***Malachi 2:1-9 “And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. 2If 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. 4Then 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. 6The 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. 8But 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.”***

 We’re in Malachi 2 tonight. Malachi is the last recorded prophet before what is known as the 400 years of silence. The silence starts with Malachi 4:6 and ends with Luke 1:11. Malachi communicates God’s promise of John the Baptist, preparing the way. In Luke 1:11, an angel appears to Zacharias – God is about to speak again. Though it was a time of silence, it doesn’t mean it was a time of peace. No, it was a time of great violence and wickedness, upheaval and battles. Tonight, the corrupt priests are fully in view. We know that 1 Corinthians 15:33 says *Do not be deceived: “Evil company corrupts good habits.* Those around us impact us. The priests were irreverent and didn’t keep the highest standards. The people saw, understood, and followed suit. If we want the best from those in our circle, we must be the best example we can be. If our families, our friends, our coworkers, our communities fail, it must never be said that we set the wrong example.

 *Verses 1-3 “And now, O priests, this commandment is for you. 2If 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. 4Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That My covenant with Levi may continue,”
Says the Lord of hosts.* ***And*** *now, O priests, this commandment is for you –* Malachi leaves no doubt or guessing who this commandment, the degree of condemnation, is given. The language used is like that of a judgement being passed down in a court. The priests can expect consequences and punishment for their actions. *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.* Malachi 1:6 spoke of the irreverent and deceitful way the priests were performing the services before God. God now says – If you will not bring glory to my name, consequences will occur. He will send a curse upon them. Poverty, sickness, afflictions will come. Prosperity will be nowhere to be found. He will turn blessings into curses, removing blessings from the priests lives and bringing calamities in their place. *“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.* God will cause offspring to stray, corrupt the seed planted in the ground, and cause little fruit to come from effort. He will spread the rottened leftovers of the feasts over your face, making you as vile as if someone spread animal dung and filth over you. People will reject you and leave your presence. One shall take you away, out of sight and out of the Temple. You will be cast out of fellowship. *Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, That My covenant with Levi may continue,” Says the Lord of hosts.* As punishment falls and consequences occur, the priests will know this is their failing and they have brought this upon themselves for failing to honor God. God is reminding the priests that He had a covenant with Levi, for the descendants of Levi to serve Him in the Temple. They have breached the covenant. God is going to renew it.

 Verses 5-6 *“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. 6The 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.* ***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.* Malachi is speaking here of Numbers 25:10-13  *Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: 11 “Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, has turned back My wrath from the children of Israel, because he was zealous with My zeal among them, so that I did not consume the children of Israel in My zeal. 12 Therefore say, ‘Behold, I give to him My covenant of peace; 13 and it shall be to him and his descendants after him a covenant of an everlasting priesthood, because he was zealous for his God, and made atonement for the children of Israel-* Of course, we remember that Aaron and Moses were from the tribe of Levi, through Kohath. Phineas was the grandson of Aaron. God made a covenant and He intends to keep that promise. The current priesthood is not upholding their side of this, as they are failing to administer the duties honestly and correctly. God expects zeal, honor, and reverence. He expects the priests to be honored to serve in the Temple, honestly and courageously before the people. *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 –* Malachi recalls how Phineas had the Law of Truth in his mouth, behaving with piety, honor, dignity, and humility is administering the office of priests. He taught the people from the Law of Truth consistently and Iniquity was not found on his lips – He didn’t walk in sin, he didn’t mix unclean with clean, he didn’t deal falsely with the people, he gave instruction in keeping with God’s commandments. He didn’t change based on the people and was no respecter of men. Further, Phineas walked in peace and equity with God. The word of God ruled all parts of his life and he sought honesty and integrity at all times. Through his example and instruction, many turned from evil. Unlike the priests Malachi is addressing, Phineas lived his full life on display for the honor of God. May we find ourselves doing the same.

Verses 7-9***“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. 8But 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.” For****the lips of a priest should keep knowledge, And people should seek the law from his mouth* – The priest must preserve and store up the knowledge of God in his heart, so he can distribute it freely and lovingly to the people. As he demonstrates wisdom, discernment, and a deep knowledge, the people seek him in times of challenge and trouble. In the days of Malachi, this applied to decisions about disagreements, division of property, and other matters. The priests were to be the messenger of the Lord of hosts. He not only declares what should be done, but also calls out those not doing it. *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.* But, the priests have failed to be true to the duty. They have acted in a way that departs from what God has commanded. They’re selling and sullying their blessed office, causing many to stumble by bad example and ignorance of the law. The priests have corrupted the covenant with Levi. Evil has replaced zeal, pride has replaced humility, greed has usurped a hunger for knowledge. Evil and sin has separated the priests from the God they are to serve.  *Therefore I also have made you contemptible and base Before all the people*God has made and will in the future make the priests contemptible before the people. We know this happens with the coming of Antiochus, who removed the priests, desecrated the Temple and the Altar, and placed his own people in as High Priest. Daniel foretold this and it is still ahead in the time of Malachi. *Because you have not kept My ways But have shown partiality in the law.* All of these curses and consequences are coming because of the evil and wicked way the priests are walking. They have failed to keep God’s word. They have shown partiality to people based on social status or standing, have given favor to unworthy and disqualified people, and sought gain at the expense of justice. The people knew this and disdained the priests for it. Romans 2:11 - *For there is no partiality with God.* As God shows no favoritism, so the priests must show none.

And so we leave Malachi tonight. It’s clear where the fault and failure lies. The priests have failed to set the example and deal with honesty and integrity. The people saw. Now, consequences are coming on all of Israel. Likewise, we must set the example in today’s world. We never know who is watching. We must do our best to cause no one to stumble. May our every word and all our life honor God through Jesus His Son.