

# Malachi 1:6-2:16

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[ 0 : 00 ] Thank you very much indeed for your welcome and the opportunity of being with you. I'm using this microphone if you can't hear or want to hear, wave of Paul because I can easily speak up.

! I feel I've had lots of links with you here, not the least friendship with Paul, but recently I've been in Singapore and Andrew Leung was there, greatly enjoyed his time with you.

And last night I was staying in a student house up in York and one of the students there goes to St Nicholas Sevenights where Paul often does a youth camp with them.

And this student imitated Paul perfectly. Wonderful Welsh accent, so I felt I was prepared and ready to be with you.

I hope this is going to be encouraging. You probably know the story of the elderly couple, the alarm went off and the wife got up to make the tea and as she passed the mirror, she looked in the mirror and said, Oh dear, I'm so grey, I've got lots of lines, I've got bags under my eyes, I've got several chins.

[ 1 : 09 ] And she turned to her husband and said, Can't you say something encouraging? Nothing wrong with your eyesight, he said. I hope you've got Malachi open. I've been walking out with Malachi for a few months, we're not yet an item but we're getting to know one another.

And greatly helped by a very new commentary in the Bible Speaks Today series, which I want to warmly commend. The background is the year 460 BC, Malachi is the last of the prophets and is a natural bridge into the New Testament.

He wasn't the last book in the Hebrew Bible, that was Chronicles. But in our Christian Bibles he's the last one. And the situation is that people are fairly jaded, as you'll see.

And there are a whole series of disputations. So look with me, chapter 1, verse 1, I have loved you, says the Lord, but you say, how have you loved us?

And chapter 1, verse 6, Where is my fear, says the Lord of hosts, O priest who despised my name? But you say, how have we despised your name? Chapter 2, verse 17, the same sort of thing happens.

[ 2 : 24 ] You have wearied the Lord with your words, but you say, how have we wearied him? By saying, everyone who does evil is good, in the sight of God, and so on. Go into chapter 3, verse 7 and 8.

So all these disputations. Now I know that we are in Ealing, and not in Jerusalem. And I know that most of us probably are Gentiles, not Jews. So there's not an exactly comparable priesthood, as we're speaking about Levi.

And yet one of the things we discovered at the Reformation, was the priesthood of all believers. So I think we can learn much from this. And there's a certain amount that is negative here.

A very strong language used in chapter 2, verse 3. There was a very rude, outspoken, but wonderful evangelist called Donald Barnhouse.

And he was doing a mission in Cambridge in 1947, I think it was. And he was due to speak at the girls' college, Girton. And he was asked what his text was going to be.

[ 3 : 25 ] And it was going to be Malachi chapter 2, verse 3. I will spread dung on your faces. Which was slightly alarming for the young ladies there. But anyway, that's the way he approached things.

So there's a lot here that is quite strong. And in a sense, negative. But I want to major on the positives, with contrast with the negatives. And here's the first thing.

The Christian believer, the Christian believer, and I've got lots of x-ray eyes, so there may be some here who are still exploring and investigating. But the Christian believer must listen to the voice of God.

Chapter 2, verse 2. If you will not listen, you will not take it to heart. You will not listen. We can't speak for the Lord Jesus unless we first listen and heard.

Do you remember the miracle of the healing of the man who was deaf and dumb? Some people who've got a serious hearing impediment don't speak clearly.

[ 4 : 28 ] Because they've never heard people speak clearly. And we won't speak clearly unless we've heard clearly. And the trouble with these people is that they were not listening to God's word.

And the result of that was they caused many people to stumble. Look on to verse 8. You have turned aside from the way. You've caused many to stumble by your instruction.

Because you've got to listen first. And you know that there's one thing worse than being a sinner.

It's being a stumbling block. So Jesus said that if anybody causes little ones to stumble, it would be better for a millstone to be turned round to their neck and were thrown into the sea.

And this is what was happening with some of them. They were not listening. And therefore they caused people to stumble. And probably they showed partiality. Look at verse 9.

That is, they cherished bits that they liked and disregarded other things. And when Paul says goodbye to the Ephesian elders, he said, I preach the whole counsel of God.

[ 5 : 29 ] There was a distinguished theologian, Reinhold Niebuhr, who characterized liberal teaching in this way. He said, the liberals talk about a God without wrath, bringing man without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a cross.

Very shrewd. And that is people showing partiality. They're not talking about the fact that God is a God of holy wrath. They play down the fact that we are sinners, and depraved, and guilty.

They say that there's going to be no judgment. We're all going to be alright in the end. And therefore the death of the Lord Jesus is irrelevant. Those are the people all around us, I'm afraid. Especially in the Church of England.

For showing partiality. There was a good American bishop. One, literally. And he wrote a book with this brilliant title, The Cruelty of Heresy.

You see, the truth of the Gospel is to liberate, to set free, it's wonderful. And to deviate from that is very, very cruel indeed. So, what the Christian believers do, is first of all to listen to God's word.

[ 6 : 44 ] Make sure that what they're going to say is in accord with God's word. Now, I don't know what some of you senior people feel, as I do. There's been a decline, I think, recently, in the habit of daily quiet times.

I think 30, 40 years ago, it was axiomatic for all key Christians to be having a good half hour or more than that before they went off to work. Obviously, mothers looking after young children couldn't face that, and they mustn't be put under a feeling of guilt.

But I get the impression that that's declined. And there's a wonderful senior Christian statesman, Alec Mateer, who quoted to himself, Isaiah 50, verse 4.

He's in his 90s now. But this is the verse that hit him. The Lord has given me the tongue of those who are taught, that I may know how to sustain with the word him who is weary.

Morning by morning, he awakens me. He awakens my ear to hear as those who are taught. And what Malachi is saying, look, some of you folk are not listening to God.

[ 7 : 53 ] They're not listening to his word. Whereas Isaiah says, look, if you're going to pass on anything true, you must listen to his word. And of course, the glorious truth is, that we'll never be closer to the Lord Jesus, than when we're reading the Bible.

Never closer to the Lord Jesus, than when we've got our Bibles open, and we're hearing his word to us. So that's the first positive. The Christian believer must listen to the voice of God.

Some of them weren't doing that. Secondly, the Christian believer must honour, glorify God's name. And what we discover is that some of these people were despising his name.

Chapter 1, verse 6. A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I then am a father, where is my honour? I am a master. Where is my fear?

Says the Lord of hosts. To you, O priests, who despise my name. And again, in chapter 2, verse 2. If you will not listen, if you will not take it out, to give honour to my name.

[ 8 : 56 ] And the lack of reverence for his name, was shown in sort of shoddy public worship. They were offering knackered animals in the temple.

They were giving their loose change to God. And he says, well you wouldn't do that for your boss. Look at chapter 1, verse 8. Present that to your governor.

Some churches suffer from what we call the tyranny of the volunteer. That is, when it comes to their paid employment, they arrive on time, absolutely regular and so on and so forth.

But when it comes to things they volunteer to do for their church, the honour rata, well, they feel they could arrive late and not sort of do it particularly efficiently. And that is what's happening here. They were shoddy in their public worship. Whereas Levi, by contrast, was completely different. Chapter 2, verse 5. My covenant with him was one of life and peace.

[ 9 : 55 ] I gave him to him. It was a covenant of fear. And he feared me. The Lord Jesus once said, his people honours me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.

And I think that describes some of the people in Malachi's day. Now, I don't know what your reaction has been over the last ten days with what happened in Paris.

I mean, that form of violence is absolutely horrendous. And we distance ourselves from it in every way. But, it's just striking that they don't like their prophet being insulted.

Now, the way they reacted to that, I think, is horrendous. But have we got the same concern for his name, his honour? I wonder whether we feel as offended as we should when his name is just used to blasphemy and trips off people's tongues like that.

This concern for the honour of God comes throughout the Bible. Back in Ezekiel 36, turn to it.

Ezekiel has, well, God speaks to Ezekiel and says, look, the way you've behaved has meant that you've gone into exile and people are saying, what sort of God have you got?

[ 11 : 19 ] If he can't keep you safely in your own land and you've gone off into exile, he must be a rather feeble God. And so, God's name was being dishonoured in that way. The same thing may be happening here.

I personally think the nation is under judgment and the Church of England is under judgment because his name is not honoured and glorified. Do you remember Psalm 23?

He leads me in paths of righteousness. Why? For his name's sake. So that his name is not dishonoured in any way.

Hallowed be thy name. And intriguingly, the first reason why the Lord Jesus had to die was to vindicate God's honour. This is Romans 3, 25 and 26.

See, the spectacle that confronted the whole of the moral universe was a scandal. God had said that he hated sin and would punish it.

[ 12 : 21 ] And yet, Abraham, a liar, Moses who lost his temper, David who was an adulterer, Jacob who was a cheat, they all get accepted by God. And what did God mean then?

He said that he hated sin and would punish it. And therefore his name and his honour had to be vindicated. And it was vindicated by the Lord Jesus dying and the punishment due to Abraham, Moses, Jacob and the others, was paid for by the Lord Jesus.

And so his honour was vindicated. So the debt of the Lord Jesus works backwards and forwards for us. And God can only accept us honourably because the Lord Jesus died for us.

That is a wonderful truth, isn't it? Just to think that if you had been the only sinner in the world, the Lord Jesus would have died for you for his name's sake. So he's very concerned that people should honour his name.

And many of you like me will revere the memory of John Stott. John Stott said that verse 2 of chapter 2 was a defining moment for his ministry when he set his heart to honour God's name.

[ 13 : 38 ] Take it to heart, not to let honour come to his own funny little name, but to give honour to God's name. A crucial clarification of the goal and objective of his life.

To bring honour to God's name. Now, I don't know whether you noticed it. Did you notice how God is called in our passage? It's there in chapter 1 verse 7, it's there in chapter 1 verse 8, verse 10, verse 11, and on and on and on.

It's the Lord of hosts. Have you pondered on that? What was the state of Judah at the time? They were a subject nation, they were still part of the Persian empire.

The Persians had failed to get into Europe. They had attacked Greece. Athens was evacuated twice. If Athens had been captured by the Persians, the whole of Western civilisation would have been completely different.

but they were beaten. But they still occupied the eastern Mediterranean. And Judah was a subject nation and it had no army. But their God was the Lord of hosts.

[ 14 : 53 ] What a terrific thought for them when they felt, you know, we are a despised subject nation. Ah, but our God is the Lord of hosts. Do you remember how Elijah had to say to the young

man who was all frightened because the opposition seemed so great?

Open the young man's eyes that he might see. Saw the mountains filled with the hosts of the Lord God. And this is the reminder of who their God is, the Lord of hosts.

And therefore honour him. Honour him. Henry Martin, that great missionary. There was an occasion when he was in a Persian court or something and there was a picture of the Lord Jesus kneeling before Mohammed.

And Henry Martin said he was so grieved and outraged at this, felt he couldn't live for another moment without wanting Jesus' name to be honoured.

And this is the second mark. A Christian believer must honour and glorify God's name. And we read in Acts again and again that as people became Christians, they gave honour to his name and lived in fear.

[16:05] So as we're taking notes, you might like to jot down Acts chapter 9 verse 31 where we read So the church throughout all Judea and Galilee and Samaria had peace and was being built up and walking in the fear of the Lord and in the comfort of the Holy Spirit.

Multiply. The fear of the Lord. Practically I think that means daily repentance, just acknowledging that I'm a sinner and keeping short accounts and being full of praise and thanksgiving and honouring him.

You know the story of praying Hyde, missionary in India. Obviously it's fairly quaint, but he felt the Lord was laying on him the idea of leading one person to Christ every day.

And he began doing that. And day by day somebody was converted. And at the end of the year there were 365 people converted. And next year he felt he to lead two people to Christ every day.

And that began to happen. And then there were some days where he didn't get his quota. And he'd flop on his knees and he'd ask what sin he'd been committing that had stopped him being used.

[17:20] And again and again it was the sin of not praising and thanking God. And one of the secrets of humility is to be constantly thanking God and therefore honouring him.

For all that he's done. All the promises that he's kept for us. So the Christian believer must listen to God's word. Must honour and glorify God's name.

And then very obviously the Christian believer must be marked by holy living. And with the folk at Malachi's day initially it doesn't seem to be so much gross immorality.

There's a touch of that in chapter 3. but this lukewarmness this stinginess this infidelity it comes to and probably sins of omission not doing as much as they should.

And you remember the old saying it's not great gifts that God uses but great likeness to Jesus. And therefore we've got this wonderful example of Levi in verse 6.

[18:28] True instruction was in his mouth no wrong was found on it. He walked with me in peace and uprightness. He turned many from iniquity. You're probably well aware that in the pastoral epistles when Paul is giving instructions to Timothy the one non-moral characteristic that Timothy had to have was being apt to teach.

But all the other qualities were just basic Christian qualities. Put negatively he had to have money sex temper alcohol under control.

And that's the things for us as well. I suspect I suspect that few generations future generations will look back at us and just see how very very wealthy we are.

And there will just be friends who come from India. spent time here just slightly amazed at how comfortably off we are. And once there's nothing wrong with it. God's made all things richly to enjoy. But are we as generous as we should be? I know that Philip Jensen back in Australia feels that money, materialism is probably the biggest problem for young pastors there.

[19:44] So that would be an area to get under control. Sex obviously. I've just been on a student conference and there was one very helpful talk on digital stuff.

Now this bypasses me because I haven't got it, I haven't even got a mobile phone. But in the little group that I was with it was very interesting how honest some of the students were about the problems with the internet and so on.

That's an area. And what price purity said one of them. If it costs a bit to be on covenant eyes, well it's worth it. If it's going to help me to be pure. Temper.

We read of some of our politicians being in a rage about things and that we can't do that. And simply alcohol. Till 1967 in evangelical circles we were pretty well all teetotal.

And then almost overnight people stopped being teetotal. And I don't think the Bible enjoins that but there's no doubt that some people, I remember a very distinguished senior evangelical leader staying with me.

[ 20 : 55 ] He'd been at dinner and I had to help him up the stairs because he'd just drunk a bit too much. And another missionary friend of mine told me that on the mission field one night he'd drunk and he wasn't quite sure what he'd done, had he slept with a girl or not.

So there is that danger. And what Malachi is saying is that the Christian leader, teacher, but every Christian must be marked by holy living.

And this is a lovely example that we read often of Levi. He walked with me in peace and uprightness. I think a particular problem for men, where we tend to be slow to admit it, is, according to scripture, quarrelsomeness.

And the mark of Levi was he walked with in peace and uprightness. Uprightness. A dear friend of mine, now in glory, he was a very distinguished scholar, got a first in classics at Cambridge. He was a great athlete. I think he has a record that's filled in wisdom at the fastest opening century in minor counter cricket. He was headmaster of two different schools.

[ 22 : 08 ] When he retired, he did a second degree in maths at the open university. He had a lovely family, a great Christian man. And it was said of him, his life could bear inspection at every point, on the capes field, at work, in the family.

And that was the sort of life that Levi lived. And that the Christian is to aspire to a consistency of life and living.

So, there is quite a lot in Malachi to challenge us and to rebuke us. But I'm really anxious that we should look at the positives.

The Christian believer, must listen to the voice of God. If you will not listen, he says, chapter two, verse two. And here he's spoken, God has spoken, we've got it in front of us.

God has said all he needs to say in this book. Let's renew our determination to come and hear him through his word. The Christian believer must be concerned for his honour and glory.

[ 23 : 18 ] And therefore, feeling very grieved at what is happening in our country today. The standards that are plummeting, the way the name of the Lord Jesus is tossed out so irreverently.

Whereas we want his name to be honoured, to be glorified in our lives. Paul was able to say they glorified God in me, in our church, in our land.

And the Christian believer must live a life consistent with the standards of God. Take away the love of sin. Remind me of your standards, Lord.

Help me to live accordingly so that I reflect the Lord Jesus and become more like him day by day. Let's pray together.