

PostExilicProphets 22-05-18b

We're ready now to pick up our study in Malachi, and we have seen the consistency of this prophetic message, even in the central section, which I personally think, and now I have the august company of C.C. Torrey, is a part of that message and is a very effective metaphor for the level of disloyalty to covenant relationship with God as reflected in what even these Israelites would have considered to be a shocking act of treachery to divorce an Israelite wife and marry the daughter of a foreign God. And yet, as with so many of the illustrations that God uses throughout Scripture and that the Lord Jesus in particular would use, it's such a telling indictment because they have just, in Ezra, condemned people who would marry heathen women and they are now being charged with having done something as bad or worse in divorcing the wife of their youth and marrying the daughter of a foreign God. And there's multiple applications.

I think all of the things that we've seen in the past, you know, all ethnic and racial origins are really off the table once someone expresses faith. Countless times we've seen this with Ruth and with Rahab and others in Scripture who, Naaman the Syrian, are entered into the roles of the faithful because of their faith. It doesn't matter where they were born or how they started out.

It isn't how you start, it's how you finish. And so that having been said, we come now to this section in chapter three, verse eight. After the introduction in verse six, I am the Lord, I do not change.

That's the only reason you are not consumed, O Jacob. God is faithful even when we are faithless. And you have Paul making this same point later on in New Testament days.

That's why you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. Verse seven of chapter three. Yet from the days of your fathers, you have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them.

And this echoes what we saw in chapter one, what we saw in the center of chapter two there and what he picks up as a theme again here in chapter three. You have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

But you say, in what way shall we return? I'd be very interested in the answer to this question. How should we return? Think about that for a second. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

Well, what should we do to return? Did you not read, did you not listen to the first two and a half chapters here of what you're failing to do, what you have done that separated you from God? You're the one that left the wife of your youth. You're the one that has defiled and corrupted the table of the Lord and the altar of the Lord and the worship of the Lord. By bringing in that which corrupts, that which defiles.

The worship of the Lord should be pure. Not adulterated, it should be all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, all your mind, as reiterated and emphasized by the Lord Jesus in our recent study in Matthew. This answer ought to be obvious if you have taken on board the criticism, the fact that this question arises, how should we return? What does that tell you? They haven't been listening.

They're not listening. So to try to create another shock to the system, as it were, God says, will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. Will a man rob God? You have robbed me.

Stop robbing God is the idea here. So this is the answer. You know how many times Jesus famously will answer a question with a question.

And here God himself employs this tactic. How should we return? God says, will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me. You are robbing me.

What is robbery? It is taking from someone what is rightfully theirs. What is properly their possession. So now we come to this very interesting and oft quoted section of Malachi, probably quoted more often than any other part of Malachi in some circles.

In what way have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse for you have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house and try me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it.

And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field, says the Lord of hosts. And all nations will call you blessed for you will be a delightful land, says the Lord of hosts. Well, what is this about? Are we talking about taking a tenth of your income and sending it to the church? Are we talking about making sure something clinks when the offering plate goes by? What is God talking about here? Let me begin by offering a suggestion.

If everything we have seen up to this point is the literal being used to point to the spiritual, these literally corrupt and blighted sacrifices that are being brought are evidence of a deep spiritual problem. This notion of leaving the wife of one's youth, divorcing her to marry the daughter of a foreign god is a metaphor pointing to a spiritual truth, a spiritual lack. Wouldn't you expect that God is not now going to turn to the literal bringing of physical items of tithes and offerings when he says return to me? He doesn't say, well, start bringing the best of the flock again.

He's now turning to a fresh metaphor, a fresh example, if you will, which is the largesse, the tenth part, the first fruits, the tithe that properly belongs to God, to not bring God what is his due. What is God's due in the spiritual sense? It's the first commandment in the tables of the law, love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, right? Jesus

reiterates that, the love that is God's due. This is why marriage is used as a metaphor in the preceding chapter, because this loyal love, this faithfulness, this non-treachery.

Remember how many times we saw the word treachery throughout chapter two? It is faithlessness. It is spiritual adultery. It is breaking of covenant.

It is treachery to make a commitment and then fail to keep it. So you are robbing God how? By not bringing to him, giving to him what is his due. And these tithes and offerings were his due under covenant, right? So what exactly are these? We need to review what the law had to say about these tithes and offerings.

So turn with me back to Numbers chapter 18. Once again, we're looking at this, not because we're trying to figure out how the post-exilic Israelites can get back into God's good favor and he'll open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing on them. And by the way, if you look at the intertestamental period, you don't see the windows of heaven opening and blessing and prosperity such as brings awe into the hearts and minds of the surrounding nations.

That never happened. So we can assume that whatever the warning in the exhortation is here in Malachi was really not heeded. We want to do better, don't we? We want to take this observation, properly interpret it and properly apply it for ourselves.

Are we, are you and I, verily or inadvertently robbing God, not giving him his due? Well, we need to understand the actual tithes and offerings that were prescribed for Israel so that we can interpret and apply in our own spiritual lives. So we go back to Numbers chapter 18. Now pay attention because you remember who has been primarily in view throughout chapter one and on into chapter three of Malachi in terms of responsibility to ensure that God gets what is his due.

Who is indicted? It's the covenant of Levi, right? It's the Levites. It's the priests. Notice Deuteronomy, I'm sorry, Numbers chapter 18.

We'll be in Deuteronomy shortly. Numbers 18, the Lord said to Aaron, you and your sons and your father's house must bear the iniquity involving the sanctuary. If there is defilement, if there is pollution, if there is iniquity, something corrupts the sanctuary, it's on you, Aaron and your sons.

Remember, Aaron is just a portion of the tribe of Levi. You and your sons alone must bear the iniquity involving your priesthood. So bring with you also your brothers from the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may join you and assist you and your sons before the tent of the testimony.

They shall attend to your duties and to all the duties of the tent, but they must not come near to the furnishings of the sanctuary or the altar, or both they and you will die. If you don't keep them in their place, tell them what their assignment is and ensure that they fulfill it. You and they will die.

Right away, you can stop right there and say, what would be the modern day equivalent? What does Malachi say is a primary responsibility of the Levites? To teach the truth, to communicate Torah, the law should be found on their lips. And if they fail to properly communicate these instructions, both they and the people who are not demanding truth from their lips are going to die. They're going to suffer the consequences, right? Very pertinent here.

Verse four, numbers 18, they are to join you and attend to the duties of the tent of meeting, doing all the work of the tent. No outsider may come near you. You shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and of the altar so that wrath may not fall on the Israelites again.

Notice the concentric circles. Aaron and his sons, the priests, have primary responsibility. The rest of the Levites are in the ring that is around the bullseye.

And then the rest of Israel is in the outer ring from them. This was even the physical layout of the camp. Remember, only you and your son shall attend your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and what is inside the veil.

You are to perform that service. Aaron is in the innermost. The high priest can go in within the veil.

This is what the Lord Jesus Christ has done for us, right? So there is this concentric idea throughout. So I skipped down to verse seven there. I'll back up a little bit.

Verse six, behold, I myself have selected your fellow Levites from the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the Lord to perform the service for the tent of meeting. Think about this. Who is the high priest in Israel at the time these words are set down, the time these words are issuing forth from God? Who's the high priest? Who's the high priest? Who's he talking to? Starts with an A, followed by another A, R-O-N.

Aaron is the high priest, right? What does God say to the high priest? In verse six, I myself, this is God talking. I have selected your fellow Levites from the Israelites as a gift to you, dedicated to the Lord to perform the service for the tent of meeting. The Levites have been given to Aaron as a gift.

Who are the priests in the church age? Look around. It is us. For the work of worship, for all of the functions, we have various assignments.

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some pastors and teachers. There are those who have the gift of helps. There's a variety of gifts, but there's one spirit.

Who are we given to? To whom do we belong as a special gift from God? Who's our high priest? Church is a gift from God to the Lord Jesus Christ, just as the Levites were a special gift from God to Aaron, the high priest. This is no accident. Then in verse seven, only you and your sons shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and what is inside the veil.

When it comes to contact with God, the vertical component of Israel's relationship to God, that is a priestly function that the priest performs individually. And our relationship to God is not brokered through the church. It's not brokered through our fellow believers.

There are other things by which we are related to our fellow believers, but when it comes to communication with, worship of, and service to the Lord God in heaven, we are priests and by means of our high priest, we are qualified to enter through the veil. This is something new. Levitical priests couldn't enter through the veil, only the high priest could.

But in the Melchizedekian priesthood, we are given the privilege as believer priests of entering through the veil in Hebrews chapter 10. Right? This is new. Melchizedekian priests enter into the Holy of Holies by a new and living way consecrated through that torn veil of the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ, our high priest.

And unlike the Levites, we are not forbidden to enter into the very presence of God. This is a difference. So now look at verse 8. The Lord said to Aaron, Behold, I have put you in charge of my offerings.

Same word we have in Malachi, offerings. How have you robbed God in tithes and offerings? Here are the offerings. I have put you, Aaron, high priest, in charge of my offerings.

As for all the sacred offerings of the Israelites, I've given them to you and your sons as a portion and permanent statute. A portion of the most holy offerings reserved from the fire will be yours. From all the offerings they render to me as most holy offerings, whether grain offerings or sin offerings or guilt offerings, that part belongs to you and your son.

That portion belongs to you and your sons. You are to eat it as a most holy offering and every male may eat it. You shall regard it as holy.

This is yours as well. The offering of their gifts, along with all the wave offerings of the Israelites, I've given this to you and your sons and daughters as a permanent statute. Every ceremonially clean person in your household may eat it.

I give you all the freshest olive oil and all the finest new wine and grain that the Israelites give to the Lord as their first fruits. The first fruits of everything in the land they may bring to the Lord will belong to you. Every ceremonially clean person in your household may eat them.

Every devoted thing in Israel belongs to you. The firstborn of every womb, whether man or beast, that is offered to the Lord belongs to you. But you must surely redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals.

You are to pay the redemption price for a month old male according to your valuation. Five shekels of silver according to the sanctuary shekel, which is 20 giras. I wish we had time to study this in detail.

We might do a special on one of these days. There's so much in here that is directly applicable and pertinent for us. You can make a one-to-one correspondence to the Melchizedekian priesthood, our relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, and so on.

All the holy offerings, verse 19, that the Israelites present to the Lord, I give to you and your sons and daughters, sons and daughters as a permanent statute. It is a permanent covenant of salt before the Lord for you and your offspring. Then the Lord said to Aaron, you will have no inheritance in the land, nor will you have any portion among them.

I am your portion and your inheritance among the Israelites. Behold, verse 21, here's the other word in our context. I have given to the Levites all the tithes in Israel as an inheritance in return for the work they do, the service of the tent of meeting.

No longer may the Israelites come near to the tent of meeting or they will incur guilt and die. The Levites are to perform the work of the tent of meeting and they must bear their iniquity. This is a permanent statute for the generations to come.

The Levites will not receive an inheritance among the Israelites, for I have given to the Levites as their inheritance the tithe that the Israelites present to the Lord as a contribution. That is why I told them they would not receive an inheritance among the Israelites. Lord instructed Moses, speak to the Levites and tell them when you receive from the Israelites the tithe that I have given you as your inheritance, you must present part of it as an offering to the Lord, a tithe of the tithe.

You see that? A tithe of the tithe is presented to the Lord. Your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the threshing floor or juice from the wine press. Now you hold up right there and look at Malachi.

I'm just going to read it. You stay here in numbers. I'm going to read it to you from 310 of Malachi.

Bring the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Try me now in this and see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven, pour out for you such a blessing, there will not be room to receive it. I will rebuke the devourer for your sake so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field.

Through the ground. These are the crops. These are the grain offerings.

Same thing that's being spoken of here. Verse 27, your offering will be reckoned to you as grain from the threshing floor, juice from the wine press. This is exactly directly and specifically what Malachi chapter 3, verse 11 is referring to.

Grain and new wine. Fruit of the vine. So verse 28, you are to present an offering to the Lord from all the tithes you receive from the Israelites.

And from these, you are to give the Lord's offering to Aaron, the priest. You must present the offering due to the Lord from all the best of every gift. See that verse 29.

You must present the offering due the Lord from all the best of every gift, the holiest part of it. What was the indictment? The charge in chapter one of Malachi. These offerings and by extension, the tithes that you're bringing, that they're not bringing the tithe at all.

And the offerings they bring are terrible. So how is it they are robbing God in tithes and offerings? Who is directly at fault? The priests. What is good, they're keeping for themselves.

And what's bad, they're giving to God. It's the exact opposite. You must present the offering due to the Lord.

The offering due to the Lord. If you're not going to rob God, the very best goes to him. All the best of every gift, the holiest part of it.

Therefore, verse 30, say to the Levites, when you have presented the best part, it will be reckoned to you as the produce of the threshing floor or wine press. What happens on a threshing floor? Grain is separated, the wheat from the chaff, right? Barley from the husk and so on. You and your households may eat the rest of it anywhere.

It is the compensation for your work at the tent of meeting. Once you have presented the best part of it, you will not incur guilt because of it. But you must not defile the sacred offerings of the Israelites or else you will die.

If you defile the offerings, you will die. What is the charge throughout Malachi? You've defiled the offerings, you've defiled the altar, you've defiled the table. Why does it keep talking about food at my table? That there may be food in my house, he says in verse 10 of chapter 3. Food in my house.

Who eats the food in God's house? The Levites, their sons and daughters, their families, anyone who is ceremonially clean, anyone who is qualified, eats of the food. What does this tell you in Malachi chapter 3? They are shooting themselves in the foot. Because the best of the offerings and the best of the tithes, only a tenth of that goes to God.

The rest of it is for them. When they are crying and sighing, wearing the Lord and saying, we're wetting your altar with our tears and we don't see why we're not being blessed. God says, if you were paying attention, you would be blessed.

If you were giving God his due, you are blessed by extension. Nine-tenths of the best fruit of the land, the first fruits and the best of the vine and the best of the threshing floor. Nearly all of that would be yours if you just gave God his due.

How many times do we question and doubt and complain about the course of our lives and we wet the altar of the Lord with our tears in prayer and say, Lord, why am I having such a hard

time? Why do I feel like blessing is far from me? Your presence is far from me. Your power in my life doesn't seem to be operating. I feel like I'm just being blown along like any other person in the world.

What does God tell the Levites? You've robbed me of what is my due. And in so doing, you've robbed yourself of what I have promised. And what I have decreed for you, I can't fulfill blessing for you.

If you would just do what you're supposed to, it would be as though the windows of heaven opened and instead of a flood, you know, the windows of heaven were opened in judgment at the flood. God says instead of water descending and washing iniquity away, the windows of heaven would open with a flood of blessing. How much clearer can God make this for Israel in the post-exilic day when they are already starting to repeat the sins of the fathers? And that's why at the close of the book, he's going to talk about the hearts of the fathers and the hearts of the sons, hearts of the children.

It's a heart problem. From beginning to end in Malachi, we're not really talking about offerings per se. It's the motivation that causes those things to be corrupt.

It's not really the lack of interest in the lack of faithfulness on the part of the Levites to instruct in the law. It's because their hearts are wrong. If their hearts were right, they would be doing their job.

The law that was sought on their lips would be there and be present in abundance. And the people would be fed spiritually so that they can be fed physically. The Levites would be blessed spiritually so that they can be blessed physically.

It's a heart issue. First foremost, beginning to end, going back to the problem that was endemic and pandemic in Israel from the outset, couldn't keep covenant. Divorce the wife of their youth to marry the daughter of a foreign God.

Anybody can pursue the things that most of us as believers pursue today. Why are there so many unbelievers involved in social justice and virtue signaling and trying to right the wrongs of society? Unbelievers can do that. What is it that only we can do? Only we can enter into that area of worship of God.

Only we as priests after the order of Melchizedek can enter into God's holiest precincts, have the privilege of representing ourselves before his throne. Do we take it for granted? Do we treat it as a light thing? Are we more interested in the subjective world of what about people? What about circumstances? What about myself? I've got my eyes on myself. My problems, my circumstances aren't what I want them to be.

And God tells these Levites, do you not see that the whole problem starts with you robbing God? Will a man rob God? And the parenthetical unincorporated second half of that sentence is, will a man rob God and prosper? Will a man rob God and succeed for long? Will a man rob God and

not be held to account? If you stop robbing God, God will be thrilled to open the windows of heaven and bestow on you blessings like you can't believe. If we do not experience blessings like we can't believe, the place to look is, where am I robbing God? Where am I denying him just that small portion of my time, my attention? And when you go back to Numbers 18, it's the best. Do I use the best of my concentration? Do I study the word of God and review my notes and engage in my prayer life when I am fresh, when I am energized? Do I take the best part of my day, the best part of my attention, the best part of my thought life and dedicate it to God? Or do I throw up a half-finished prayer right before I fall asleep? Do I do a quick review of Bible class right before the next Bible class? Is that the best? Are we corrupting the table of the Lord? Or is the house of the Lord filled with food? Is there, anytime we come to our spiritual table, is there food there for us to consume and metabolize and be energized and fully equipped for every good work because we have partaken? Or is it half-baked? Is it slapdash? Is it hit and miss? We're not consistent.

We're not giving God the best of our lives. It is not enough to bring a sacrifice to put something on the altar and say, well, you know, look at all the people that don't bring anything on the altar. As Torrey pointed out, the book says it would be better if you didn't even attempt it, if you're just going to do it in a corrupt way, a defiling way.

Bring the best, tithes and offerings, Levites, priests, and see what God will do in response. You know why? There are so few of us as believers that do this anymore. God is searching the earth, looking for someone who will take this message to heart and say, you know what? God's going to get my best.

He's going to get my first. I'm going to appreciate what my high priest has done in conferring on me his privilege of entering into the very holy of holies and representing myself before God's throne. Jesus died to give us this privilege.

His flesh was torn that we could do this. Do we appreciate it? Do we reverence it? Do we pause to reflect on what a profound gift this is? You are not your own. You are bought with a price.

Therefore, glorify God in your body, in your life, in your daily practice. It's not just a sacrifice. It's the best.

It's not just some grain. It's the first foods. It's the finest and the best.

And we end up getting most of the benefit. It doesn't necessarily bless God that we wake up and start doing this. We as priests partake of the fullness of those first foods and the quality of those offerings.

We get the most benefit when we honor God just with a tithe of the tithe. But it benefits us because that's the way God built the system. That's the way God decreed that it would happen.

When we put him first, he is able to open the windows. Well, another passage that reflects on this, and I hope you have written Numbers 18 in your margin outside Malachi chapter 3, but

turn quickly now to Deuteronomy chapter 12. These are the two chapters.

Just put them in the margin next to Malachi 3. And if you want to bring some grain and new wine into the storehouse, if you want to be blessed, just read and reflect on Numbers 18 and Deuteronomy chapter 12. These are the statutes and ordinances you must be careful to follow all the days you live in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess. Destroy completely all the places where the nations you are dispossessing have served their gods atop the high mountains, on the hills, under every green tree.

Tear down their altars. Smash their sacred pillars. Burn up their Asherah poles.

Cut down the idols of their gods and wipe their names from every place. You shall not worship the Lord your God in this way. Do not marry the daughter of a heathen god.

Burn that stuff down. Expunge it. Destroy it.

Eliminate it so that nobody can even find where it used to be. Instead, verse 5, Deuteronomy 12. You must seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to establish as a dwelling place for His name.

There you must go. To that place you are to bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and your heave offerings, your vow offerings and freewill offerings, as well as the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your households shall eat and rejoice in all you do.

Because the Lord your God has blessed you. You are not to do as we are doing here today, where everyone does what seems right in his own eyes. For you have not yet come to the resting place and the inheritance that the Lord your God is giving you.

When you cross the Jordan, remember this is Deuteronomy 12. This is Moses talking. He says, we're not yet in that place.

By the way, we are in the place. We have crossed the Jordan. When you cross the Jordan and live in the land, the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.

And he gives you rest from all the enemies around you. And you dwell securely. Then the Lord your God will choose a dwelling for His name.

There you are to bring everything I command you. By the way, what is the dwelling place for His name today? You are the temple of God, right? There you are to bring everything I command you. Your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts and all the choice offerings you vowed to the Lord.

12:12 of Deuteronomy, you shall rejoice before the Lord your God. You, your sons and daughters, your men servants and maidservants, the Levite within your gates, since he has no portion or inheritance among you. Where and how does he rejoice? In worship, in partaking of

the tithes and offerings, the best and choices, the first fruits.

Be careful not to offer your burnt offerings in just any old place that you see. You must offer them only in the place the Lord will choose in one of your tribal territories. There you shall do all that I command you.

Whenever you want, you may slaughter and eat meat within any of your gates. According to the blessing the Lord your God has given you, ceremonially clean and unclean may eat it as they would a gazelle or deer. But you must not eat the blood poured on the ground like water.

Within your gates, you must not eat the tithe of your grain. Or new wine or oil, the firstborn of your herds or flocks. Any of the offerings that you have vowed to give or your freewill offerings or special gifts.

Instead, you must eat them in the presence of the Lord your God at the place the Lord your God will choose. You, your sons and daughters, your men servants and maidservants, and the Levite within your gates, rejoice before the Lord in all you do. This is why we give thanks before every meal.

We recognize that we are in the presence of God all the time. Be careful not to neglect the Levites as long as you live in your land. For us, do not neglect your priesthood.

We are priests everywhere. We enter into the presence of God all the time. When the Lord your God expands your territory as he has promised, you crave meat and say, I want to eat meat.

You may eat it whenever you want. If the place where the Lord your God chooses to put his name is too far from you, then you may slaughter any other herd or flock he has given you as I have commanded you, and you may eat it within your gates whenever you want. Indeed, you may eat it as you would eat a gazelle or deer.

Both ceremonially unclean and clean may eat it. Only be sure not to eat the blood because the blood is the life, and you must not eat the life with the meat. You must not eat the blood.

Pour it on the ground like water. Do not eat it so that it may go well with you and your children after you because you will be doing what is right in the eyes of the Lord. You stop before you eat and reflect.

Am I obedient? Am I faithful? Am I honoring the Lord and the word of the Lord every time I eat a meal? When the Lord your God cuts off before you the nations you are entering to dispossess, and you drive them out and live in their land, be careful not to be ensnared by their ways after they have been destroyed before you. Do not marry the daughter of a heathen God. Do not start practicing their cult practices and traditions.

Do not inquire about their gods asking, how do these nations serve their gods? I will do likewise. You must not worship the Lord your God in this way because they practice for their

gods every abomination which the Lord hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods.

See that you do everything I command you. Do not add to it or subtract from it. Not add or subtract.

Well, this is wonderfully applicable for us. It is a reminder as the Old Testament concludes that in these days when the New Testament age is ever closer to concluding, we should be faithful to those things that distinguish us as believers, as priests, as those who are faithful, as those who are careful to, as it says in verse 28 of Deuteronomy 12, be careful to obey all these things I command you so that may always go well with you and your children after you because you will be doing what is good and right in the eyes of the Lord your God. This is not a responsibility to be taken casually or lightly.

When Israel did that, what happened? They lost their inheritance. They lost their future. They lost their national identity and ended up in the darkness which is outside.

That can and will happen to us if we make a similar mistake. All these things were written for our instruction so that we do not repeat these egregious failings and shortcomings. Something to reflect on, something to think about.

Are we robbing God? Will a man rob God? Or are we rendering to God the firstfruits, the best of what belongs to him? And he allows us to partake of nine-tenths of what belongs to him. The blessing with which we bless God returns on us in manifold ways. It seems like such a simple thing to do and yet looking at Israel, we see how easy it is to fail the grace of God.

Well, we'll reflect on this. We'll return to Malachi next week but we'll close here in a word of prayer. Father, we do thank you for the wonderful privilege we have of belonging to you through the Lord Jesus Christ who is our high priest.

We pray that as we reflect on these truths, your Holy Spirit will convict us, illuminate our path, show us how we can walk the narrow road headed through the straight gate that leads to life. We pray it in Jesus' name, amen.