.
 - d) Malachi makes the point that for the vast majority of people in the world, young boys will generally do what their fathers tell them to do and that's how they honor them. Slaves must do what their owners tell them to do, so that means by definition they honor their masters whether they like them or not. (This is not a pro-slavery argument. It's just saying if one's a slave, one must honor their master.) Malachi's main point is if it's "natural" for sons and slaves to honor those in charge of them, and if the Israelites claim "God is God" why aren't the Israelites honoring God as God, since they're claiming to be Jewish?
 - i) Again, think about "faith versus works" here. It's not about earning God's love, or trying to prove our worth to Him. It's about giving of our time and our resources to where we claim our love is! If we claim God is the center of our lives, how will people know that unless there is evidence for that to be true?
 - ii) Think about our lives from God's perspective. By definition God is perfect and He does not need anything. So why does He care how we act? Because if God wants the world to know of His existence so that He can spend eternity with us, He does want us to "act like it" and share the word of Him to others. I sometimes use as an illustration, a person who loves to play a musical instrument or paint pictures. My point is such a person would do that not for the money, but just because he or she loves to do that. My point is that's "God's nature". He has so much love for people that He wants to spend eternity with people expressing that love. What He asks of us in return is the same "free will" love for Him that He has for us. That's why God cares about how we live and why He wants us to be a good witness for Him, as to have others realize there is more to life than say, money, fame or power. He cares about how we act since we're representing Him to the world. That and that alone is why "works matter", again not to earn His love but simply to live as God wants us to live.
 - e) A natural question one would ask at this point is, "OK God we get it. Can You give some examples of where we're messing up?" Let also say it's not a matter of "do's and don'ts" in order to get into heaven. It's not a matter of doing "A, B and C" and then we're saved. It's a matter of how we're to act as His witnesses. That's the main issue here. With that said, it's time to get into some of those specifics.
11. Verse 6 (cont.): "It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?'"
- a) I can just hear a lot of religious Israelites at this point thinking, "Hey I know we're fine, as we work hard to make a difference for God". It's those nonreligious types He's picking on here. It's almost as if "God throws it in their faces" to accuse the priests of being guilty for showing contempt for Him. If one has spent their lives trying to be a witness for God and those same people hear their "blowing it big time", that had to hurt!

- b) The last part of the verse naturally asks, "How have we blown it?" Yes we'll get to that as it's Malachi's main message for the rest of his book. Before I do that, let's all realize that for us Christians, the issue's not just the Jewish priests who lived a long time ago, but all of us Christians as witnesses for Him. I don't want you to read this section and think those guys who lived thousands of years ago really blew it. The point of bible study is to see how this fits our lives today. As the old preacher saying goes, the job of the Christian is to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable". OK then, let's begin that process.
12. Verse 7: "By offering 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 offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame 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.
- a) Before I get into the specifics of "sin of the day", let me point something out to you: There is no mention of murder, theft or any grievous crime. The issue at hand is us offering God our "leftovers". The best example I could think of would be like looking in our wallet and thinking, "OK, after I paid my bills, I've got \$20 left over, I'll give God \$5". The issue here's about putting God first in our lives.
- b) Let me explain it with a New Testament example. Jesus dictated (via John) seven letters to seven churches in Chapters 2 and 3 of Revelation. One of the fascinating things is what is dictated to the last church (The Laodiceans). They were condemned for their works being "lukewarm". I'd argue those in that church were not saved, but I could be wrong. It could just be an eternal reward issue. Either way, I can't imagine messing with the possibility of not being pleasing God by our works. We're back to the issue or realizing eternity is much longer a time span than this lifetime. The point is if God's not happy with what how we're living, that means we're in big trouble.
- c) That leads back to the priests in Malachi's day. They were not offering their best lambs to be sacrificed. It's just saying, "here's an old sickly one, let's offer that one to God". Malachi even mentions the governor (as in paying one's taxes). Imagine telling your tax collectors that you can't pay the full amount but I've got \$20 in my wallet, take that! Let's just say it won't work with the government so why can't we treat God any better than that?
- d) Time for a quick lecture on Christianity and giving. I disagree (respectively) with a lot of Christians about "tithing". (That's giving 10% of one's take home income.) My argument is if we do that, "we put ourselves under the law". With that said, Paul said we should be giving generously and with a good attitude. It's the idea that we're "happy to give!"
- i) I never hold the attitude that we must give all to our local church. My view is we should be giving where we see "God working". If we are involved in a Christian ministry that is making a difference for Jesus, give there as well as a home church. I simply hold the view that Christian giving should be "first" and not what we've got left at the end of the day. (As most of you know, I don't take money for what I am doing here. I figure God's providing and that's that.) Let's just say I don't get rich don't what I'm doing, but I can't stand not doing it and I believe it's what God has called me to do.
- ii) Bottom line time, budget your income. Start with giving to God and then plan for the rest of one's needs and desires. If you're income goes up and down like mine, I would simply say give a percentage of your income when it comes in and continue to trust God to provide in bad times (and do the footsteps for marketing!)
- iii) I've met some great "givers" in my lifetime. It's considered a spiritual gift. I notice that a lot of "giver's" styles are to give where God is blessing. They'll often ignore a new ministry, but if they see it taking off and it gets results, then those "givers" will step in at that point.
- iv) OK, now that I've got my giving lecture out of my system, and we realize that the issue here is about doing works that are pleasing to God, let's get back to Malachi.

13. Verse 9: "Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?" – says the LORD Almighty.
- a) After spending a page describing how our efforts for God can be "lukewarm", as if we are going through the motions of living the Christian life, but our hearts aren't in it, one has to ponder, "OK then, how do we fix that?" The desire of believers is for God to pour out His grace upon us. I'm not just talking about accepting Jesus as God, but letting God bless our lives as we make a difference for Him. It doesn't mean life will now be perfect since we're now letting Jesus be in charge of our lives. It's about realizing He wants to do for us what we can't do for ourselves. It means rain coming down so plants can grow and we all have water to drink. It's God providing us with a sense of peace no matter what life's throwing at us. All I'm saying is there's a "cause and effect" with God. As usual, the issue at hand is us being a good witness for Him. Let me explain:
 - i) If word got out that people we're offering their leftovers to God, they'd be thinking how powerful can this God be if He's willing to accept "leftovers"? How can He be the God of the Universe if those who worship Him don't take Him seriously? How can we be separated for His use if we don't make Him the center of our lives? All I am saying is if we don't put God first in our lives and make Him the main focus of our lives, people will think, "What's the big deal about your God anyway?"
 - ii) OK, enough guilt for Verse 9, let's try Verse 10.
14. Verse 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 where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty.
- a) Here we get the "What does God desire" verses. Verse 10 is in effect a plea from God. It is saying in effect, if that's the way all of you are going to act, I wish someone would lock up My Temple. I'd rather have a "closed until further notice" sign on the door than to have a bunch of people offer their leftovers and in essence not make Me the center of their lives".
 - b) Stop and think what God wants more than anything else from us: A relationship with us. He wants us to make Him the center of our lives as He wants to be the center of our lives. God wants to bless our lives, simply because He cares about us and wants us to be a good witness for Him. That's what Verse 11 is all about: God wants His name respected among all nations of the world. God wants non-Israelites to think, "Wow, He's really blessing His people, maybe we should check out this god and find out what the big deal is!" I need to be careful here: We don't seek God for the "fringe benefits". We don't turn over our lives to Jesus so we can kick back all day and God just "rains down money and food at us". He does for us what we can't do for ourselves. That's why I like "rain" as an example. Most of us can work to do what's necessary to provide for ourselves and our family, but we are dependant upon God to provide for us what we can't do for ourselves. That's what having peace with God is all about: Trusting He will do what we can't do for ourselves and doing what we have to do to "survive and thrive".
 - c) Of all the things God promises us, the hardest one to accept is that we'll have suffering to go through in this lifetime. (2nd Timothy 3:12, paraphrased). Most people want to make themselves the center of their lives. They don't think much about God unless life is going bad. Christian suffering comes when we make God the focus of our life and opposition to that lifestyle comes around. My point here simply is despite whatever we must face in our lifetime in terms of suffering, it is worth it because the God who created us also is the God who loves us and wants to bless our lives so we can be a great witness for Him.
 - d) Speaking of God's promises, realize He's promising here that His name will be (note that) great around world. That's a promise. Yes that means effort on our part, but it also means it's a certainty told by the God who knows all things before history occurs.

- e) Stop and think about that for a moment. While other ancient nations discussed in those Minor Prophets no longer exist, Israelites live today. How many "Amorites, Edomites or Moabites" exist today? Nobody claims they are part of those nations. Yet Israelites exist all over the world. The same with Christians. Despite persecution in some places, we do "survive and thrive" worldwide. All I'm saying is God's word came true in Verse 11 that His name is well known around the world.
 - f) Given the positive fact that God's name is well known world wide, let's return to the issue at hand, which is being lukewarm toward God and the consequences of living that way.
15. Verse 12: "But you profane it by saying, 'The Lord's table is defiled,' and, 'Its food is contemptible.'¹³ And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, lame 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.
- a) Let me paraphrase these verses from God's perspective: How can My name be considered great around the world if those are called to be My people don't show Me any respect? It's a matter of God's reputation on the line based on how we act. Again the issue at hand isn't a major sin like murder or even theft. It's treating God as if we're on "autopilot" as we are only going through the motions of honoring Him.
 - b) One of my favorite illustrations on the difference between "involved versus committed" is a "bacon and egg breakfast". The joke is the chicken is involved, but the pig is committed. When I see people who only go to church on Christmas and Easter, I think of "lukewarm" Christians. There's an old Christian reference that goes: Avoid being a "pew potato". That refers to someone who takes up space in a church service but that's all the "works" they do for God. Just as those Israelites offered their "second choices" to God, so we as Christians can easily be lukewarm toward God if we're just going through the Christian "motions" as we are not putting our hearts into it.
 - c) Yes I'm piling on the guilt here, but let's be honest it's easy to do. It's like driving in "auto-pilot" mode where we don't have to think too much about what we're doing. Christianity requires a constant reminder that God wants to be the center of our lives and wants to be "First on a list of one" in our lives. That means if we're going shopping we take God with us. If we're going to work, we take God with us. If we're doing a fun activity, we realize that God's there with us as part of that activity. It doesn't mean we have to say, pass out bible tracks everywhere we go. It does mean we're always to be a good witness for Him in all situations. Think about it this way: If people know we are Christians, they're going to watch our behavior to see if we act like it. Even if they don't know, they should see us as loving people who are God-centered. That's why we're always "on the clock" for Jesus.
 - d) You may say, I can't think about Jesus 24/7. Nobody can. I'm just saying that if we think of ourselves as living God centered lives, then the decisions we make in life must be what He desires. I don't think God cares so much where we live or what we do for a living. He is interested in us being a good witness for Him in whatever choices we make in life.
 - e) You might think I've wandered away from the text, but in effect, I've covered it perfectly. For example, the text says a person is cursed if they give their "leftovers" to God. Whether we realize or not, that's true. When we don't make God the center of our lives, we become cursed in that we're now trying to live based on our own power and not His power.
 - f) Verse 14 states that God desires is His name to be "feared" around the world. That's about us fearing the eternal consequences of ignoring Him and being sent to hell for not turning our lives over to Him. The "fear of God" is called the beginning of wisdom in Proverbs. It is the idea that because we have a healthy fear of His wrath for not living as He desires, it is a matter of wanting to please God as that's the best way for us to live!

16. Chapter 2, Verse 1: "And now, you priests, this warning is for you. ²If 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.
- a) Speaking of curses, God doesn't let up in Chapter 2. As my regulars know, there were no chapter breaks in the original text. I get the impression that Malachi's main purpose was to "afflict the comfortable". What I mean by that was that the Israelites were going back to the bad habit of going through the motions of serving God, but their hearts weren't in it.
 - b) Malachi is speaking to the priests as if to say, "Don't think you're any better than everyone else in Israel just because you're priests. If you are just doing what everyone wants you to do, that doesn't make any of you a good representative for Me. You're cursing yourself by your actions because you're not helping the situation."
 - c) As I said in the introduction, don't think I'm not a professional "priest" so this section isn't for me. If we believe Jesus is God and in charge of our lives and died for our sins, then we are "priests" in that we've been called to live as a witness for God in everything we do.
 - d) The Israelites were guilty of "going through the motions of doing church" but their hearts were not in it. That's why they were offering leftovers to God.
 - e) Let me reverse this for a moment. What if you say, I go to church every Sunday, I'm got a few ministries I'm involved with and I write checks for those ministries. The issue isn't to make us feel guilty about not doing enough. The issue is the question of do we make God the center of our lives or not? If we think, I did "x, y and z" this week at church, now I am free to go do what I want, that's the wrong attitude. I like the attitude of "I'm free to drink all the alcohol I want or I'm free to do all the bad drugs I want. The question is how much do I want to? It's about desiring to please God in all that we do. That's how we make Him the center of our lives in all that we do and avoid the curses of these verses?
 - f) So how does God curse believers? I think of it as God loves us too much to leave us alone! He desires a relationship with us so much that He's willing to do whatever He can to drive us back to Him. If we live the Christian life for a while, and then go turn away from it will make us miserable as we realize that's the best way to live this life. That's when the curses come as God tells us in effect, "You want to be miserable without Me, ok then I'll give you want you want and you'll be cursed whether you realize it or not!"
 - g) Now if that isn't enough to keep us on the "straight and narrow", Verse 3 should really do the trick:
17. Verse 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. ⁴And you will know that I have sent you this warning 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. ⁶True 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.
- a) Imagine God telling you that He's going to smear "dung on your faces". Whether that is a reference to human or animal dung is irrelevant. It's God "getting in our faces" to remind us that "He's not to be messed with. I don't know if that literal act really happened and to tell the truth I'd rather not know. God's in charge, deal with it and live with that reality!"
 - b) From there Malachi makes a "strange left turn" to discuss the Levites. Let me explain that one quickly: Of the 12 tribes of Israel, God picked one of them and said, whether you like it or not, all of you will be priests to the other 11 tribes. As I once jokingly said, if you are the descendant of that tribe and you told your parents, "I want to go into sales for a living, you're parents would say, no way, off to seminary you go!" On the other hand if you were not a Levi and wanted to be a priest, it's "Too bad, you're working the family business!"

- i) The point of that silly illustration is that priests were "separated by God and they were picked by Him for Him". People who go into the ministry say it's a "calling" by God and live as if they had no choice in the matter. My simple point is just as God separated the Levites to be His priests back then, so God separates people to be His priests for us today. If God's called you to be a witness for Him, welcome to the ministry! That doesn't necessarily mean we all have to pack our bags to go to seminary. It just means we're to live differently enough that people know we're separated by God to be used by Him. That's what living the Christian life is about.
 - ii) The reason I gave that little speech is so that when you read this passage about the Levites, you won't think "Good for them, what about me?" Just as He separated all of them to be His witnesses to the world, so God's separated us. With that said, let us look at these verses and "see if the shoe's fit"!
 - c) The call to be Levite (separated for God's use) is to have a wonderful sense of peace about life knowing that we can't blow our salvation if we tried. We can lose our eternal rewards if we're not a good witness for Him, but we can't lose our salvation, because it's no longer "ours" to lose! The big question of life to me isn't "are we saved" it is "what have we done with it?" That's what God is interested in. That's why God separated the Levites from the other Israel tribes. That's why He separated us Christians from nonbelievers so we'll use our lives as a witness for Him.
 - d) From there Malachi reminds us what Levites were required to do: Teach as God desires them to teach. It's not about being perfect, but about studying God's laws, and teaching them and practicing them in their own lives. The point is it should be our desire to turn from sin and be a good witness for Jesus in every aspect of our lives. That's what all these verses are reminding us about here.
18. Verse 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."
- a) It's time to talk about literal pastors, priests and even bible teachers. The hard part about those roles is God holds us accountable for them. James 3:1 says that teachers will have a stricter judgment. What I suspect that means is God holds us accountable for what we do teach. Yes that scares me and that keeps me on the "straight and narrow" more than most bible verses. The point is to teach God's word accurately, in context and also to explain simply what it means and how to apply it our lives. If we fail to do that, that is when we become bad teachers and suffer for it. I'm convinced that's Malachi's point here in these verses. Yes I'm sure there was literal suffering by the rabbi's of that day, but let's make it clear that God holds teacher to that higher standard for that reason.
 - b) The related idea is pastor and teacher's behavior. I've known a handful of pastors who've lost their ministry due to sin in their lives. I'm not saying pastors have to be perfect, but I am saying such "mess up's" are costly. When problems occur, we confess them, turn from them and not think, "I'm better than you, as I expect you to live by these standards but I'm a pastor (or whatever) so it doesn't matter if I obey them or not". In Leviticus a "remedy" exists when leaders sin and it's stricter than when another Israelite sins. My simple point is such sins are forgivable, but it's another proof that God holds those given the privilege of teaching His word to a higher standard than the rest of His people.
 - c) I can just hear the Jewish leaders asking, "OK, where did we mess up?" We'll get to that in Verse 11. Again, notice the underlying issue is "mediocrity". It's not like they were killing innocent people. It's about having a lukewarm relationship with God by not living as He desires we live. Part of that living is not only our personal behavior, but how well we do teach His word as an obvious example. Need specifics? Coming up.

19. Verse 10: Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?
- a) I see Verse 10 as the audience response to Malachi or him being cynical as he continues to speak on God's behalf. In other words, they're asking, "how have we been unfaithful?"
 - i) Realize these are the children and grandchildren of the Israelites who moved back to that country after the Persians allowed them to do so. You'd think they cared a lot about pleasing God. Again the issue is not putting our hearts into it, but going through the motions. It's like saying "I did a, b, and c for God today", so I can now check that off my list and go live however I want.
 - ii) Now that I've beat that point to death, let's move on to the next "lukewarm" issue:
20. Verse 11: Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god. ¹² As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD remove him from the tents of Jacob – even though he brings an offering to the LORD Almighty.
- a) Now we get to the heart of the issue. The Jewish people living there were "dumping their wives" to marry foreign (and I'll assume younger) girls that worshipped foreign gods.
 - b) Time for a divorce lecture. Verse 16 coming up effectively says, "I (God) hate divorce". Does that mean divorce is an unforgivable sin? As I like to say, the only unforgivable sin is to deny Jesus is God. The idea of God "hating divorce" is the fact that He can't stop loving who He has committed to love. Just as we Christians can't lose our salvation if we believe God did pay the complete price for our sins and we call Jesus "Lord", so God can't divorce us from that unconditional promise.
 - c) I can't cover the divorce topic in a paragraph or two. Let me give the highlights: I'd argue that a reason God wants men and women to marry is because it's hard to get along with a member of the opposite sex. When homosexual men say they truly do love their partner, I do believe it because in a lot of ways it's easier to get along with a member of the same sex than the opposite sex. I assume most of us have seen a lot of failed marriages. Often it's a case where two people argue too much or have drifted apart and it's better they divorce. I have even seen grown children who say it's better my parents got divorced. It was easier to deal with both of them separately. I've also seen people who become devout Christians after marriage and that fact kills the marriage. I'm just saying that while I don't encourage divorce, I've seen it way too much in my life and I know all too well the pain it causes.
 - d) Then we get to the specific topic of going out of one's way to marry unbelievers. That's the focus here. To divorce a wife just because a younger one is better looking, won't solve our desire. As I was once taught, "God sometimes punishes the adulterer by making them live with whom they cheated with." I've also heard sermons of the three legitimate reasons for divorce is "Adultery, abuse and addiction". I'm not saying one has to divorce in cases like that, but not dealing with those issues is what often leads to divorce.
 - e) OK enough on that tough topic. If one is facing that issue, please talk to one's pastor over how to get help. Many larger churches offer divorce care ministries. I don't claim to have all the answers. I just know it's a complicated topic and we must pray their way through it in order to survive and make a difference for God despite facing such issues.
 - f) Meanwhile the priests of Malachi's day, were guilty of divorcing their Jewish wives to go marry foreign women. Ezra (Chapter 9) complained about this as well. A reason we get the famous "equally yoked" passage in 2nd Corinthians 6:14 is because a marriage of two believers honors Him and gives marriages a key thing to unite upon. I admit that I'm not crazy about "evangelical dating", which is the classic reference to a Christian who's dating a non-believer in hopes of converting them. Bottom line is it rarely works. Lots of people will agree to anything to get close to someone. It's only God that converts hearts to Him. Which leads back to these verses. Malachi tells the priests who did this that they must be "removed from the tent of Jacob" (treated as a nonbeliever) even if he's a priest.

- g) OK then, does that mean if I'm married to a nonbeliever, I can't attend church? There are a few churches that teach that, but I don't see it that way. I'd argue that any person who has given their lives to Jesus should be welcome in church. If they have a spouse who doesn't believe in Jesus, that's a "marriage issue" and not a salvation issue. The issue in Malachi is the priests who left their Jewish wives for non-Jewish girls will now be torn between their service to God and trying to make their wives happy. You can't have it both ways. If our spouse says we can't go to church because they don't believe it, we have to choose who we love more, our spouse or God? That's why Paul was clear about the issue of not being "equally yoked" with nonbelievers. If one gets saved after marriage, Paul tells us that we should stay in that marriage if possible to be a witness to that spouse. (See 1st Corinthians Chapter 7 on that issue.) Meanwhile it's time to back to Malachi:
21. Verse 13: Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. ¹⁴You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.
- a) I may have wrapped up my divorce discussion, but Malachi's still on a role. He's making a point that God's not blessing their lives because of their marriages to non-Israelites. As I have been beating home the whole lesson, this isn't murder or theft. It is about not giving our "all" to God. Divorce and marrying nonbelievers on purpose is a perfect example of a lukewarm relationship with God. The point here is we may cry and moan about how we are suffering and God's not blessing our lives. The question is what are we doing about it to change the situation? Confession of sin is not just confession, but turning from sin! I'd argue that's the underlying point of this section and the lesson.
- b) Does that mean to be blessed by God we have to marry our ex-wives? I'll just say that if a marriage ended and we're still fully committed to God, and reconciliation isn't occurring, learn from our mistakes, fix what we can and move on. As I recently taught my children, when we dig ourselves in a hole, there are three issues 1) How do we put the shovel down 2) how do we get out of hole and 3) how do we not dig more holes? The lesson the priests have to focus on is those three issues as it centers on having a strong commitment to God and avoiding compromises with Him.
22. Verse 15: Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.
- a) So why does God care so much about who we marry? Remember God's goal, to spend an eternity with those who out of their own free will choose to love Him. Who we marry will make a difference as far as how our children are raised. Children of marriages with both parents coming from different religious background usually end up with no faith in God or whoever has the strongest beliefs. That's why the "equally yoked" issue is essential in marriages. Even if we don't have children, by living with someone who also believes that God is the center focus of our lives is essential. Bottom line, it's about staying loyal to our spouse if they are believers. Avoiding the three "A's": Adultery, addiction and abuse as any one of those can destroy how God intends a marriage to be.
- b) I'm very aware marriage is a struggle. No one ever said it's easy. First one has to think of the children and what's best for them. Then it's about keeping our commitment although it is a struggle for all of us at times.
- c) The bottom line here is about trying our best to do the right thing, making God the center focus of our lives, and making the best decisions we can given the situation at hand. If we do that, we can be assured that God will continue to love us and guide us no matter what it is we're going through in life. Again realize the issue isn't salvation here, it's avoiding a "lukewarm" relationship with God.

23. Verse 16: "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.
- a) Let's be honest, a commitment to God and a commitment to our spouse can be a struggle through our lives. The desire of pleasing one can be a problem when it comes to pleasing the other. The issue is faithfulness. God calls us to be faithful to Him as well as to whom we marry. What if your spouse wants to leave you? Here is where serenity is important. It's a matter of fixing what we can, giving to God what we can't and having the wisdom to know the difference. We can't control our spouses behavior, only our own. Part of being faithful to God is being faithful to our spouse. Marriage is rarely easy and requires work to keep it going well. That's a whole separate topic, but since I'm running long, I'll spare you that lecture today. The point here is to be faithful to what God calls to be faithful to, which includes our marriage. The grass is "not greener" on the other side!
24. Verse 17: You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"
- a) Remember there are no chapter breaks in the original text. Even though this is the end of Chapter 2, Malachi's thoughts will continue in Chapter 3.
 - b) This last verse is Malachi answering his critics. His critics are essentially saying that God loves all people so whatever we do is pleasing to Him. The second criticism is "We don't see God's justice happening, so what are you (Malachi) talking about?"
 - c) As to the first point of "God loves all people". It's true that God desires all people to have a relationship with Him. However, God is just as much a God of justice as He is a God of love. That can only be reconciled by God Himself paying for our sins. Malachi's book did open with a comparison of twin brothers and "God loving one and hating the other". The evidence of that love was based on the descendants of each brother and who He's blessing and who He's cursing based on "who's back in their land and who's land is wasted!" What Malachi's point is God's justice occurs all the time, all we have to do is look for it! Realize who's living a joyful life, and you'll find a person fully committed to making God a focal point of his or her life. Show me a person who may be wealthy or famous, but their main focus is themselves, and usually they're miserable on the inside. It's only when we live a God centered life is when true joy comes into our lives. With that said, I'm way overdue for our closing prayer. Hopefully we'll finish up Malachi in the next lesson.
25. Heavenly Father, Help us to be fully committed to You. Show us areas of our lives where we are still acting "lukewarm" in our relationship with You. Help us never to waste the most valuable asset You've given us, our time, so we can use it to make a difference for You. Lead us down the path that You desire we go. Fill us with Your power and give us boldness so that no matter what occurs in our lives, we can know that You're using it for Your glory. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.