

Malachi Then and Now
God's Unchanging Love
iii. Mouthpiece for God (Mal 2:1-9)

"The eye is the window of the soul" is a familiar saying. However, Malachi addressing the priests of his day argues that the mouth is the window of the soul. Jesus echoes this sentiment, "For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of" (Matt 12:34). Malachi took the priests to task for failing to fulfil their primary calling, viz. faithful teaching of God's Word.

The novelist John Updike, no friend of the gospel, in his novel *Run Rabbit* describes a young minister Rev Eccles, "With his white collar he forges God's name in every sentence he speaks... He steals belief from the children he is supposed to be teaching. He commits fraud with every schooled cadence of the liturgy." John Updike may well have taken his words straight from Malachi 2400 years ago. Malachi sounds strident and harsh to our modern ears. We prefer a kinder, gentler faith. But extreme times require extreme measures. The priests looked the part. They wore the right vestments. They recited prayers. But they were lifeless. Platitudes devoid of passion. They bent the truth and corrupted their ministry.

When a building is on fire we don't simply speak in measured tones. We shout fire! When someone is teetering on the edge of a dangerous cliff, we shout danger! Likewise, Malachi. His stern words are in fact an act of kindness – a call to repentance, strong medicine as an antidote to the slow poison administered by the priests. Just as in Malachi's day, the enemy of our faith, the father of lies, knows if we confuse people through ignorance and indifference, the battle for hearts and minds is half won. As Paul put it, "If the trumpet does not sound a clear call, who will get ready for battle" (1 Cor 14:8).

Malachi's brief message breaks down into three parts:

- i. He *condemns* the priests for their failure in ministry
- ii. He lays down the *covenant* standard
- iii. He *charges* them for doing wrong in light of that standard

They had failed in their threefold task viz to teach the law of Moses, offer intercessory prayer and make atoning sacrifice. They were first and foremost teachers of God's word and they had failed abysmally.

If they did not change their ways, they would not simply have egg on their faces, God says "I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it" (Mal 2:3). Because they failed to honour God, he would dishonour them. Grace spurned leads to disgrace. Malachi calls them to radical repentance. Honour God's name and walk in his ways. To honour God is to stand in awe of his name. To walk with God is to live one's life in accordance with the will of God. To walk with God is to go where he goes, to stay close to him and be at peace with him (vv5,6).

Character is king. There are only two weapons in a Christians leader's armoury viz. personal example (life) and teaching (doctrine). The best antidote to sin is a holy life. The best antidote to indifference is love. The best antidote to despising God's character is to honour his name. And it needed to start with the priests. Likewise today, as the pastor so the people. May God give us grace to heed the 'severe mercy' of Malachi's warning and respond accordingly. May we like Enoch and Noah of old, unlike the priests of Malachi's day, walk with God, consistently and faithfully.

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