

Malachi 2:1-16 and Hebrews 8:1-13

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, if you need a church Bible, grab one at the door. It will really help you go through. It's on page 801. Mark Twain was a very famous American novelist.

He was the author of books like Tom Sawyer or Huckleberry Finn. And I have no idea whether Mark Twain was a Christian, but I can tell you that he had a healthy respect for the Bible.

He knew that the Bible was no ordinary piece of literature. He once said, most people are bothered by passages of the Bible that they do not understand.

But the passages that bother me are the passages I do understand. Let me say that again. Most passages, most people are bothered by passages of Scripture that they do not understand.

But the passages that bother me are the passages that I do understand. And this morning in Malachi chapter 2, we come to a chapter that isn't very hard to understand at all.

[1 : 09] But it may certainly bother you if you're serious about it. You may have noticed when Reuben read to it that the word covenant keeps coming up.

It's repeated several times. And the covenant is a solemn and a binding agreement between two parties. We talk about the covenant of marriage.

And in these verses, God refers to several different covenants. Binding and solemn agreements. That's how we're going to divide the passage in.

Verses 1 to 9, you'll see the first one. You might remember from last week that Malachi is specifically addressing the priests.

The religious leaders of the people of God. And they continue to be the focus of the next session. You see it in verse 1. And now, O priests, you lot, you priests, this command is for you.

[2 : 12] And what follows is an admonition or a rebuke or criticism of some sort. And again, just like we saw last week in chapter 1, verse 6, the issue continues to be the failure of God's priests to give God the honour that he deserves.

So look with me at verse 2. If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honour to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send curse upon you. And I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I've already cursed them because you do not lay it to heart. You can hear the heat in those words, can't you? God is angry with the priests of Israel.

So angry, he says in verse 3, Behold, I will rebuke your offspring and I will spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you will be taken away with it.

It's very, it's a polite translation. What he's saying? That when the Israelites made their animal sacrifices, the dung or the offal, it was the inedible part, the internal organs, that was to be taken away from the sacrifice and burnt separately.

[3 : 25] It's not a pleasant image at all. But whatever has stirred God to be this angry, it must be, mustn't it? Very serious indeed. And from verse 4 onwards, God makes it clear what the problem is.

So if you look in verse 4, and then you look at verse 8, God refers to the covenant that he made with Levi. Levi was the founding father of the tribe of Levi.

They became known as the tribe of the Levites. And it was the Levites, wasn't it, who were chosen out of the 12 tribes of Israel to be the priests. They were to be the religious teachers.

They would represent God to the people and the people to God. And the covenant he made with them outlined the obligations that they had.

And so Malachi recalls them. Look at verse 5. He says, It says, The priests were to be God's mouthpiece.

[4 : 52] They were to be God's messengers. They were to instruct God's people. And they were to do it truthfully. And if they did their job properly, then the people of God would turn away from their sin.

But the priests in Malachi's day weren't doing their job properly. They'd completely drop the ball. And so instead of calling people to turn from their sin, they've actually caused people to stumble into sin.

In fact, they themselves as priests had turned away and become corrupt. Look at verse 8 and 9. But you, you, O priest, you have turned aside from the way.

You've caused many to stumble by your instruction. You've corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. And so I will make you despised and abased among the people. Inasmuch as you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your instruction.

God says, you've violated, you've broken the covenant, the agreement, the binding solemn agreement that I made with Levi. With Levi's descendants.

[5 : 59] And you've broken it. And what God is very serious about, they have treated with contempt. They've not honoured him, and so he is angry. What are we to make of it?

Since Jesus has come, we don't have priests anymore like they did in the Old Testament. Jesus is our priest, our perfect priest.

I and Reuben are not your priests. Jesus is the one who represents God to us, and us to God. The New Testament teaches, in a sense, we are all priests.

All of us who have trusted in the Lord Jesus, we are all in him, we are all priests. We are to represent God to the world. Your elders are not priests.

But nevertheless, God still appoints leaders in his church. He appoints men to lead his church, and to teach his people.

[7 : 03] He has laid a responsibility on those preachers and teachers, on elders and ministers. But he also, doesn't he, gives that responsibility from time to time, to Sunday school teachers, like you were taught this morning, to youth group leaders, to those who instruct our children, to those who teach Bibles.

And it is a, a Bible study, it is a very serious business. So look at James chapter 3, verse 1, or let me read it to you. You can turn there if you want. And these words are really sobering. And the Apostle James writes to the church, and he says this, Not many of you should presume to be teachers.

Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness. Lots has changed since Malachi's day, and our day, and our day, but one thing hasn't.

And that is this, that God is still very serious about people turning away from their sin. And those who are his messengers, his mouthpiece, must take that responsibility very seriously.

You must demand of those who preach to you that they teach you the truth, and nothing but the truth. Nothing false ought to be on their lips.

[8 : 35] And James reminds us, doesn't he, that when we speak for God, we are accountable to God. There will be a special judgment for us.

It's a chilling verse. For those of us who teach and preach God's word. So it's not something, and we do for fun, it's not something we do as an adrenaline rush.

It's not something that we do simply out of obligation. Instead, it must be something, isn't it, that the preacher must work very hard at.

They put time into it. They should take great care. And the implications for us as a church family is that it's far more important how the Bible is taught than what games and activities we do in the youth group.

It's far more important, isn't it, that the Bible is taught clearly and faithfully than that our children think they've had a wonderful time in our kids' clubs. And so our preparation as leaders of youth groups, Bible studies, in whatever context in the church, is to reflect what is most important to God.

[9 : 56] And so that's a great thing, isn't it, for those of you who are serving in ministries, to think about the different ministries in church life and think, are we reflecting what is most important to God?

Whether it's in the youth group or Little Stars or the language class, whatever context we're teaching God's Word, God is very serious indeed about how His Word is taught.

Speaking God's Word is a very serious business and we ought to treat it as seriously as God does. Malachi turns his attention then to what he calls the covenant of our fathers.

And he's talking there about the solemn binding agreement that he made with the whole nation of Israel. And so, at this point he addresses the whole nation, the whole people of God, not just the priests.

Look at verse 10. Have we all not one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another profaning the covenant of our fathers? The covenant God made with our forefathers, with their ancestors, has been violated, snapped, broken.

[11:03] Because they've broken faith with one another. And that is they've broken the bonds of commitment, of trust, by which God's people are bound to.

How have they done that? Look verse 11. Just glance down. He uses Judah and Jacob as synonyms for the people of Israel. Now, Judah's been faithless and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.

For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves and has married the daughter of a foreign God. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob and the descendants of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts.

The issue is here. This is the issue. The issue is they have intermarried with those who are not Israelites. That's what God means by marrying the daughter of a foreign God.

And some of you might be sitting there thinking, what's the big deal in that? Is God racist? Of course not.

[12:07] As in everything we've seen in Malachi so far, the problem is that they have broken God's clear commands. So let me read to you from Deuteronomy chapter 7.

It's from earlier on in the Old Testament. Deuteronomy chapter 7, verse 1. When the Lord, your God, brings you, the people of God, into the land that you are entering to take possession of it and clears away the many nations before you, the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites, seven nations more numerous and more mighty than you.

And when the Lord God gives them over to you and you defeat them, you must devote them to complete destruction. You shall make no covenant with them and you shall show no mercy to them and you shall not intermarry with them.

Giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters to your sons for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods. Then the anger of the Lord would be kindled against you and he would destroy you quickly.

Do you see, God not only gave the Israelites a command, I think you should be willing to see that, not to intermarry with those who didn't follow the God of Israel.

[13:16] He gave them the command but he also gave them the reason for it. that when you marry outside of the people of God, when you marry those who do not worship me, who worship other gods, God is concerned about that because the Israelites would turn away from serving him to worship the idols of the other nations.

And that is in many ways the story of the Old Testament. That when they did marry outside Israel, when they did turn away from worshipping God to worshipping, when they did into marriage, they turned away from worshipping God to worshipping idols.

King Solomon is the great example, isn't it? It's the classic and tragic case. His heart was turned away. But they're still doing it 800 years later.

And God says through Malachi, you've profaned the covenant. That means this. It means that they've treated something holy as if it was unholy.

And they've shown no seriousness about what God is serious about. And again, this is still an issue that God is serious about.

[14:35] In 2 Corinthians chapter 6, the Apostle Paul is writing, talking about how Christians are to live in the world. He says that he wants them to live in a way, in a world, he wants them to live in a way that is pure.

And this is what he says. Hear these words. He says, do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with unrighteousness?

or what fellowship does light have with darkness? And Paul is urging Christians like you, if you've trusted in the Lord Jesus, like me, to be uncontaminated in our devotion to the Lord Jesus.

To be uncompromising about our devotion to the Lord Jesus. believers. And to that end, he urges us not to bind ourselves to unbelievers in any sort of irreversible partnership.

Now, I presume that that applies to things apart from marriage too. But it certainly does apply to marriage. Whatever form the yoking together, joining together, takes, Paul urges us to be pure and to maintain undivided loyalty to Christ by avoiding it.

[16:02] You might feel this morning that you are strong enough to avoid being distracted or contaminated.

But that doesn't give you permission, license, to disregard God's command. And God says to you this morning that you should be loyal to him above everything else.

that we should love him more than anybody else. And it seems clear to me that the teaching of the Bible is that Christians should not consider marriage to an unbeliever an option.

It's not an option. And so if you are looking for a husband or wife even, or if you are looking for a girlfriend or boyfriend, the Apostle Paul would urge you, would command you, look for someone who shares your commitment to Jesus Christ.

Let me speak to our young people, to our teenagers. Let me plead with you. Let me plead with you as your minister that if you are looking for a relationship, if you are looking to get married, hear these words, look for someone in the Lord.

[17:25] God, I cannot tell you the untold harm and pain that it causes to disregard that clear command from God. I realise that this morning, this is not an easy issue for some of us.

In fact, I know for some of you, this has been excruciatingly hard. But I need to tell you that this is something that God is very serious about.

And so we should be serious about it too. Thirdly, and finally, let's look at the third covenant in verses 13 to 16. In Malachi 2, Malachi explains why God is not accepting Israel's offering.

He's not accepting their religious devotion. Do you remember last week he said, I'd rather you shut the doors, I'd rather you didn't bother. And it's because of the third covenant violation in verse 13.

He says, this is the second thing you do.

You cover the Lord's altar with tears. You come and you cry. You love the music. You cry your eyes out. And you weep and you groan. But he no longer, God no longer regards your offering with favour from your hand.

[18:38] But you say, why does he not? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you've been faithless. though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Notice again, it's the dispute structure. Do you remember we saw that last week? God says, this is how you behaved, and the Israelites say, no, no, no, no, how have we done that? How have we broken faith?

Here, it's about the bond of a commitment between a husband and a wife. And that bond between a husband and wife is a covenant. And on this occasion, God takes the Israelites back to creation, to the covenant of creation.

And in the book of Genesis, he reminds them that marriage is two people becoming one flesh.

Verse 15, look at this, did he not make them one with a portion of the spirit in their union?

And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit. Let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.

[19:53] So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. Because of the oneness intended for marriage, God calls on his people not to reverse that.

Not to reverse the oneness into two-ness. By divorcing their marriage partner. Or being violent to their marriage partner. Because that could incite God's hatred.

And this too is something that God is serious about. And again, the New Testament, the teaching of the Bible is telling you and I, God hasn't stopped being serious about this.

When Jesus was quizzed, you remember, on the topic of divorce, his answer was really clear. Let me read you from Matthew 19. Religious leaders came up to him and they tested him by asking, is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any reason?

And he answered them, have you not read that he who created them, Genesis 1 and 2, from the very beginning made them male and female? And said, therefore a man shall leave his wife, his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and the two shall become one flesh.

[21:05] So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate. Now of course, this isn't all that the New Testament says to us about divorce and

about marriage.

Even in that passage, Jesus goes on to recognise some of the complexities that are involved. But God's view is not complex.

God still hates divorce. And that is a hard word, isn't it? I suspect some of you listening to me might be able to identify with Mark Twain because passages like this bother us.

And what bothers you and I is how black and white they are when we know that the world is full of grey so much of the time. And so particularly when it comes to divorce, for example, there is pain and complexity in broken relationships.

So complex that no two situations ever see the same. And sometimes passages like this bother us because we find it hard to see why God wants things this way.

[22 : 32] Sometimes they bother us because what the Bible says is so different from what the world says all around us. And indeed, what the Bible says about some of the things we're looking at this morning is incredibly unpopular in the world, isn't it?

And the temptation to simply say what people want us to say is very, very great.

a friend of mine I was with this week attended a wedding recently and he heard a marriage sermon. He was just there as a kind of punter, as a guest.

And the marriage sermon had two main points. The first point, point number one in this, he was a minister, the point number one was there's a lot of paperwork involved in getting married these days and in marriage.

marriage. Point number two was some marriages work and some don't so we've got to hope for the best in this case. Here is a man who was entrusted with God's word to these people and he thoroughly undermined God's word.

[23 : 49] Even Christian leaders sell out on the truth of God's word. My friend found out actually this man had been married twice before and he was saying these things wasn't he to justify his own existence.

They say things people want to hear and the temptation to do so is so very great but that is simply not the right way to respond to the epidemic of broken marriages in our country and amongst your friends and amongst mine.

We as Christians need to be people who are willing and prepared to be unpopular. Who are prepared to be bothered by the Bible but who will remain loyal to God and to God's word.

Who won't change it and won't ignore it and won't water it down but will obey it. Now listen to me here. Particularly if you're a little bit upset by what I've just said. Maybe you're a little bit angry but I want you to listen to this.

Malachi is not saying God hates people who've been divorced. Malachi is not saying God hates people who are divorced.

[24 : 57] He's saying he hates divorce. And I think if you have been divorced this morning you will be the quickest to understand this truth. I agree with it.

Because you will know won't you if you've been through a divorce how gut wrenchingly awful it is. But this verse is actually not directed towards those who've been through the tragedy, the grief of divorce.

It's directed to those of us this morning who are married or who one day will be married. And the message for you and I is this. Take the covenant of marriage seriously.

Marriage is for life. Anything else is destructive of people and heartbreaking to God. Marriage is not to be entered into lightly.

Marriage requires hard work and deep commitment no matter what the cost. And so if you've made a covenant like that already or will one day do it do whatever it takes to keep your covenant no matter what.

[26 : 13] No matter what. because if we are serious about loving God we will be as serious as God is about obedience in this area. And I hope you're seeing this morning that God is serious about covenants and the keeping of covenants.

And that really is the big theme of Malachi chapter 2. And I want you to notice this profound thread that runs right the way through all of these three issues that Malachi tackles.

you see whenever Israel the people of God disobey God and break covenant it's got implications for the greatest covenant. It's got implications for the greatest relationship of all.

Look at verse 8 of chapter 2. When the priests break their covenant with God other people are led astray from God. They cause others to stumble. Look at verse 11.

when the Israelite marries non-Israelites it desecrates the sanctuary God's temple. It's an insult to God personally. Verse 13. When the Israelites break their marriage covenant God is no longer pleased with their offering.

[27 : 17] He's personally offended. Because when God's people betray their covenant when they betray his word they betray him. And that's what Israel has done.

They've betrayed God. And that's a pretty bleak picture this morning isn't it? What hope did Israel have? What hope is there for you and I this morning feeling guilty?

What hope is there when we disobey God's word? Well if Israel were going to take Malachi seriously they were prepared to take God and his covenant seriously. Well they might also remember a promise that God had made about 150 years earlier.

It was a promise that came through the prophet Jeremiah. It was our assurance of pardon that we read earlier in the service. And it was God's promise for the future for the people of Israel.

Behold the days are coming declares the Lord when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.

[28 : 31] My covenant that they broke though I was their husband declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with them the house of Israel after those days declares the Lord. I will put my law within them I will write it on their hearts and I will be their God and they shall be my people and no longer shall each teach his neighbour and each his brother saying know the Lord for they shall all know me.

From the least of them to the greatest declares the Lord. And then here's the great news for I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more.

God said the problem of the! covenant which is the problem that we see in Malachi chapter 2 is that Israel broke it. They violated it by persistent deliberate willful obedience disobedience.

But God says I am making a new one and it will be totally different. In the new one he says my law will be on the people's hearts. In the new one my people will all know me.

In the new one I will forgive my people's wickedness and I will remember their sins no more. And that was Israel's only hope. They couldn't repair the old covenant.

[29 : 44] No amount of repentance would make it right. They wrecked it. They needed a new one. They needed a new one that only God could make. That's precisely what God has promised to do.

As we read in Hebrews chapter 8. It's not just what he's promised to do, is it? It's what he's done because on the night before he was betrayed, Jesus took the bread and said, this is my body.

He took the cup and said, this is the cup of the new covenant, which is shed, which is my blood, which is shed for the forgiveness of sins.

It's what he's done in the Lord Jesus. He's seen the disobedience of Israel, he's seen all of my disobedience too, he's aware this morning of your brokenness and your frailty and your rebellion.

He knows that we would probably wreck the new covenant if it was up to us. And he's brought us into a covenant with his son, the Lord Jesus. The perfect priest has made us clean and it is a covenant that we cannot break.

[31 : 01] And so we do not stand this morning before him as covenant breakers. And that's an incredible truth, isn't it? We come to the table as those who are in Christ washed, perfect, spotless, blameless, holy.

And that is God's covenant with us. And while we break covenants, he doesn't break covenant with us. And this is a covenant that God is very, very serious about.

I suspect that Hebrews chapter 8 was a chapter that Mark Twain wasn't bothered by. It's black and white though.

It's crystal clear. It's a word from God, a word of great hope, a word of wonderful reassurance and true freedom. For those who've called out to the Lord Jesus this morning, who recognised their guilt and their brokenness and have asked him to forgive them.

God says this to you, he has forgiven your iniquities and he remembers your sin no more. Let's pray.

[32 : 19] Let's Thank you.