

God's (un)Faithful Teacher

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[0 : 00] The grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of the Lord endures forever. Let's pray and ask God's help as we come to his word. Our gracious God and heavenly Father, we do pray now that you would speak to us.

We long to hear your voice, so speak to us, we pray, as we come to your word by the power of your spirit, that we would come to see and behold and know more of the Lord Jesus Christ, who we seek to follow with all our hearts.

So we ask for your help now, and we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. How do you recognize a faithful teacher of God's word?

How do you spot someone who is faithfully teaching the word of God? Is it by their accent? A lovely Edinburgh accent like mine.

Is it by their shirt? A nice white shirt wearing here this evening, or a nice Czech shirt that was modeled to us earlier. Is it by a dog collar? Or some robes that someone would wear?

[1 : 13] How do you recognize a faithful teacher of God's word? Well, it's not by any of those things. So how do we do it? Let me put the question a little bit more sharply.

How do we all know, how do you all know as a church family, that I am doing this work of teaching God's word faithfully this evening? How do you know that I am doing this properly tonight as we come to the preaching of God's word?

Well, as we return to Malachi this evening, God through Malachi is giving instructions for what a faithful teacher of God's word should be like.

And the reason he's needing to do this is that the priests, the teachers of God's word, if you like, they've abandoned their positions. They've abandoned their posts.

They've kind of got God's job description of what they should be doing, and they've rewritten it. They've scored out large parts of it. They've taken tip-ex to it. I don't know if people still do that these days.

[2 : 17] I guess everything's on email. But they've deleted it. They've tip-exed it. They've written other bits in the margins. They've abandoned their posts. They're doing their own thing. No longer faithfully teaching God's word.

And no longer faithfully living God's way. You see, in the Old Testament, priests had kind of two main roles, if you like. Offering sacrifices to God from the people, bringing them to the temple, and teaching the Bible.

And last week, we kind of saw how it was going. This unit, the start of chapter 2, actually belongs with the sort of major part of chapter 1 from verse 6.

This belongs with that. And we saw last part, how the offering of sacrifices was going. It's going terribly. It's going awful. It's horrendous.

It's so bad that in chapter 1, verse 10, God says, shut the churches. Close the temple. Don't light the fires. Let's all pack up and go home. Some of us have appraisals or kind of job reviews at work, don't we, or a university, a director of studies.

[3 : 25] Well, God, if you like, is bringing the priests for an appraisal. Part 1, fail. And it's serious.

Part 2, well, what about their teaching? We're going to see this evening that it's perhaps even worse than part 1. So if you like, this evening, as we come to Malachi chapter 2, we're kind of rejoining the worship service.

The gathering of God's people is they come to worship. The sacrifices have been offered in a way that they shouldn't have. And now, if you like, we're coming to the sermon.

The focus is on the pulpit, on the lectern, on what we're doing right now. Or more specifically, it's on the person that stands behind it, behind the lectern, behind the pulpit.

We've seen, haven't we, these last few weeks, just how spiritually dark these days are at the end of the Old Testament. We're right here at the end of the Old Testament, 400 years before Jesus comes.

[4 : 30] And it's spiritually dark. Chapter 1, verse 2, God's people have forgotten the love of God. They've forgotten God loves them. They've forgotten he's their father, verse 6.

He's their master. And so God's people are kind of barely recognizable as God's people. Last week, we saw their worship is unworthy. Their prayer is prayerless, if you like.

Their praise is praiseless. And what about their teaching? If we can put it like this, their word is wordless. It's empty, distorted, unfaithful.

And so what does God do? What does God do? He kind of sets up a spot, the difference. If you just cast your eyes down to the whole section, you'll see in verses 1 to 3, he kind of begins to admonish them, call them to task.

And also in verses 8 and 9, at the start of verse 8, you get, but you. So kind of at the start and at the end, he kind of calls them to task for their unfaithfulness.

[5 : 33] And there, right in the middle, he gives them their job description. He tells them what it is they should have been doing in verses 4 to 7. And you see, especially there, if you cast your eyes down, he talks about the terms of a covenant, the terms of a covenant that he made with the Levites.

That is the tribe that was set apart to be the priests, to minister in the Old Testament to God's people. And he reminds them the terms of the covenant. It's like a boss in an appraisal or a job review, getting out the terms of service, getting out the job description.

And here's what it is that we signed up to. Here's what I gave you to do. Here's what a faithful teacher ought to look like. And then at the end, he says, but here's what you're doing.

In some sense, it's a little bit like a spot the difference. I know some of the younger people that are here get magazines and things at home, kind of spot the difference. And that's what we're going to do this evening, looking at a faithful teacher and an unfaithful teacher.

Now, there isn't a direct line between an Old Testament priest and a minister or a teacher of God's word today. It's not a direct line. But Old Testament priests were called to teach God's word.

[6 : 49] And ministers, pastors today are called to teach God's word. And so we can get application from that. But the application goes a little bit wider. It goes a little bit wider.

If we're all sitting there thinking, well, what's this got to do with us? It isn't recognizing a faithful teacher kind of for an ETS classroom. Isn't it for seminary or kind of discussion between Joe and Donald and Joe and the staff team through the elders?

Isn't it just for that? Well, no, we all need it. We all need it because actually the application goes a bit further to others who would teach God's word in other settings. Not just here, but maybe in Christian unions or in camps in the summers or Bible studies.

What is it that we're to do? How is it that we are to live? But it also applies to us because there are going to be seasons in life where perhaps we move. Some of us who are younger or older, we move to be near our family or work or jobs, whatever it is.

What does healthy preaching look like? If I have to move to a new church, what should I be looking for? And certainly we're going to come to the end to see, I hope this evening helps us all to know how to pray, how to be praying for teachers of God's word.

[8 : 03] So how do you recognize, how do you spot a faithful teacher of God's word? We're going to kind of look at these two pictures and then look to apply all this at the end.

So firstly, a faithful teacher of God's word. How do you recognize them? Listen to their lips. Listen to their lips. They faithfully teach God's word. Look down at verse six. Speaking of a true Levite teacher, Levitical teacher, Malachi says this, true instruction was in his mouth.

No wrong was on his lips. Verse seven, for the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and people should see construction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

The word there for instruction is the Hebrew word Torah or law. It's kind of shorthand for God's word. God's word is in his mouth.

Truth is on his lips. He's teaching it faithfully, guarding knowledge, for he is a messenger of the Lord of hosts. Faithful ministers and teachers of God's word know that they're not their own.

[9 : 10] They know that the word is not their own. They are merely messengers proclaiming and teaching what has been given to them. If you've been here the last couple of weeks or you're going

to be here a little bit more throughout Malachi, we haven't touched yet on that word hosts.

God talks about himself often as the Lord of hosts. And the teacher of God's word is a messenger of what? The Lord of hosts. What does that mean?

Host is kind of just an older word for armies. God is saying this, you're a messenger of the Lord of armies. There was a film a few years ago, I think it was a couple of years ago, called 1917, set during the First World War.

And the whole movie is kind of set about two men, two soldiers, privates, I think, who go and meet a very high-ranking officer. And they've got to take a message from him to another part of the front. And I think the message is they need to give it to another commanding officer so that they don't attack over the front because a trap has been set for them, something like that.

[10:21] And as these men get the message in a little bunker and set off for the next hour and a half as it is in the movie, over the next couple of days as we watch it in the film as it's set, what do they do?

They guard the message with their lives. One of the soldiers gives his life for it. No soldier would dream of changing or altering or not listening to the message of their superior officer.

No, the officer gives the message and it goes into his top button pocket or whatever it is, and I will guard the message with my life. I will relay it word for word. If messengers in the army wouldn't dream of not faithfully relaying a message from their captain, how much more a teacher of the word of God is charged to faithfully proclaim all, all of God's word.

As Joe explained this morning before taking us so helpfully through Genesis 34, a difficult passage, a difficult passage, but what did he say to us? He said, well, this morning, as he and Donald do every week, they take us through what?

Book by book? Chapter by chapter? Chapter, why? Because they're committed to feeding you, to feeding us all of God's word.

[11:42] They are committed and convinced that all of God's word has been given to rebuke and equip and to train us in righteousness. So for all this morning was difficult, wasn't it?

And actually, in a couple of weeks' time, we've got a difficult passage in Malachi. We're going to come and speak about divorce. You have pastors here that are committed to talking about all these things, preaching all of God's word.

And that has to be a real encouragement to us. Faithful teachers of God's word are committed to teaching all of God's word because it is God's.

Secondly, then, look at their lives. Look at their lives. They teach God's word, all of it, but they also live God's way. Look down at verse 5. My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave it to him.

It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, no wrong on his lips. And here it is. He walked with me in peace, in uprightness.

[12:44] Do you see those kind of posture words? How does a teacher of God's word, a faithful one, how do they walk? How do they walk? I used to work in a school.

People used to say to me, you've got to walk really fast to get to the break room in time for a cup of tea or coffee or get to the store before the class arrive. And I think sometimes now I still walk a little bit too fast.

But how does a teacher of God's word walk? It's not about walking fast. It's not about walking slow. They walk in uprightness. They seek holiness.

They don't just teach the Bible. They live the Bible. They don't just teach what the Bible says. They do what the Bible says. They live under the authority of God's word.

Some of the easiest people, or at least I think, I think that some of the easiest people in the world to ignore are those who do one thing and say another.

[13:45] Cut down your carbon footprint is the great cry these days. But when you hear it from celebrities or world leaders or politicians, all that, is it Davos, the play, the economic forum, whatever it is, who all fly in on private jets, it's pretty hard to take it seriously.

Hypocrisy kills a message. And so in the faithful teacher of God's word, in the faithful teacher of God's word, we should see something of that word shaping their lives.

Now, not perfectly, not perfectly. No preacher is without sin or will get everything right, not at all, but a man shaped with and formed by the message of the Bible who's under its authority and committed to be killing sin and putting it to death.

This past Tuesday, and I say this, I hope, for your real encouragement, this past Tuesday was an elders meeting, a Kirk session meeting. And as part of my application for free church ministry, I was interviewed this past Tuesday evening.

And I really hope this does encourage you. One of the questions, someone turned up to 1 Timothy chapter 3, to a passage in the New Testament that lays out what the life of a preacher should look like.

[15 : 17] And they said to me as part of the interview, where do you struggle here? Where do you struggle here? Where can we be praying for you here in your life?

And so I want to encourage you, dear brothers and sisters, that you have elders here and ministers here that take seriously, take seriously the call to train men in godliness.

Not just how we teach the Bible, but how we live out Christlikeness in God's word. And so we have, if you like, a man and a message, life and doctrine, these two great pillars that are going to shape the faithful teacher of God's word.

But did you notice that there is actually something else? Did you see that? There's something else. And it's this. It's that. You see it right there at the end of verse 5, just before verse 6.

How else do these people live? They live in awe before God. They live in fear of God. Not that they're terrified, but in holy reverence. They have life and doctrine, but it's awe before God.

[16 : 24] They're captured by the majesty and the beauty and the glory of God. Their hearts are aflame with the gospel. A free church minister of old, Horatius Bonner, says this, a man may be free from all scandal in creed or conduct.

So he may be free from error in life or teaching, and yet be an obstruction in the way of teaching people. How so? He said, souls have been lost for a want of earnestness and a want of love in the preacher, even when the words uttered are precious and true.

And so, dear friends, and so, dear friends, it's living under, it's teaching God's word and living God's way, but we need men who, chapter 1, verse 2, love God. And chapter 2, verse 6, who are in awe of God and have truly been caught up, if you like, in the sense of the majesty of who God is.

And so what's the result of all this? What's the result of all this? Verse 5, they're blessed by God. Verse 5, the covenant is of life and peace, of wholeness and goodness. Most importantly, as they teach, people are turned from iniquity, turned from sin, and come to God.

So there's our first portrait. There's our first portrait, that a man and a message centered on God's word, lips and mouth and posture, all about God's word and his glory.

[17 : 49] But as it were now, Malachi kind of, it's as if the priests are sitting on the other side of the table in the kind of performance review, if I can put it that way, and God says to them, verse 8, but you, but you.

Here's this beautiful picture of wholeness and life and goodness that Israel and Judah have known at points in their history, but you. So dear friends, can you spot the difference?

Can you spot the difference? Let's now look across the pictures to the lips of unfaithful teachers. Look at right there at the end of verse 9. What's on their lips? It's a distorted word.

End of verse 9, you however, but you, you show partiality in your instruction. Partiality, that is they distort God's word. They teach to itch the ears of those that are listening.

They leave out the hard bits, the awkward bits. They teach to gain favor from the rich people, the right people, to get a seat at the table. So dear friends, here's the warning.

[18 : 50] But beware the church. But beware the teacher of God's word. Beware the minister who changes teaching or doctrine to line up with something that isn't in the Bible, especially we might say something that's popular in the world.

that the church for 2,000 years has believed X. The world comes to oppose X, teaching Y. And then you hear the church saying, well, do you know what?

We really actually believed Y all along anyway. Beware the sentence, we know God's word says, but. We know God's word says X, but.

Or the sentence, well, Jesus never really talked about. Have you heard that one before? Do you know Jesus never really mentioned? It is teaching that leaves certain things off the table, that pits Jesus against Paul or the Old Testament against the New Testament.

Anything that is unfaithful adds or takes away or distorts the word of God. Trying to gain earthly popularity. And dear friends, we see it in our nation. We see it across the West.

[20 : 02] What about their lives? What about their lives? They're deaf to God, they dishonor his name and they've departed from his way. There's three things. Look to verse two. God says, if you will not listen. And really the implication is they're not listening.

And then verse two again, if you will not take it to heart to honor my name, that is they're dishonoring God's name. We saw that last week. They're despising God's name. And verse eight, they have turned aside from my way.

They've turned aside from his way. They're deaf to God. They dishonor his name and they've departed from his way. For these people, kind of holiness is the last thing on their mind.

That these are soldiers who ignores the captain's message and actually decide to do something and go somewhere completely different from how the captain has taught them to engage in the battle. They're doing their own thing in their own way.

Their lives do not match their message. So dear friends, can you spot the difference? Can you spot the difference? Faithful, teach all of God's word. Unfaithful, distort God's word.

[21 : 06] Leave parts out of God's word. Twist God's word. Faithful, live God's way. Not perfectly, but intentionally seeking to grow in godliness. Unfaithful, departed from God's way.

Living, doing their own thing. Faithful, stand in awe of God. Unfaithful, dishonor God and despise his name. And what's the result of this?

God says in verse 2, God says, I will curse you. You see, covenants come with blessings and curses and if you break a covenant, there'll be curses and so they're cursed. God says, you despise my name and I'll despise yours.

And actually, I think we see in verse 3 the kind of most vivid picture of the result of all this. It's very graphic. God tells them in verse 3, they're doing such a bad job that they're failing so miserably. He's going to take all the insides and all the waste from the animal sacrifices and he's going to spread it all over their faces and put it outside of the camp with the rest of the waste where it belongs.

[22 : 11] They're doing so badly that the only fit place for them is to be smeared with animal waste and put outside the camp away from God's people. It's how serious it is.

So, dear friends, what do we do? What do we do with all that? We're going to end with some application. So, we've got a warning, prayer, and to worship our perfect priest. So, firstly, a warning to the teachers of God's Word.

Don't stray from faithfully teaching God's Word and living God's way. Don't stray from faithfully teaching God's Word and living God's way. As we read earlier, what did Paul say to Timothy? He said, follow the pattern of sound words you've heard from me in faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

And Paul says to Timothy a little later in 2 Timothy, he said, I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus who is the judge of the living and the dead by his appearance of his kingdom, preach the Word.

[23 : 13] Be ready in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with complete patience and teaching. The charge is to preach and teach what has been given to us.

Like a soldier who takes a message from his commander, hand over and tell what God has given to you. Will pressure come? It will come.

Paul goes on in verse 3 right after that charge to Timothy saying that there will be days where people will start to have itching ears. Well, they'll turn from God's Word and not want it. And so keep teaching with patience.

Now friends, I just want to say one other thing as we move through this. That God's rebuke and admonishment here isn't the same as some of us who teach in Bible studies or in small groups or on camps that we're kind of learning as we grow as Christians.

It's not the same as a faithful disposition that says, do you know what? I've done a Bible study and I've learned something. Now, wow, and in that last study I maybe should have said that. No, because that's what we're all doing. That's what any minister, any teacher's doing all the time.

[24 : 21] They're teaching and growing in the knowledge of God. No, no, the warning here is to people that are deliberately, intentionally carving bits off, leaving bits out to gain favor.

Whether it's favor from classmates in a school SU group, whether it's to be more popular on campus with other people around students we want to invite or in societies or clubs or camps or wherever it might be or in churches.

The warning here and the rebuke here is those who intentionally, knowingly are distorting and twisting God's word for the approval of others. And so, dear friends, we do need to take this seriously.

This is a strong rebuke here and a strong warning to us. Jesus says in Luke 17, 1, it's better to have a millstone placed around your neck and to be thrown into the sea than to mislead his people. Better to have a millstone placed around your neck and to be thrown into the sea than to lead astray one of his people to any who would change God's message and become like these priests.

[25 : 30] God will take us outside of the camp and away from him. So, if we've done that or we're tempted to do that, and I think all of us that handle God's word in some way, shape, or form, the temptation's going to be there.

What do we do? Well, we cling to God. We return to God. We trust him. We trust that the word of God will do the work of God and it will return and bear fruit. But if we know that there's been times where we have swerved, we have pulled the punch, if you like, then return to God.

Chapter 1, verse 9, Malachi says, entreat the grace of God. And the great invitation of this book in chapter 3, verse 7, is return to God and he will return to you.

Kind of theological repentance is a great thing. Lord, I believe this. I taught this. I see now that it's wrong. I come to you and he will come back to you.

And the same thing goes then with our lives. The same thing goes with our lives. To those that are teaching God's word or training to do it like I am. If there are sins which are ensnaring us, if there are sins which are tripping us up and we're stumbling with, repent, come to God and receive his grace.

[26 : 47] Robert Murray McShane is famous for saying that his congregation's greatest need was his holiness, was his holiness. My dear friends, be killing sin or it will be killing you and holding back and hampering the work of the gospel.

So a warning. And secondly, pray, pray, do pray. Dear friends, this then is how you can pray. I hope as we've walked through all this, we've seen some of this.

This is how you can pray for your elders, for your ministers, for the other gospel ministries across this city or this nation. Pray that there would be men who fiercely hold out and will always preach Christ crucified.

Who will preach the whole counsel of God and never pull any punches and pray that we would continue to walk and live lives that are holy and righteous before the living God, putting the gospel on display in teaching and in our lives.

And finally, finally then, our final point, worship and listen to Christ. Worship and listen to Christ. Worship and listen to your high priest.

[27 : 55] As we walk through Malachi, and even over the next few weeks as well, not next Sunday but the following weeks, I think it should start to build a sense of longing.

A sense of longing. God says, I love you but the people don't love him back. But priests are scorning sacrifices and offering worthless worship. We need a greater sacrifice.

We need a high priest. Priests are teaching unfaithfully. We need a greater teacher, one who will teach us about God fully and truly and reveal God to us.

And of course, we find all of that in the Lord Jesus. If you cast your eyes back down to Malachi 2, 4 to 7, you'll see that it's a little bit unusual because Malachi slips into the first, he sort of slips into the singular.

He slips into the singular. singular. So he's describing a priest here and beginning to anticipate one who will come.

[28 : 57] One who will come. A true high priest who will come to guard knowledge. Do you see what he says then? True instruction was in his mouth, singular.

No wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness. He turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge and people should see construction from his mouth for he's the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

That, of course, is fully and perfectly found in the Lord Jesus. And what we get here in Malachi in this chapter is a kind of shaft of light beginning to come through the darkness anticipating one is coming.

A true high priest that will teach and offer sacrifice perfectly for us all. So, dear friends, this evening the invitation is to come to the Lord Jesus to seek his instruction and to listen to him and all that he's

done for us.

He's our great high priest. Listen to him in his word. But we see here, don't we, right at the end, what do we see of our high priest that the gospel has held right out here?

[30 : 05] You see, Jesus is the high priest who comes to offer God to us, but what does he do? He's the one who goes outside the camp. You see, God says to these priests, what? He says, away with you. And Jesus is the one true high priest who finally and fully fulfills all this and he willingly goes outside to forgive our sin, to forgive our shame, and to make us right with God.

And so, dear friends, worship to and seek the living Lord Jesus in his word. He teaches us now in his word by his spirit. And so, I think our response to all this is to come to him with gladness and full hearts that in Christ and his word he shows us who God is.

So, dear friends, all your days, turn to him, seek him, repent where we've wronged him, listen to him, and God will be faithful to bless you until he takes you to him or the Lord Jesus comes and makes all things new.

Let's pray and sing to close. Lord Jesus, thank you that you are our great high priest, the one who has perfectly offered a sacrifice for our sin, a once and for all sacrifice for our sin.

And thank you that you live ever to intercede for us before your Father. And we thank you, Lord Jesus, how you have come and shown us and revealed the Father to us. We do pray that you would help us to know and listen to your voice in your word always.

[31 : 34] May we seek and know that there is life fully to be found in you. So may we as your sheep seek you our good shepherd, our high priest, both this day and always.

And we ask it in his name. Amen.