

Intro: A Sense of Impending Dread

Rugby League story

Context:

Last book of OT. Israel back in Promised Land after exile to Babylon

Written about 350-450 B.C.

V1-5 – God states that he loves Israel. Israel asks how. God replies that he chose to love Jacob and hates Esau.

The Sin of the Priests

V6 – Pattern repeats – God states something – no honour for him, contempt instead

Addresses the Priests. Word translated priest can refer to leaders in general, as representatives of the people, and therefore can mean Israel in general. As we go through this passage, we will see that the whole people are at fault here, but God particularly takes aim at the priests.

They ask how they have shown contempt for his name

V7a – God answers – by offering defiled food on his altar

V7b – Another question from priests – how have we defiled you?

V7c-8 – Longer answer from God – offering blemished animals shows that they think that God's table is contemptible, and therefore God is contemptible. God uses the example of their offerings to the governor – probably the local governor from Persia. They wouldn't dare offer these sorts of animals to the governor, so why should they think that it is OK to offer them to God?

See how their actions are showing their attitude towards God? By offering blind, lame and diseased animals to God, they show that they really don't care about God or fear him at all. By showing them that they wouldn't dare offer these sorts of animals to the Persian governor, God shows them that they think that the Persian governor is more important than God.

V9 - Now plead with God to be gracious to us – God being sarcastic and saying that they can't do their job of interceding between the people and God if they are treating God this way.

V10a – God shows his anger towards the priests – he wishes that one of them shut the temple doors, so that they would not light useless fires on his altar!

Equivalent of Tom shutting the doors on the building here, and when we turn up for church he goes – no you can't come in. What Stu and John have allowed to happen here on a Sunday morning over the past few years is so full of contempt/disrespect towards God that it would be better if we didn't meet.

God is saying that he would prefer no sacrificial system to one that is done with contempt.

V10b - I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands". God will not accept their offerings – in other words, the sacrificial system had lost its effectiveness – no longer would offering animals cleanse people from their sins.

Breakdown in the relationship between God and his people because of the sinfulness of the priests. At this point the original hearers of this prophecy (spoken by Malachi) would have been in despair. If we can't offer sacrifices anymore how can we remain in a right relationship with God?

God gives them some hope in the next verse, although maybe in a way that would have been surprising for them.

V11 – God looks forward to a time where his name will be great amongst the nations, and they will bring pure offerings to him. Unlike the priests and the people who showed contempt for God, the nations will honour God and bring pure offerings out of reverence.

V12-13 – But the priests profane God's name by degrading the sacrificial system and offering blemished animals for sacrifice. God asks rhetorically why he should accept such animals.

V14 – The people are complicit in the degrading of the sacrificial system, as they are the ones that would have brought the blemished animals to the priests to sacrifice, so they are showing as much contempt for God as the priests. God curses the priests/people who do this, because he is a great king and his name is to be feared amongst the nations.

Sum Up: Priests have shown contempt for God by allowing blemished sacrifices to be offered to God. Their actions show what they really think about God.

E.G. Treat people with the respect they deserve – Usain Bolt, Michael Phelps, Albert Einstein.

1:6-14 – What they priests have done wrong.

2:1-9 – God’s judgment/punishment on them.

God’s Punishment of the Priests

2:1 – God singles out the priests – not whole leadership, not all the people, just the priests.

V2 – Part of priests’ role was to pronounce God’s blessing on the people. But if they do not listen, God will turn their blessings into curses. He has already done so.

V3 – Three punishments – rebuke their descendants (reduce the numbers of children they had, so that over time the priesthood would shrink), smear on their faces the offal or dung of the animals they sacrifice, and they will be carried off with it. Offal or dung of the sacrifices were to be removed from the sanctuary and burnt. That’s what God is saying is going to happen to the priests.

This is horrible! You wouldn’t want anyone to say this to you, let alone God. Do you hear just how angry God is with them? It’s scary.

But right in the middle of this tirade, God slips in a moment of hope.

V4 – Purpose of punishment is so that they will know that God has sent them this warning so that his covenant with Levi will continue. Go into who Levi was in a moment, but notice firstly that God never punishes without a purpose. It’s not like God just goes: You’ve done the wrong thing, so now you are going to get it.

No, when his people sin, God punishes them, not to inflict pain but to turn them away from their evil behaviour, behaviour that is leading them away from God. Their actions are dangerous, they have serious consequences, so God punishes them to get them to turn away from the way they are going and turn back to God.

E.G. Little child breaks free from mum or dad’s grip and runs out onto the road and nearly gets hit by a car. Parent pulls them off the road, gives them a good talking to, telling them of how dangerous their action is, and

punishes them in some way so that they won't do the dangerous action again. Punishment out of love that leads to a change in behaviour. That's what God is doing here.

Levi was one of the sons of Jacob, and his descendants were set apart by God to be the priests – to offer the sacrifices, to intercede between God and the people, to teach the people about God and lead them in the worship of God.

Covenant with Levi – not a particular promise, but throughout OT God blesses his people through the sacrificial system that the Levites were in charge of. It is in that sense that there was a covenant with Levi and his descendants – they were to faithfully administer God's sacrificial system, and teach the people about God and how to live in relationship with him, and through them God would bless the his people. You see it explained there in v5-7.

V5-7 – This is how a priest should act – this is how God wants the priests to act. God punishes them so that they will go back to being like Levi.

V8 – Instead of acting this way, the priests have turned from the way and caused many to stumble. They have violated the covenant with Levi.

V9 – Therefore God has punished them by causing them to be despised and humiliated before all the people.

Big Idea: God judges and punishes the priesthood for their contempt of him, in the hope that they will turn back to him and be the priests that he has called them to be.

The Perfect Priest

Human priesthood will never act properly because of their sinfulness. History tells us that the Priesthood never really acted in the way God wanted them. By Jesus' day they had turned the temple into a marketplace!

God needs to send a perfect priest, one without sin, to intercede between him and us. Jesus comes as the great high priest who perfectly fulfils all the functions of the priesthood, and is also the sacrifice. We need to go to him to worship God properly.

Heb 4: 14 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. . . . **16** Let us then approach God's throne of grace with

confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Mal 1: 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.

John 4: 23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. **24** God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.”

Rom 12: 1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.

Application:

Know how seriously God takes sin

Allow Jesus to be your priest

Don’t follow human leaders – follow Jesus

Hold your human leaders to account

Leaders, don’t be like this

Leaders, don’t allow your people to show contempt to God