

PostExilicProphets 22-04-06a

Good Wednesday evening, welcome to Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the sixth day of April, 2022. We're in the book of Malachi, and we are starting chapter two, chapter two of Malachi.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we will begin. Father, we are grateful as always for this time of benefit of edification, looking into the truth of your word, having your Holy Spirit minister to our hearts and build us up in the faith, give us light on our path, guidance as we pursue our daily lives, looking to respect the priorities and the values that you have imbued within our hearts through the teaching of your word and the example of the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that as we reflect on this portion of your word tonight, that the Holy Spirit will enable us to see its pertinence and where it applies in our walk before you so that we can redeem the time, lay hold of righteousness by faith and be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

We pray these things in Jesus name, amen. You will remember that Malachi begins with a declaration of God's love. This is the Hebrew word Ahav, A-H-A-B, and this is policy love.

We know this because God, when questioned, how have you loved us, gives the illustration, gives the example, gives the history of his treatment of the nation of Edom versus the nation of Israel. And in terms of a national identity, Edom has not been blessed and Israel has been blessed. Individuals within these nations are free to make their own choices, independent of the trend of the group.

And you are not trapped within your nation. We know this from many Old Testament examples. But this burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi is a message to the nation as a nation.

And then it is going to direct itself specifically. God is going to directly address the priests who are the spiritual leadership. Israel was a theocracy, then it was a monarchy, then it was conquered, sent into captivity.

Now it has recovered enough to be repopulated as a land, but it does not have its own independent government. It is governed by foreign individuals representing a foreign power. Right now it is the Persian governorship.

And so the nation, when it is being addressed, its independent leadership is its priesthood. There's no king that can be addressed by God. He's not going to be talking to the Persian governor in all likelihood, but he can address what remains of individual or independent, I should say, leadership in terms of Israel, and that is their priesthood.

This is what they had by way of leadership to begin with under the theocracy. God mediated his rule in Israel through the priesthood and through the law that the priests were representing

and implementing. God's law was graven on stones, the Ten Commandments, symbolically representing the entirety of the law.

Where did that reside? In the Holy of Holies, which was in the tabernacle and later the temple. And who performed all of the duties, maintenance, moving when it was the tabernacle, guarding the holiness, and so on? It was the priests, right? So you've come almost full circle back to the time when priests were custodians of the word of God. So this word is directed to the priests, remembering that this is the last communication from God to Israel, and there's going to be around four silent centuries after this.

No further word from the Lord. Do you think of or recognize any sort of parallel in the New Testament age? What is the last communication inspired and written down from God to the church? Book of Revelation. It is, in fact, the last book.

Don't let anybody tell you different. There are people who try to say the gospels were written late, and that's just wrong, incorrect. Revelation is the last book to be written.

It was written by the Apostle John. He is John the Revelator. There's not two Johns involved in the gospel, the epistles, and Revelation.

It is all one individual. It is John. He was probably the youngest of the disciples, and he outlasts all of them, including Paul, all the way down into circa 90 to 95 of this era.

How does it begin? You get some red ink there in chapters two and three, and this represents the final word of the Lord Jesus Christ in those chapters, and then again in chapter 22, behold, I come suddenly, and so on. But that Revelation is the closing element of Revelation for the New Testament age, and we have lived for some 19 centuries since that time with a completed canon of Scripture in the same way that Israel would live for close to 500 years if you count the 70 years following the birth of Jesus and then the final seven years, which will constitute the 70th week of Daniel. So why am I belaboring that point? To whom is this next section addressed? Look at chapter two, verse one, and now, O priests, this commandment is for you.

To whom did Jesus address Revelation chapter two and chapter three? To the church at Laodicea, right? To the church at Ephesus, right? To the church at Smyrna, right? To the church at Thyatira, right? To whom are those seven letters addressed? To the messenger of the church, Angelas, messenger. To the messenger, to the pastor, to the one charged with spiritual maintenance and oversight in those groups, to the messenger of the church, right? The Lord Jesus respects the communication structure that God the Father instituted both Old Testament and new. In the former days, God communicated by the law and the prophets many diverse ways.

Read first few verses of Hebrews. In the latter days, he has spoken through his son. It doesn't mean that he only spoke through his son.

I don't understand why progressive Christians can't think to read Hebrews and realize that it

was God speaking in manifold parts and ways in the Old Testament. And in the latter days, he has spoken by his son, but the latter communication did not obviate, cancel, or otherwise diminish the authority of the former, but they want to do away with it all and not read it. And that's tragic.

All scripture is God-breathed and is profitable for doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. Those who don't want to be corrected want to deflect the paddle. And I was a child.

I witnessed this as well as perpetrated it. You get in a weapon and you instinctively want to put your hand back there and stop the pain. And we need correction.

We need rebuke. Whom the Lord loves, he chastens and he scourges every son whom he receives. It's not always pleasant.

In fact, it is often unpleasant, but it's needful. People don't like unpleasantness anymore and they'll do almost anything to avoid it. But that's why we have here in this final revelation, we have the priest spoken of.

So chapter two, Malachi, and now, O priest, this commandment is for you. 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.

This process is already underway and it's going to continue and get worse. Is this disconnected from chapter one? Verse three of chapter one, Esau, I have hated and laid waste his mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness. Edom said, we've been impoverished, but we will return to build the desolate places.

God's lack of blessing on Edom has caused them to suffer loss, but they say, well, that's okay. We will rebuild. God has cursed the blessings for Israel, but the priests say, that's okay.

We'll rebuild it. And God says, did you listen to the first part of this prophetic message? Those who rebuild are just going to live to see it knocked back down again. This curse on your blessings has already begun for Israel.

And they say, well, better times are a coming. Well, no, they're not because God himself is actively going to judge Israel and they will be indistinguishable from Edom. The people who have the opportunity to experience God's love, God's policy of blessing and prosperity and preservation are going to lose it.

And they will look no different than those who are cursed. Why? He says it twice here. You will not hear, and you will not take it to heart.

You remember Proverbs chapter two, just rehearse that in your mind. I don't have time to

quote it, but there is listening. There is taking to heart involved, right? If you do not do that, verse three, 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. It's interesting that this literally in Hebrew says, you notice one is in italics and the word with is actually two and will take you away to it. To what? To the trash pile.

There's going to be trash picked up and rubbed in their faces. And then they're going to be taken to the trash pile. They're going to be taken out with the garbage.

That's what it means. Then you shall know that I have sent this commandment to you, that my covenant with leave, I may continue this message of warning of current judgment underway has been brought not to end the covenant, but to preserve the covenant. If you don't mind writing in your Bibles or if you, I do it with pencil sometimes.

So if I need to move comments and add more to it, I can erase and so on. Notice the word covenant, that my covenant with Levi may continue. This idea of covenant is going to permeate much of the remainder of Malachi.

It's apropos because this is the concluding book, the concluding communication chronologically. And in our English Bible, the order of books, it comes last. And I think that's a good order.

So that my covenant with Levi may continue says the Lord of hosts. My covenant was with him. You have covenant again.

What kind of covenant of life and peace? Once again, this ties back to verse two of chapter one. I have loved you says the Lord. I have selected you from among the nations.

I have made you my own. I have entered into a covenant with you. What kind of covenant? What does God's love look like? It is life and peace, life and peace.

These are much talked about in the current day, aren't they? And the lack thereof in some places in the, in the world, my covenant of life and peace, I gave them to him to fear. See all the italics there that he might. And me is not in Hebrew.

I gave them to him fear. The minimum requirement to maintain life and peace is reverence, reverential fear, the obedience, the consideration that a slave gives to his master. That's the threshold level of acceptability.

At least honor God the way a slave does his master. And a slave out of whatever motivation at a minimum, he fears punishment and he will be obedient. He will do what he is told.

Hopefully that relationship develops into something more into honor, into the kind of respect that Job's field hands had for him, that Boaz field hands had for him. Mutual respect and honor,

regard and obedience out of more than fear of retribution, but out of respect and ultimately to return the love that God has for them. I gave them to him fear.

This is the, this is the only return requirement in this covenant is to obey. Do these and thou shalt live. These commandments do these and live, respect these and you have life and peace.

I gave them to him. So he feared me and was reverent before my name. This is specifically Levi.

This is specifically their father in the priesthood talking about Levi verse four. He, Levi feared me and was reverent before my name. The law of truth or the true law 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. This is the early generations of Levitical priests, not Levi specifically. You do realize that Levi was dead by the time the law came down the mountain and the Levitical priesthood was established.

Who is actually the father of the priesthood? Who's the first priest in this order in Israel? It's Aaron, right? And then Aaron's sons are assigned various responsibilities, but Levi is put for them because we are speaking in broad strokes. Jacob represents Israel. Edom represents those who were near but not qualified, had no desire to covenant relationship with God.

They're sort of cousin nations. Same with Moab and Ammon and some of the others. But you have Edom specifically as the brother of Jacob who had first crack at covenant relationship with God, but sold it for a bowl of stew, right? So the Edomites represent that attitude.

And God says, I don't bless that kind of attitude. Those who disregard me, I will lightly esteem. And you do not want to be lightly esteemed by God.

You end up like Edom. That's what introduces this message. And by way of application, claiming the name of God, claiming to have built a temple to his name and to live in his city and dwell in his nation can still result in cursing.

Because that minimum level, not even the minimum level of lukewarm obedience is present at this time. We're going to talk about the specifics of this as soon as we finish reading it. So the true law or the law of truth was in his mouth and justice was not found on his lips.

He walked with me in peace and equity and turned many way from iniquity. This was the early function of the priesthood under Moses and under Joshua. There were many generations of priests who were faithful, who eliminated iniquity.

You remember there was a time when the priests had to go and kill their fellow priests in Israel. And there are times when gross disobedience was punished with capital punishment by priests. We don't have time to review those, but look at verse seven, for the lips of a priest should keep knowledge and people should seek the law from his mouth.

He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts, messenger of the Lord of hosts. This is the group

addressed in this prophecy, the priests. What have we just seen in Matthew chapter 23 and chapter 24, those who sit in Moses seat, those who are supposed to be messengers of the true law and who fail that responsibility are under a curse.

Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. They should keep knowledge. This is where you should be able to find the law, messenger of the Lord of hosts, but you priests have departed from the way.

You have caused many to stumble at the law. And remember now that this is in those days when they have come back from the Babylonian captivity, but you do not have scrolls that are being read in synagogues. This is one of the reasons I believe that Malachi is in the immediate timeframe of Haggai and Zechariah.

You do not yet even have Ezra and Nehemiah. You don't have Ezra the scribe. You don't have the compilation of the old Testament canon yet.

And God doesn't say here, you're not reading the scrolls or interpreting like you should. The priests are still in this time, the communicators of God's truth. It is the ritual.

This is the reason God wanted his house rebuilt so that the communication of his word could resume from that location. The rituals communicated the law. The law was largely read by the priests so that they performed the sacrifices and conducted the ceremonies and oversaw the feasts and the justice system in Israel.

This was overseen by the priests who conferred with the elders and it was the elders and the priests who ensured that justice and righteousness were accomplished in Israel. You are still in those days in Malachi. You go to most Malachi commentaries and you can't believe how late they think that it was composed.

This belies that. This would be addressed to the scribes if that were the case. But Ezra and Nehemiah are still future or perhaps contemporary at this point.

It's really hard to pin down if it's in the early days of the rebuilt temple or if it's decades later. My personal belief is that it is some decades later. They finally get the temple finished in the latter days of Haggai and Zechariah.

And you're now coming down to the time where you have Ezra and Nehemiah coming in. And we'll see why that is here momentarily. You have departed from the way, verse 8, chapter 2. You have caused many to stumble at the law.

You priests cause people to stumble at the law. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi. Covenant, once again, there is mutuality in this relationship.

A covenant is between two parties, both of whom have responsibilities, both of whom make pledges, who make promises, who testify and witness that there are certain actions they will

perform and provisions that they will keep. You've corrupted the covenant, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore, verse 9, I have made you contemptible and base before all the people because you have not kept my ways, but have shown partiality in the law.

Partiality in the law. And there are reasons that people will be partial instead of impartial. They will justify it.

They will say, well, we need sort of a remediation of past wrongs. So those in the past who suffered under the law, now we're going to extol them under the law. And those who benefited in earlier days, now we're going to move them down several notches.

This is just as evil as it was the first time it was done. Taking any group and administering the law partially instead of impartially, taking into account certain factors that pertain to the individuals who are being hailed before the judge or judges is wrong. The only justice God approves is impartial justice.

Doesn't matter what happened in the past. Doesn't matter. You know, when I sat on jury, there was a rascal that came up before us and he had a long list of priors that were not allowed to be admitted into evidence.

They said, we're only considering this particular case, this particular breaking of the law, and you cannot take his past into account. Well, this is why the statue of justice has a blindfold. You just put it in the scale and balance those scales.

Punishment fits the crime. You don't punish for past crimes. Those are their own separate issue.

Well, that's no longer the case. Now we want to take historical trends and past wrongs and injustices into account when people are judged before the law now. Did you participate in a riot? Well, how did you vote? Or what color are you? Or what was your grievance? None of that should be taken into account in justice.

If you trespass, you ought to be tried, convicted, and do the time for trespassing, etc. If you burn down businesses, then you should be tried, convicted, sentenced, and serve whatever time for that crime. And you don't get a pass because of political winds that are blowing.

All of that's gone out the window. We are a nation of gross injustice, even as people claim to be pursuing social justice. Well, these people did the same thing.

They didn't just wake up in the morning twisting the ends of their mustaches saying, what evil can I do today? They justified it in their minds. They said, well, I've got good reasons for perverting justice. I've got good reason for favoring some and oppressing others.

Some of these are sinners, and they shouldn't get the kind of justice that the law requires because they're sinners. And I know they're sinners, and I'm going to punish them. I'll use

God's law to punish those I disapprove of.

And I will use God's law to approve and benefit those that I think deserve it because look how rich they are. God's obviously blessing them. They're obviously God's favorite, and I should bend the law to their advantage.

And they happen to be friends of mine, et cetera. Partiality in the law. Verse 10, chapter 2, 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? There's that word covenant again.

Judah has dealt treacherously and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. What is this crime? Judah has profaned the Lord's holy institution is not there, which he loves. He has married the daughter of a foreign God.

He has married the daughter of a foreign God. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, the man who does this being awake and aware. This is you got a text note in your New King James that says the Talmud and the Latin translation read both teacher and student.

I like awake and aware. I think that's perfectly fine. Yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts? That's as far as we need to go for the moment.

We saw last time that far from there being love for God in Israel, even the honor that he is due as the father, and even the fear that he is due as a master in Israel, being his servant is not found. This attitude began in captivity. It persisted in captivity and it came back with the returnees.

This is why they couldn't get the temple rebuilt. They didn't have the heart for it. They had to do it under duress.

They had to be brow beaten by Haggai and Zechariah to finish the thing. It laid fallow, a little bit of resistance, and they folded. They quit.

They got their own houses built. They lined their own domiciles with cedar, but they had no interest in completing the house of God because they didn't value God's presence. They were glad to be back in their own land and in Jerusalem, but the reason for the land and the reason for Jerusalem had disappeared from their hearts.

We can enjoy Christian faith. We can enjoy Christian fellowship, but if we forget the reason that there is a Christian faith, if we can forget the reason that the Lord Jesus Christ came, he didn't come to model love and show us the way for social justice. Jesus came to bring us to the father, to reconcile us to the father, to redeem us from the curse of the law and from sin and the penalty of sin so that we could be related to the father the way he is related to the father, which is as children, children of the father.

This is our identity. We are body of Christ. What does that make us? Children of God, because

the Lord Jesus is the son of God, and he is to be the firstborn among many brethren.

To look and say, I've got such a wonderful brother. I love this brother that I now represent and am a part of, and forget to look up to the father of whom he is the son is a grievous error, and it has spawned a complex of errors in our day. Covenant.

Who is our relationship with? Who determines whether we are doing well or doing poorly? We've read it recently. I'm not going to go there now, but if you abide in the vine, John 15, who prunes the vine? Who judges whether it is being fruitful? Who judges whether it needs dead branches snipped off? It is the father. To whom do we pray? The father who establishes the millennial kingdom, the kingdom of the son, who presides over the eternal kingdom after that, it is the father.

We forget that at our peril. Look at verse 13 of Malachi chapter two. This is the second thing you do.

The first thing that they do in this section of course, we've already seen the defiling of God's altar, the desecration and diminishment and scoffing and scorning of God's table. This is fellowship with God is despised. Not going to respect it, not going to value it, not going to bring the best to it because God deserves the best.

And this is a priestly function. The priests are allowing these. Who decides if a sacrifice is acceptable or not under the law of Moses? Who was it that determined whether or not a skin disease had been healed or whether a domicile had recovered from mold and mildew? This was the priest's job.

What did Jesus say after he cleansed the lepers, the 10 lepers? Go show yourself to the scribes, to the priests, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice Moses commands as a witness to them, as a testimony to them. In Malachi's day all the way down to Jesus day, the priests need a message because they are not performing their duties as they should. The lips of a priest should keep knowledge, verse 7, but this is the second thing you do.

Judah has profaned the Lord's holy, which he loves. He has married the daughter of a foreign God. Notice Judah is a personification, the way Levi is a personification, the way Edom is a personification, Esau in verse 3 representing Edom.

This is the second thing you do. You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with reaping and crying, but he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with your goodwill from your hands. And 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.

Did he not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? See in verse 15 where it says, but, that should be now. It should be now, not but. Now 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. For the Lord God of Israel says he hates divorce, for he covers one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. Therefore take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously.

This is a very powerful indictment. It ties in to episodes that we have seen in the past in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, to which we will turn when we come back from our break. But notice dealing treacherously with one's wife breaks a covenant.

What is marriage if not a covenant between two individuals, both of whom plight their truth, pledge their truth, promise to each other, loyalty, love, at a minimum love as a policy, hopefully love as an emotion, but at a minimum loyalty. It is a pledge. It is a promise.

It is a covenant. It is made before God. It is registered in heaven.

It is God's holy. According to verse 11, God pays attention to the covenant of marriage when it is entered into by two parties, one man, one woman. Well, we have much more to say about this, but by way of application for our first session, you will notice that the thread running through these grievances that God brings forward is fundamentally from chapter one, verse one, all the way to where we have arrived.

There is the expectation of keeping of promises of loyalty that is expected, that was willfully entered into by covenant and breaking those promises is a grievous thing and will result in a curse on one's blessings. Priests are the representatives. They are the mediators.

People in the Catholic church still get married by a priest. The idea that a pastor needs to marry you descends from that Catholic tradition, but it goes all the way back to this idea that priests were those who represented God's truth to God's people. In the New Testament, it is the messengers of the truth, beginning with the apostles and the prophets and devolving in later days to pastors and teachers, messengers of God's truth.

And this is why even to this day, church weddings are traditional, but the real wedding takes place in heaven. God registers it. And regardless of what happens on this earth, it's registered in heaven, about which we have much more to say when we come back from the break.