

Honor Your Commitments

Introduction

Jim and I are moving through a four-week series on the book of Malachi, and today, we're going to focus on the importance of honesty, sanctity, and the importance of honoring our commitments. This is what **Malachi 2** is largely about. I think that we live in an age that is well categorized by idle-talk. What I mean by that is, people say a lot, but they often do so free of meaning or without any sense of gravity to what they say, what it means, or what the consequences are of what they are saying. Social media has made it easy for one to place words out into space, and there is little if any ramification on the speaker if he is not accountable to what he has said. As you can imagine, the word of a Christian is not meant to be like this.

We're going to talk today about holiness and promises, and the two really go hand in hand. We're going to talk about one of the greatest promises on Earth, and how it relates to one of the greatest promises that God makes to us as His followers. We'll see the gravity with which God approaches our word as Christians. And... We'll look at the consequences we face when we don't honor our commitments and promises.

These verses don't carry on an air of flowers and a cool breeze; so remember that as surely as God loves you, He expects a lot of you. Nevertheless, He tells us everything, even those things that are corrective, because He loves us and desires that we would be the best believers that we can be. Let's listen and learn together today. *First, we need to...*

Understand that God is Serious about Our Sanctity

So, what do I mean when I talk about our sanctity? Our sanctity is our purity. Our sanctity is our spiritual cleanliness and tidiness, so to speak. Our sanctity is highly variable at any given time, depending on how our battle, or lack of battle, with sin is faring. I want to be clear that our sanctity does not determine our salvation. Christ declares us righteous before God when we accept his Lordship, period. Nevertheless, we are to do our part daily in striving to live 'good Christian lives', free of sin and devoted in service to God and our community.

Sanctification is a lifelong journey with ups and downs. If you feel like your struggle to live righteously is down right now, take heart, because it can go up from here, I promise. With the Holy Spirit as your guide, you can always bounce back.

One way in which our sanctity is positively affected is when we are being positive witnesses to the Lord, not just in what we are doing, but more importantly, in *who we are being and who we are becoming*. At the beginning of **Malachi 2**, God addresses the priests of Israel when He says this.

Malachi 2:1-5 - “And now, you priests, this warning is for you. 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. “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. And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue,” says the Lord Almighty.

You see, the priests had not been fulfilling their core duties of teaching the Law and providing good lifestyle examples to the people. This was especially important because, from the headship of the priesthood, the masses would follow. I personally love the graphic nature of how God promises retribution in these verses. We need to understand that this unfortunate picture painted by God is more than just an embarrassing situation of being covered in poo. A priest who was covered in dung would be ceremonially unclean, and thus unable to practice his priestly duties. He’s essentially out of a job, and God also says that he’ll be carried off with the waste. Disposed of... Out of the community... Ostracized... A VERY big deal...

But again, even this admonishment from God comes from a place of love. Though **verse 2** indicates that He had begun to curse their blessings, it also leaves room for and in fact calls for repentance in saying, ***If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name...*** The call to repentance is just that. Listen to the instruction of God, honor His name. Honor your commitment to God and to these His commands. God is encouraging the growth of his people here.

God would go on in the verses immediately following to remind his Levite priests of Levi, their model and namesake representative. Levi was certainly not without sin, but by God’s own account, he was upright and lived the life of a good priest. We have the Highest Priest in Jesus Christ to model ourselves after, in honesty, in promises, and in all aspects of life. The standard of Jesus Christ is our daily goal. ...Living and promising as He did. ***Next, we need to...***

Honor God

God continued on in **verses 7 and 8...**

Malachi 1:7-8 – “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. 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.

Let me ask you something. What does this have to do with you and me? Are we Levites? Unlikely. Most of us, I’m assuming, are gentiles. But are we priests in any sense of the word? Yes. In fact we are. Peter tells us in **1 Peter 2:9** that we are a...

1 Peter 2:9 - ...chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that [we] may declare the praises of him who called [us] out of darkness into his wonderful light.

The priests were the carriers of the Truth and the messengers to the non-believers and believers alike about who God is. In the same way, all of us as Christians today are the carriers of the Word of God, and the messengers of who Christ is. You see, the priests owed it to God to be honest examples for the Jewish people. Today, we owe it to God to be honest examples to everyone of who Christ is and how He loves. That’s part of our covenant with God, given to us in the Great Commission. We have to honor that commitment, and, like the Levitical priests of old, we have to strive to live righteous lives, walking an honest path and confessing and repenting of our sins daily.

Now God has never smeared dung on me, and I can’t express to you how thankful I am for that. If you want a visual to relate to, though, how many of you have changed a diaper in your life? Think about some of the sights, smells, and even the emotions that come with changing a diaper... *A bad one...A blowout...* That may sound like an odd analogy, but it’s one that most of us can probably relate to. Have you ever gotten it on you? Do you remember how you felt? And when a baby has a dirty diaper, or when we’ve gotten some on us, we clean up the situation *right now*, don’t we? We don’t wait until much later down the road to address this situation of uncleanness, and nor should we wait to address the uncleanness in our spiritual lives, should we? There are consequences to our uncleanness, and consequences when we don’t honor our commitments to God. Let’s look at two of them that we can pull directly from the book of Malachi.

1. First, we damage ourselves. This one is rather obvious, but when we don't understand and honor God and His Law, and when we don't live out a lifestyle worthy of one who follows Christ, we degrade ourselves. You see, a lot of Christians think that the best way to process Christianity is to accept the gift of salvation and then stop right there. They think they can kick back, take it easy, continue to live lives of varying degrees of questionability, and ultimately, not play their necessary part in their own growth. Such a flower by my estimation lacks fragrance, and may even, as we've seen, be dung covered. Such a flower may be attractive from afar, but up close, it's wilted, tattered, and barely alive if not merely dying.



2. The second consequence may be yet more critical, especially when considering that the two greatest commandments as cited by Jesus Christ were to love God, and love one another, but NOT simply to love oneself. When we don't honor our commitments to God, we can damage others. We can lead others astray. How horrible would it be to have followed a priest gone astray, to think that you are walking in the light, and instead be walking in darkness? How horrible would it be to be that priest who haphazardly misled one, or many, by walking a complacent and errant path? You see, we must be vigilant in honoring God. Loving God is the first and greatest commandment. The second is loving each other, and we'll take a look at that next in depth, as does Malachi in the rest of this chapter. ***Hand in hand with honoring God, we need to...***

Honor Each Another

Our relationship with God and our love of Him should certainly be reflected in how we treat one another. We're called to honor our commitments to one another like we're called to honor our commitments to God, and certainly like God honors His commitments to us. In Malachi's time, the Israelites had failed to

respect one of their most critical promises to one another, that being the marriage relationship. Malachi's prophecy details this in **verses 10 - 14...**

Malachi 2:10-14 – 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? Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying women who worship a foreign God. 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.

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. You 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.

First off, let's get one thing right. God is not a racist. *I thank God every day, as someone who's not from the middle east, that He is not racist, because the last time I checked, He's not American either.* We have to understand that God's **mission** per se, through so much of the Old Testament was one of preservation. God has always desired purity for His people, and no form of purity was more important than the purity of knowing and living under the banner of the one and only true God.

Marriage to foreign women would threaten exactly that. The men of Israel would be tempted to explore the foreign religions of their exotic wives. Wives would not raise their children in the ways of the one true God. Have you ever known children who come from parents with mixed religious backgrounds? I have known two. They ranged from religiously confused to completely indifferent, and it's because of the special challenges they face receiving guidance from their parents that pull them in two distinctly different directions. This is why God forbade marriages outside of the Jewish community in these days, but let's not lose sight of the critical point. It says in **verse 14** that, **"...the Lord was witness between the men of Israel and the wives of their youth."** *These men had already been married to God-fearing Jewish women, and they divorced them to chase after these exotic women!*

I want to be clear on one thing... The marriage relationship is meant to be that relationship in which a man and a woman love one another and bear with one another in the same way that God loves and bears with us! Later in Malachi's

prophecy, divorce is used synonymously with terms including, “hate”, “injustice”, and “violence.” Israel had broken one of their most sacred promises, and we can infer from the verses in Malachi that this wasn’t likely a small handful of people, but a large group in mass. They’d done this and then wearied the Lord with their complaints as they faced the consequences of their own sin... **Verse 17...**

Malachi 2:17 – 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?”

That is to say, as we wrap up these verses, these men had determined that in spite of their blatant and indulgent sin, they were still right with God. AND... When faced with the consequences of that sin, they bellowed out into the night complaining that the God of justice was treating them unjustly. That’s Malachi 2 in a nutshell. The Israelites were wrong... Let’s finish out today by focusing instead on how it is we can be right. *Simply put, we need to...*

Let Our Word be Our Word

Be it our marriage, our friendships, our relationships with our children, our relationships with our coworkers, or our promise in general, we need to treat all of our promises as if they were sacred; because I believe we’ve seen in this chapter of Malachi that God expects them to be so. Do you guys remember the story about the man who ended up riding on a talking donkey in the Old Testament? That man was named Balaam. If you don’t know that story, you should read it sometime, but God put some important words in Balaam’s mouth as a reminder of how God is. God said in **Numbers 23:19...**

Numbers 23:19 – God is not human, that he should lie, not a human being, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?

Isn’t this the standard towards which we should strive as priests of Jesus Christ and messengers of the Lord’s Word? There are a number of ways by which we can keep our promises sacred before God and before others. Let’s explore some of them now.

1. Give your Promise Sparingly – This is not to say that the solution to breaking promises is simply never to promise. This is an understanding that

you can only stretch yourself so far before you break. If you know that making a certain promise in any given time will be making a promise that you cannot keep, then simply don't make the promise. This is about setting boundaries, which is a very difficult lesson for many of us. It's okay to say "no." Let me tell you with full confidence that your "honest-no" carries much more value than a "hapless-yes", even if your intentions are from a good place!

2. Don't make Empty Promises – I just spoke briefly about a "hapless-yes" promise, which is a promise you intend to, or would like to keep, but you know you probably shouldn't have made. The big brother to the hapless-yes" promise is the "empty-yes" promise, and it's a little more nefarious. The "empty-yes" promise is the one you make when you know full-well that you're not going to keep it, or you have no intention of keeping it. You may simply be trying to be polite in the moment, but again, just give an "honest-no." It carries much more value.
3. Keep Track of your Promises – If you struggle to remember the promises you make, write them down. There's absolutely nothing wrong with being organized. I try to remind myself of that daily. I've found it useful in the past to carry a memo pad in my back pocket to help me to remember commitments I've made, or people that I've offered to pray for. There's no harm or shame in this. Put tools to your use.
4. Follow Through on Your Promises – Stated simply, if you've made a promise, follow through on it. Understand that it may require cost, work, time, and sacrifice, but in the end, you'll have better relationships and a solid reputation if you fulfill the promises you make. If you make them, strive hard to honor them.
5. Mend Broken Promises – Finally, if for some reason you can't keep a promise you've made, work hard to mend any broken bridges that result from the broken promise. Things will happen. Unforeseen events will interfere, and you will not be able to maintain a perfect promissory-record. When this happens, be honest and humble, and do what you can to make up for your inability or inopportunity to follow through. If we love each other, we owe each other that much. This is true of both the people in our lives, and of God.

Jesus sums this up succinctly in **Matthew 5:37** – And I like the Berean Study Bible translation, which says...

Matthew 5:37 (BSB) – Simply let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ No.’

Let’s ingrain that on our hearts as we close today.

Conclusion

You know, when we make a promise, a solid promise, and we keep it, we cast a firm and unmoving island into the sea of uncertainty that is the future. I’ll say that again, because in my opinion it’s beautiful. When we make a promise, a solid promise, and we keep it, we cast a firm and unmoving island into the sea of uncertainty that is the future. I’m so thankful for all of the promises that God makes to me, so many of them life and soul-saving, and we know that He keeps them all. ...Every last one. Let’s strive to be like that in turn, both to Him, and to others, every day. Let this permeate into all of your relationships and promises. Stand with me as we prepare our hearts for the invitation.

Invitation