

Recession Proofing Your Faith

Confess Your Sin

Malachi 2:1-16

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Introduction to Text: We are in the middle of a series called “Recession Proofing Your Faith.” From the book of Malachi, we are learning some principles of how to recession proof our faith and even see our faith grow in the midst of difficult times. The book of Malachi is a relevant book to study because the setting is one of economic and moral decline. Thus far, we have learned that in order to recession proof our faith, we must...

1. Celebrate God’s Love—Settle once and for all God’s love for us.
2. Celebrate God’s Name—Live a life of authentic worship.

This morning, we build on these two themes with the principle of Living in Continual Confession of our Sin.

Text: ¹ “And now, O priests, this commandment is for you.

² If you will not hear,

And if you will not take *it* to heart,

To give glory to My name,”

Says the LORD of hosts,

“ I will send a curse upon you,

And I will curse your blessings.

Yes, I have cursed them already,

Because you do not take *it* to heart.

³ “ Behold, I will rebuke your descendants

And spread refuse on your faces,

The refuse of your solemn feasts;

And *one* will take you away with it.

⁴ Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you,

That My covenant with Levi may continue,”

Says the LORD of hosts.

⁵ “ My covenant was with him, *one* of life and peace,

And I gave them to him *that he might fear Me;*

So he feared Me

And was reverent before My name.

⁶ The law of truth was in his mouth,

And injustice was not found on his lips.

He walked with Me in peace and equity,

And turned many away from iniquity.

⁷ “ For the lips of a priest should keep knowledge,

And *people* should seek the law from his mouth;

For he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.

⁸ But you have departed from the way;

You have caused many to stumble at the law.

You have corrupted the covenant of Levi,"

Says the LORD of hosts.

⁹ " Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base

Before all the people,

Because you have not kept My ways

But have shown partiality in the law."

¹⁰ Have we not all one Father?

Has not one God created us?

Why do we deal treacherously with one another

By profaning the covenant of the fathers?

¹¹ Judah has dealt treacherously,

And an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem,

For Judah has profaned

The LORD's holy *institution* which He loves:

He has married the daughter of a foreign god.

¹² May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob

The man who does this, being awake and aware

Yet who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!

¹³ And this is the second thing you do:

You cover the altar of the LORD with tears,

With weeping and crying;

So He does not regard the offering anymore,

Nor receive *it* with goodwill from your hands.

¹⁴ Yet you say, "For what reason?"

Because the LORD has been witness

Between you and the wife of your youth,

With whom you have dealt treacherously;

Yet she is your companion

And your wife by covenant.

¹⁵ But did He not make *them* one,

Having a remnant of the Spirit?

And why one?

He seeks godly offspring.

Therefore take heed to your spirit,

And let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

¹⁶ " For the LORD God of Israel says

That He hates divorce,

For it covers one's garment with violence,"

Says the LORD of hosts.

" Therefore take heed to your spirit,

That you do not deal treacherously."

Introduction: Because of the length of our text this morning and to some degree the difficult nature of our text, I wanted to see if I could help us this morning by putting the message in one sentence. It's a bit wordy, but here's the sentence.

Sermon in a Sentence: When it comes to confession we live at a crossroads of which our confession must be authentic, and for that confession, the cross is our only hope.

We live at a crossroads (2:1-9)

Again, I remind you that the setting of Malachi is after the exile. The exiles have returned with some degree of freedom. What has not occurred, unfortunately, is a long-lasting renewal in their commitment to God. Things have quickly returned to normal—and normal is not good. The people as a whole are rebellious, arrogant, argumentative, and callous in their relationship with the LORD. In Malachi 2:1-9 we see the description of their relationship with the LORD in two different ways. First, we know something of their relationship with a warning about the consequences of sin. Second, we know something about their relationship with the LORD because of the contrast described of the original Levitical priests and the priests of their own time.

Conditions of the Covenant and the Consequences of Sin (1-4)

The condition for living in right relationship with God is authentic worship as we described last week. The consequences of not living according to the conditions of the covenant are severe and incremental. This begs the question of exactly what part of the incremental consequences they are facing. That question begs the question about our own sin and consequences. The plea is to make things right before it is too late.

Contrast of Pure Priests and Poor Priests (5-9)

The original priests feared God, faithfully taught the Word of God, lived lives of integrity, fellowshiped with God, and led other people to Him. The priests of their day did the exact opposite. These were desperate times.

But, there was hope. Their hope was in confession of their sin. Notice the “if” in verse 2. Malachi has not given up on them. God has not given up on them. God is pleading with them to confess and make things right. Here is the crossroads for us. We too live in need of constant confession. We either continue on in our sin or we confess our sin. Our future depends on the “if.”

Our future depends upon confession.

In the countryside near Leicester, England, there stands an ancient church whose walls are inscribed with an eloquent memorial. The inscription recalls the life of a man who made the laying of that church's enduring stones possible long ago, and it reads as follows:

In the year 1653, when all things sacred were throughout ye nation either demolished or profaned, Sir Robert Shirley Baronet, did found this church: Whose singular praise it is to have done the best of things in the worst of times, and hoped them in the most calamitous.

(Ralph C. Wood, *Contending for the Faith*, Baylor University Press, 2003, p. 213)

Our church's future, our nation's future, our individual future depends that we confess our sin. In the worst of times, if that be so, confession is our key.

But, as we see in the text, the confession must be authentic!

The Confession must be Authentic (2:10-16)

What does it mean to be authentic in our confession? We must confess our sin ...

- Specifically—In order for our confession to be authentic, we must agree with God about our sin. We must call it sin, confess it as sin, and commit to never go that way again. The sins are specific in this text (verses 10-16). First, they have dealt “treacherously with one another.” This could be any number of things in the basic way they have treated each other. Nehemiah, for example, which is a historical book dealing with the return of the captives deals with the matter of exacting usury from one another. Basically, they are stealing, cheating, and taking advantage of one another. The second sin specifically mentioned in Malachi regards marriage. Two things are taking place—they are divorcing their wives without cause (which is and was a sin) and taking wives who have pagan gods.

Now, here’s our temptation this morning. You might say, I don’t have a problem with either of those two things, so I’m off the hook in this passage. “No!” These were the sins of the people Malachi’s day. The point of this text is in verse 15 and verse 16 to “Take heed to our spirit.” We must be willing to search our heart for any sin against God and confess that sin specifically.

- Honestly—No need to come to the altar with weeping and crying as described in verse 13, because God is the witness. God is able to see beyond the show and know what is really in your heart. God is not interested in our show; He is interested in our surrender.
- Totally—Again, “Take heed to your spirit,” is the dominant phrase of this text. As the Psalmist concluded his 139 Psalm, we must be willing to allow the LORD to “Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalm 139:23-24)
- Continually—The thing here is that confession never stops.

Confession is worthless if it is not authentic.

So, why is authentic confession so difficult? If you ever saw the movie *A Christmas Story*, no doubt you remember the scene of the boy sticking his tongue to the flag pole. In the 1983 movie *A Christmas Story*, several children gather at a school playground on a snowy day. One child tells a story about a kid who got his tongue stuck to the flagpole, adding that the fire department had to come to the scene. On a triple-dog-dare, one of the children, Flick, agrees to put his tongue on the flagpole and it actually sticks. Flick screams, "Stuck! Stuck! Stuck!" All the children abandon Flick, retreating into the warm classroom.

As class is about to begin, the teacher realizes Flick is missing. She inquires as to his whereabouts, but no one confesses. Finally, one girl points out the window. The teacher recoils in horror as she sees Flick's tongue frozen to the pole. Eventually firemen and police extricate Flick from his predicament.

Flick somberly walks into the room with a bandaged tongue, and the teacher addresses the class with a shaming tone: "Now, I know that some of you put Flick up to this, but he has refused to say who. But those who did it know their blame, and I'm sure that the guilt you feel is far worse than any punishment you might receive. Now don't you feel terrible? Don't you feel remorse for what you've done? That's all I'm going to say about poor Flick."

Still, no one confesses. Everyone sits silently, but we hear Ralphie (the main character) as he silently muses: "Adults loved to say stuff like that, but kids knew better. Kids knew darn well it was always better not to get caught."

When it comes to sin against God, I afraid we are all kids and don't want to get caught.

For that Confession, the Cross is our only hope.

So, we are back to the "cross"-road.

When I think on confession, my mind is immediately drawn to 1 John 1:9-2:2.

⁹ If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. ¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. ¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

Let's put all of this together.

Early in 1993 British police accused two ten-year-old boys of the brutal murder of two-year-old James Bulger. The two boys pleaded innocence. The young defendants responded to police questioning with noticeable inconsistency. The climax came when the parents of one of the boys assured him that they would always love him. Confronted with irrefutable evidence linking him with the crime and the assurance of his parents' love, the boy confessed in a soft voice, "I killed James." The miracle of God's love is that he knows how evil we are, yet he loves us. We can confess our worst sins to him, confident that his love will not diminish. (Greg Asimakoupoulos, Concord, California. Leadership, Vol. 15, no. 2. Copied from Preaching Today.Com.)

Our future depends upon this kind of confession.