

Influencers

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[0 : 00] Okay, well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to see you today. My name is Graham. I'm the pastor of the church here, and it's just been such an encouraging service so far. I remember as a student having that experience of speaking to a friend about Jesus, the first time I think ever in my life, and just how encouraging it is to hear Sarah have the same experience as well.

I want you to come expectantly to Malachi chapter 2, as we come to God's holy and into his holy presence and to his living and active word. Malachi chapter 2, 1 to 9. So there's four faces on the screen. Here they are. See if you recognize them. They are Selena Gomez, Cristiana Ronaldo, Dwayne Johnson, and I think he used to go by the name of The Rock, and Taylor Swift.

Recognize them? So I knew three out of the four. I'll let you guess which one I didn't know. But here is the one word that connects the four of them. The word is influencers. Okay, each of them were in the top 10 social media influencers in our world last year. Now, that word influencer, you might have heard it before. You might never have heard it before. But the fact is that it's made its way into our everyday language over the last few years. Someone through what they say and how they live has a huge sway over how other people think and behave in the world. So that's your definition of an influencer. So let me give you one thought and one question at the top of this sermon this morning. Here's the thought. Whether or not we think of it in those terms or not, the truth is that we all have influencers in our lives. So people who we're looking to to make sense of and give shape to our lives in this world. Now, you and I love to think that we are independently minded when we make decisions in our lives. But the truth is that we are highly predictable human beings, right? I'm reminded of this every time I go to buy something on Amazon. And what does it come up with the scroll bar at the bottom? What's the title of it? Customers like you also bought.

And a scant one of 47, it says, or as I like to call it, you're not so much of a snowflake, actually. You're very predictable in your buying habits. Okay? We all have influencers. We're so easily, we're so subtly influenced by people and things. And so here's the question for you. Who are those people who are influencing your life right now? Who's shaping your world? Who are you learning the world from? Have a think about it.

[3 : 18] You see, Malachi's day, that influencing role, if you want to know who God is, if you want to know what he's said, if you want to know how he's acted throughout history, if you want to know who you are and what the world is in light of him, then that influencing responsibility lies with the priests.

Now, we thought about them last week and we're thinking about them again today. Theirs is a two-pronged, God-given job description. Number one, they have to represent the people to God. We thought about that last week by making sacrifices at the temple. And the flip side, number two, is that they have to represent God to the people.

Help them understand who the Lord is. This three times holy, faithful, never-changing, steadfast, fully just God, who has a burning desire to dwell with his people.

And this God who has invited them to draw near to him and be right with him and enjoy fellowship with him through the sacrificial system that he's put in place and who's called them to live for him alone.

[4 : 46] And as well as teaching, the priests have to be like the guys who are right at the front when that starter pistol goes, right at the front of the marathon.

What are those people called? What's their title? They're paysetters. Do you know the people I'm talking about? The paysetters. That's what the priests are. They are to be the paysetters for godliness.

Now, last week we saw God out the priests because they're failing in job number one. Do you remember this? They are offering shoddy sacrifices. Saying, verse 13, and you can scan your eye back there to chapter one.

They are saying, what a weariness this is. Right? They are yawning at their job. They are saying, what's the point? Does it make any difference?

I'm bored. They're failing at job number one and they're failing at job number two as well. Now, if I can get my geek on for a second and show you the structure which emerges in these verses, because it's important to see what the key verse is here.

[5 : 53] There's an ABA structure here to this little section. You've got it there. You've got the bookends of verses one to three and then verses eight to nine.

Now, if you look at it there, you'll see that both of those concern God's stinging words of rebuke to these priests, this generation of priests. And the middle section of verses four to seven, God is saying, this is the kind of priest that I'm after.

This is who my heart beats for. This is who I want to represent me. Which means because of that structure, the spotlight, the highlighter pen falls on verse seven.

Have a look at it there. For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth.

So that's the key verse in this section this morning. What can the people expect of their leaders?

They can expect two L's. They can expect lips that proclaim God's truth.

[7 : 09] And they can expect lives that back it up. Because they come from a heart that's been captured by the all surpassing beauty of the God that they don't know distantly.

This God who they know personally. They are. Do you see the title there? They are the messengers of the Lord.

Now, we used to live right in the middle of the city center here in Edinburgh. And our kids used to love playing this game called spot the flag. Spot the flag.

So the flags of all the different countries where the ambassadors of those countries lived and worked. People whose job it was to represent their country in Scotland.

And occasionally you'd walk past and you'd see a swanky car pull up or you'd see a security guard on the door. And it reminded you, this wasn't a cute game spot the flag.

[8 : 10] It reminded you that that gig is big. Right? To represent your country of birth. To represent them is a high honor. And take that same logic.

Do you see what God is saying? There is no higher gig than to be a messenger of the Lord Almighty. No higher gig than that.

And so if we can just see two things in this passage, I think we'll understand the beating heart of the message here. Here's the first thing we need to see. Take in those bookends.

We need to see how low God's opinion is of the false teachers. Verse 1. Do you see it? And now you priests, this warning is for you.

So notice the warning word there. This isn't God's top tip. This isn't God's suggestion. Nor is this God's advice. This is a warning from the Lord Almighty to the priests who are meant to be representing him in the eyes of his people and in the eyes of the world.

[9 : 13] One that if they don't listen to and honor the God who they're supposed to be representing, not just in the eyes of the people, but verse 14 of chapter 1 in the eyes of the nations of the world, then God will curse them.

It's just worth parking that thought for where we end up this morning, okay? And that word carries with it both echoes of Genesis 3 and Deuteronomy, where God had said that this is what would happen when his people are unfaithful to their side of the covenant agreement.

And what will God do in the passage? And get this scent in your nostrils. God's will take the dung, which is the leftovers from the sacrificial animals that they take and dispose of it outside the city.

God will take that and he will smear it on their faces. And that's rank, as we would say in Scotland, isn't it? It's disgusting.

But God is saying that he will humiliate them in front of the people. And what is their crime, verse 8? They don't know and they don't honor the Lord personally anymore.

[10 : 33] And because of that, they've caused many to stumble by their false advice. These guys are like guides leading people up after their seat, having never climbed it themselves, offering advice, not having a clue what the safest way to go about that is.

Okay? If you know that hill, you know there's a certain way that's better to climb than another. And because people are listening to that advice, they are walking straight into danger.

Now you've got to see how serious these accusations are from a holy God. This God will not be mocked by people who claim to represent him, who do not know him.

One, oh, that they would turn back to God, acknowledge their wrong, repent and change their ways. Because there is no greater responsibility.

There is no greater gig than to be a messenger of the Lord Almighty. And as a side note, is that not a chilling lesson? And I feel it as I stand up here at the front today.

[11 : 41] Is it not a chilling lesson to all those who teach God's words in whatever capacity it is in here? Whether it's Sunday school, whether it's up the front on a Sunday, whether it's leading a Bible study, whether it's the embassy, whether it's the creche, and whatever context, teaching God's words is a responsibility and a privilege that's worth our best efforts.

Now, two sides to this coin. Do you see how God cares about what is communicated? Right? We are not to think of ourselves like freelance journalists.

Okay? We're just offering our interpretation of how we think things are. We've got to think of ourselves more like Deliveroo drivers. You'd be rightly raging, would you not, if you ordered a Chinese takeout one night and the guy turns up at your door with an Indian, saying, actually, I felt that you might be more in the mood for this kind of thing.

You'd be raging at that, wouldn't you? In the same way, our job is simply, as we deliver God's message from his words, to pick up, deliver, and not to tamper.

As my friend CJ from America always said, he said, we've got to be committed to unoriginality. Unoriginality. Yes, creativity, but unoriginality.

[13 : 11] And the same applies for what we see in the world as well. Friends, let me just say, don't assume that just because someone or something has Christian wrapping around it, that what they are teaching is true.

Just because someone makes an appearance on God TV, just because you hear somebody on Christian radio, just because somebody has a Bible reading commentary and app on your phone, just because a church produces good music, just because a message comes out of a church building, just because an individual has reverend in front of their name, never assume that what they are teaching is truthfully God's word.

And this calls for great discernment for all of us as a community, as a congregation, whoever in the years to come certainly is up here. We always have to ask ourselves, is what he is saying from up here?

And is what we are hearing out there, does it match up with what we see down here? Because God cares about what is communicated.

You know, every week in preparing for this part of our Sunday gathering, I just take the line from that game show catchphrase. Do you remember that game show? I think it's still going, actually.

[14 : 34] Loved it as a kid. Just say what you see. Just say what you see. God cares about what is communicated.

And the flip of it is that he cares about how it's communicated. He's not after used car salesmen who are just out to make a quick sale, not really caring about how they get there.

Our words must come from lives that are passionately pursuing the Jesus that we know personally.

Now, I love this Scottish minister from years ago called Robert Murray McShane.

He once said this. He said, Now, what does he mean by that? He means that if I'm not passionately pursuing Jesus, then I've got nothing to pass on to others.

What is true of the flu is true of teaching God's word. You cannot pass on what you haven't got. And in stark contrast to the low opinion God has of these false teachers, have a look at verses 4 to 7 and see just how high God's praise is for the true teachers.

[15 : 52] Now, verse 4, God talks about his covenant with Levi. You see that? Levi, being the name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel, set aside by God to be involved in the work of the temple.

And so you can think about it like this. What follows is almost God describing to this generation what he wants his priests to be and do.

Now, follow this because I think this is brilliant. Okay. Verse 5. My relationship with him is to be one of life and peace. Again, notice the lips and the life still get going on here.

In terms of his life, he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. His life was marked by reverence because he loved me.

That was his life. And lips, well, look at verse 6. True instruction, God's truth would be found on his lips.

[16:57] Do you see it? Do you see? Lips and life, they together form a wonderful partnership that God we're meant to be representing in the eyes of the world. And again, in contrast, contrast that to the current generation who are causing people to stumble.

This priest will turn many from iniquity. Do you see it? Lips and life's that perfectly honor the Lord. That's the kind of teacher that God longs that his people would have. And graciously and wonderfully, the good news of the gospel is that God has provided us with this priest.

It's the good news. Because God is gracious and good, he has given us this perfect priest. Oh, friends, you turn to the pages of the New Testament and you start reading the gospels.

You start reading about Jesus' life. One of the terms that you will come up against again and again and again and again that people use for Jesus is teacher, rabbi.

[18:07] Some use it in a derogatory way, but many others use it of him because his teaching was the likes of which they had never heard before.

And they call him teacher. He does. We're reading this on the day, Mark 9. And he does all things well. This is Jesus.

And let me just say, if you're thinking about the things of Christianity, here's my plea to you. You might have some big questions. Right? Are Christians bigots?

Do they just ignore science? All of these questions that are answers to. But before you get to them, can I encourage you to make Jesus your entry point to the Christian faith?

Make him your entry point. Let him influence your vision. Let him describe to you who this God is. In the words of Glenn Scrivener, he's written this wonderful little book called 321 Gospel.

[19:13] And I finished it last night. And if ever, next time my friend comes to me and says, I want to understand the Christian faith, this is the book that I'm giving them. It's the best one that I've read about an introduction to the Christian faith.

Here's what he says. Enter the story. There's the invitation. Enter the story and think about whether this is the story of stories. Look to the hero and decide whether he might be the hero of heroes. Because if he is, then you haven't shrunk your world. You've opened it up. Jesus, the God-man, who has existed with God his Father for all eternity, who came, who stepped into the pages of history, who took on human form to reveal him to us.

And if that's the case, we've got to ask ourselves, what kind of God is it that Jesus reveals? You know, I heard a story recently about a woman from Iran who picked up a gospel in her home country and who read about Jesus and having heard her whole life about all sorts of gods, she said, oh no, I understand what you mean.

She referred to the God of the Bible as the like Jesus God. That's true. The God the Father is the like Jesus God. You want to understand who this God is?

[20:40] Come to Jesus. Read about him in the gospels. Jesus, the God-man who loved God's law and meditated on it day and night.

Jesus, the God-man whose mouth was filled with God's words and his true instruction. Jesus, the God-man who died for those who didn't love the law or live the law like this generation and like you and I.

You ever wondered why Jesus died on the cross? Died for our sin, but you ever wondered why it was the cross? Why did he not die in skirmish? Why did he not die trying to break up a fight?

Why did he die on the cross? Because every Jew would know that cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree. That is the sign that he is taking what that we deserve, that the just generation deserve that we deserve.

He is taking, he is becoming a curse for us. Because we couldn't obey the law. We couldn't earn our way to God.

[21:46] We deserved God's punishment and Jesus said, I will take it for them. And talking of God's high praise for true teachers, Jesus was the God-man of whom God said, this is my son.

Come, listen to him. And let me just take you, as we begin to wind this up today, let me take you to one of my favorite bits of narratives in the Gospels.

Here is the scene in John chapter six. And we'll get to it in a couple of months time, actually, John chapter six again. This huge crowd have gathered to hear Jesus. He's been teaching them about the world in which they're living.

And he's been teaching them about who he is. He's been teaching them about what he's come to do. And it's fair to say that it doesn't go down well with the crowd. And one by one, they start to leave.

They start to drift away. And the only ones that are left in this scene are the 12 disciples. And Jesus turns to them and he says, effectively, are you going to go as well?

[22 : 56] Are you going to go? To which Peter replies. He says, where else are we going to go, Lord?

Where else are we going to go? Because we have come to see and understand that you have the words of eternal life.

In other words, we ain't going nowhere. Because we're hanging on in every word that comes from your mouth. And here's what that means.

And if you take one thing from this, let it be this. What is the thing that you and I need most in our lives today? As we sit here today, what is the thing that we need most?

Where is the place that we need to get to most? No matter what is going on in our lives just now, where do we need to get to? We need to get to the words of Jesus.

[23 : 57] Because it's his words that have eternal life. Oh, I remember using this just before going on sabbatical, this quote by a guy called Sam Albury, who said, and I find this so simple yet so wonderfully profound, he said, spiritual maturity is not gradually realizing that you need Jesus less.

Now flip it around. He said, spiritual maturity is increasingly coming to see that you need Jesus more. we need to get to him.

And so can I just give you two really quick fire questions as we think about the application of this before we finish? That's a rhetorical question because you're getting them anyway, okay? Here's number one.

As we think about the fact that we need to get to his words, question number one, are we getting ourselves there? Are we getting ourselves there? Do you know what I love to put in my porridge every morning?

Honey. Do you know what I love honey? Love honey. Nothing beats the natural, unprocessed sweetness of honey.

[25 : 14] lasts through the centuries. Right? So much so, and I was reading this the other day, that somebody was claiming that if an archaeologist was to find a pot of Stone Age honey, that they could confidently spread that on their toast.

Now I don't know if that's true or not. But do you know what I love? I'll take their word for it. Do you know what I love? I love that God says in his words, what is my word like to your taste?

It's like honey. It's like honey. Taste and see that the Lord is good. The Lord who created honey, often think if that's the, if that is the reason that he created bees and honey.

Not so that he would have a handy metaphor to use, but he said, no, no, so in the centuries to come that they will understand that my word is timeless, that my word is joyous, that my word doesn't change, that my word stays, that my word is rich, that my word is satisfying, that my word is joyous. Let me ask you, are these words connecting with you today as you think about the word of the Lord? Go on and taste and see that the Lord is good.

[26 : 28] His living and active words, his infallible word, his trustworthy words, his unchanging word, his powerful word, his word that goes forth and accomplishes his purposes.

And if it was those things to Jesus, if the word of his father was a delight, I take it that as we grow more into his likeness, as God's spirit lives in us and transforms us and pushes us away from the old us and towards the new us in Christ, I take it that that should become more of our desire to.

In our busy lives and into our weary souls, are we getting ourselves there? Second question, can you help others get there?

Who can you get alongside today? And just have a look around, okay? Who can you get alongside today? And in the weeks and the months to come with that central purpose, maybe have a think about the generation who are one below you.

Can you get alongside someone? Can you share your experiences with them? Can you model what the Christian life looks like?

[27 : 49] Can you take them out for coffee? Can you read the Bible with them? Do you know what I was thinking about in preparation for this? I wish someone in my church family, when I was in my last year of university about to go to work, I wish someone had come alongside me and said, this is what you're about to hit when you leave university.

Because my head was full of terms like world changer, an impact maker. And actually, do you know what I needed? I needed someone to get alongside me and said, okay, how about self-control? And how about witness? And how about endurance? How about patience? How about loving your neighbor well? And let me tell you, that will make so much more of a revolutionary impact in our world than you think it will.

What a difference that would have made to my early years in the workplace. Think about a generation below you. Think about a generation above you.

Who can you approach? Who can you come alongside? And honestly, just do this. I would love to learn life from you. Love to read the Bible with you.

[29 : 03] If you're wondering what that looks like, can I heartily recommend this brilliant podcast, if you're into podcasts, called Two Sisters and a Cup of Tea? 20, 25 minute episodes, and all that it is, is two, and the description of it that they give on the website is there, two sisters who meet up from living different countries, and all they do is read a passage together, and they chat about it for 20 minutes.

It is so simple, but I've listened to a couple of them now, so profoundly helpful. So here's the one thought that we finish with. We all have influencers in our lives.

One question, who's influencing you right now? I want to invite, let's get ourselves to the words of our great high priest.

You know, just as we close, I saw this play out recently in a dear old sister in her church family who died last year. Let me just say, if you're a younger generation here, you will realize when you get to know an older generation that they have been through so many things in life that I just cannot comprehend what that must have been like.

Wars, death of friends, losing spouses, raising children, dealing with unemployment, dealing with heartbreaking loss. And I always look at an older generation and the question inside that I'm asking is what has life taught you?

[30 : 31] After all that, what has life taught you? Well, I went to visit a lady in this church called Audrey the week before she died. Both her and her husband, Donald, in so much pain. And as we were chatting, she pulled out this battered old Bible and she began to tell me what she'd been reading that day.

She began to tell me how her and Donald read it every single morning or every single day together. and she said, we're up to Jonah. And she starts telling me about what she's reading in Jonah.

And I loved it. And I looked at her in that moment and I looked at the two of them and let me tell you, they were telling me an awful lot about the pain in their lives, but they were telling me nothing about the panic as to what is beyond it.

And I looked at her and I thought, in your pain, what has life taught you? Where is the place that you need to get to most today in your life?

Where are you dragging yourself every day? And it's to the words, the life-giving words of her great high priest. Now that's what I call an influencer.

[31 : 38] Standing on the promises that cannot fail. When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, by the living word of God, I shall prevail.

Standing on the promises. The promises of God. Let's pray together, will we? And Father, I ask that you would help us this morning, Lord, whatever's going on in our lives.

Father, some of us here will be doubting. Some of us here will be hurting. Some of us here will be questioning. Lord, Lord, I pray that in our lives, Lord, that your words, as we thought about this morning, the words of the great high priest, Jesus Christ, Father, would, by your spirit, they sufficiently have their way in our soul today.

Father, lift our eyes to the promises that you have made in your words. O Lord, we pray that you would transform us more into the likeness of Jesus.

Help us, Lord, not to get fixated with the things below. O, but Father, would you help us raise our eyes and live in light of the unchanging truth of what is ahead of us in Jesus Christ.

[33 : 06] Father, thank you for your unchanging love and commitment to us, your people. O Lord, as we sing our last couple of songs, would your spirit be ministering amongst us.

Would these truths that we sing about that we've heard about today, would they come with a fresh power we ask? In Jesus' name. Amen.