

PostExilicProphets 22-05-04a

This is the fourth day of May, 2022. It's Wednesday night. We're continuing our study in the Gospel of Malachi, the book of Malachi.

We are at the threshold of chapter three. It's been a couple of weeks since we were here. We'll take a quick final look at the end of chapter two.

What is God talking about in terms of treachery? The word treachery is used some five times in that section. Would be important for us to know exactly to what it refers. And so we'll be sure we have that under our belts before we cross the threshold into chapter three.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study, and we'll get started. Father, we certainly live in exciting times. The world is changing around us in many ways.

And many of those ways are negative. And yet we are encouraged and we're enthusiastic because we know that all of these things are happening in accordance with your overall plan and purpose. You have allowed Satan to rule this world.

You have allowed evil to have its way and to bring forth its fruit so that it can be clearly seen for us to test our faith, to recognize, identify and overcome. And we have never had more opportunities than we do now. And we're grateful for the support and encouragement that we receive through our fellowship, through the presence and power of your Holy Spirit, the example of the Lord Jesus Christ and the tremendous light that is shining on our path from your word.

We pray that as we look at this portion of it together, that it will be meaningful and pertinent, that each of us will find fruitful grounds for application and for endeavoring to more closely follow the example that the Lord Jesus set for us in his earthly life as we wait expectantly for his return. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. It's always helpful to re-familiarize ourselves with the passage.

I'm going to read it rather quickly. And I am going to read beginning in verse 10 of chapter two. You will remember that the first nine verses talked about the covenant of Levi.

And scholars have debated what could this be? God did not explicitly make a covenant with Levi himself or even with the tribe of Levi. He did have them assigned to priesthood in general and the line of priests through only one of Aaron's sons in particular. So this covenant is primarily found in verse five.

My covenant was with him of life and peace and I gave them to him. And then it just says, in fear or for fear or because of fear. I gave him life and peace.

This commandment of life and peace is given and the result should be respect. It should be

obedience. It should be fear.

And you'll remember earlier that God said, if I am a king, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my reverence? Back in verse six of chapter one. And so this covenant with Levi should have produced a response of fear, of obedience, of respect, of enthusiastic investment in accomplishing the assigned task. And that is certainly true for us.

We have a priesthood under our high priest, the Lord Jesus Christ, after the order of Melchizedek. And we are a kingdom of priests and a holy nation in the spiritual sense. So when God says this assignment of priestly function for life and peace and to speak truth, which comes up in the next verse five of chapter two, my covenant with him of life and peace, I gave them to him to fear me.

So he feared me and was reverent before my name. Initially, the law of truth was in his mouth and injustice was not found on his lips. From this point forward, this true instruction or true law, the law of truth, the word Torah, every time you see the word law here, it is Torah.

And Torah then and now not only refers to the law as a body of legislation or as a communication from God through Moses, but to instruction. It refers to teaching. The law doesn't really exist in the hearts and minds of the people of God unless it is taught.

So to be on the lips of the priests, to be communicated to Israel, the law is present as teaching, true teaching, true, accurate, fulsome presentation, rightly dividing the word of truth, the law of truth. So the law of truth was in his mouth and injustice was not found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and equity and turned many away from iniquity.

We talked about this on Sunday. If you turn away from iniquity, what is the alternative? It is righteousness. We obtain righteousness by faith, not by love, not by hoping, not by wishing, but by the exercise of faith.

We are assigned righteousness. This is the alternative to iniquity. We found this in Hebrews chapter six, the change of mind away from dead works and faith toward God.

It is not just eschewing and avoiding one thing, but turning to and embracing another. So the lips of a priest, verse seven, should keep knowledge and people should seek the law from his mouth. You see the emphasis on teaching here? This isn't just, I'm looking around and not seeing obedience.

It says, I'm looking around and not seeing the truthful teaching of the law from those who by covenant assignment have been given that task. Teaching is failing. Proper communication, proper emphasis, proper interpretation, proper judgment.

Remember priests would judge cases that were brought before them. Is this clean or unclean? Is it fit or unfit? Is it acceptable or unacceptable? All of this is based on the law and the teaching of the law. People should seek the law from his mouth.

He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. Put a little star there by messenger of the Lord of hosts. He is the Malach, M-A-L-A-C-H.

The burden of the word of the Lord, chapter one, verse one, by my messenger, Malachi. Who is the messenger? God says, Levi is his messenger. A priest is his messenger.

Someone who is going to bring and perform acceptable sacrifice for sin. Is God's messenger. So you have it in one, one.

You have it here in two, seven. He is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But look at verse eight.

God's messenger who is supposed to be communicating the truth and representing God to the people and the people to God have departed from the way. You have caused many to stumble at the Torah. You're not teaching it when they come and seek it and keep it, you make them stumble.

You do the opposite. You're not a benefit, you're a curse. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi.

How is the covenant of Levi corrupted? He's already talked about the poor sacrifices, but that's a result. That's an outcome of abandoning the truth of the law. They are not only not communicating it to others, but they are not practicing it themselves.

You can't really communicate what you yourself do not know. And certainly you're a hypocrite if you communicate it and you do not yourself follow it. We see this even today in our government.

You have departed from the way. You have caused many to stumble. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi says the Lord of hosts.

Therefore, verse nine, I have made you contemptible and base before all people because you have not kept my ways, but have shown partiality in teaching. Now this is interesting because partiality, we tend to think of partiality in terms of, well, I'm partial to this person and not to that person. I'm partial to this activity and not to that.

I'm going to selectively choose or unchoose, especially in the realm of people. But if you focus on what the covenant of Levi is, which is to be God's messenger to the people for the truth of the law, the truth of Torah, then they're showing partiality in Torah. What does that indicate? What does that indicate? Only part of the truth.

This is partiality of what you select to emphasize or to present. It's an incomplete picture. It's not rightly dividing the word of truth.

That's the trouble. So partiality in the law is partial truth. This is what we used to call proof texting or cherry picking.

I'm gonna decide that the Bible is only inspired in spots and I will tell you what the spots are. I am only going to emphasize certain aspects or one side of a question. You have heard me say it many dozens of times.

I'm going to say it again. For every truth of scripture, there is at least one other truth, one other aspect, one other side that balances it and helps us to not take things to an extreme. And it is comparing scripture with scripture and looking at context and ensuring that we do like the juridical oath in court that says, I will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

So help me God. And it should be the endeavor of every person who is tasked with presenting the word of God to give the entire testimony, to canvas the whole witness and to ensure that what is presented is the whole truth. This is, you would think, well, this is partiality in justice or it's like James talks about, you give people the best seats and that sort of thing.

Remember the priests were not judges in the gate. They were judges in spiritual things. They were judges at the tabernacle and later at the temple.

They would judge the worthiness of a sacrifice or whether or not something was sanctified, something had been cleansed. Has your skin disease gone away? Is the mold and the rot in a garment or in a house eliminated or does the thing need to be destroyed? Jesus said to the cleansed lepers, go show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifice that Moses commanded. They have just been excoriated in the first chapter for allowing these putrid and disqualified animals from being offered as sacrifice.

That's the area of their jurisprudence, if you will. But this partiality is in breaking the covenant by not telling the whole truth. This is something we have to watch for on the part of teachers that are purporting to present the truth of the word of God.

Every single one, including me, has to be held to the standard of, are you pushing an agenda, a point of view? Are you selling books? Are you making merchandise? Are you, have you got some philosophical bent that causes you to be inconsistent and unbalanced in the presentation of the word of God? But notice this partiality in verse nine. Then in verse 10, 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? I'm going to do, it doesn't make a serious difference here, but I'm going to suggest my best understanding, if I were translating this, is in verse 10, I would lowercase father. I would lowercase father.

I think there's a bit of chiastic structure here. And you remember many times in scripture, even in the New Testament, when Jesus tells the Pharisees and others that are hypocrites and persecutors, you're of your father, the devil. And they say, no, our father is Abraham.

And over and over again, this issue, well, it's father Abraham. Even in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, father Abraham is in view. So have we not all one father is appealing to their common nationality, their common descent from Abraham by extension, Isaac and Jacob.

And you see this affirmed as you move through the verse, you can see why people would want to capitalize father. Has not one God created us? But God is not presented as a father in the creation. He created the nation from Abraham.

This is not talking about Genesis. We're not talking about Genesis one. This is talking about Genesis 12, 10 through 17, creating a nation through Abraham.

Have we not all one father? Are we not all basically related? We're in the same nation, not just by location, but by heredity. Do we not have one God who created us? Why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? And you have the very same word used again here, but now it's in the plural. We have one father, Abraham, and the covenant is with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that establishes this nation that God created.

And so what would this covenant be then? What is the covenant that the priests are not properly communicating and are showing partiality in emphasizing to the people in their teaching? One of the ways you can answer it is what is the sign of that covenant? What is the sign of God's covenant with Israel? It is circumcision, right? And circumcision is selective in its application because it is only for males. Is God misogynistic? Is he uninterested in women because he doesn't also have a sign of the covenant somewhere in their flesh? Obviously not. This is a construct from modern thinking that God is somehow misogynistic, that the Bible, Judaism, Christianity are suppressing women in some way.

There is a purpose for this and it'll become clear as we continue, I think. Why do we deal treacherously with one another when we are a nation that God created and we are all related to each other because we are all related to God through this covenant? Now, this is really critical because I'm going to shift a bit from what we talked about in this chapter tonight because having moved into chapter three, I realized that while nothing we said about chapter two is essentially wrong, I think the emphasis that is here was missed by me and I'm gonna re-emphasize what is in this chapter. So, and it starts back here, going back and looking at the context.

Context will keep us straight. And this is the context, it is the covenant. So the covenant that is in view here is the covenant that relates God's people to God, right? It is the Abrahamic covenant.

It is the covenant with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob that I am your God, you are my people. Here is the Torah that uniquely separates you and identifies you as belonging to God. These are God's precepts, his statutes, his ordinances, his commands, his sacrifices, his feasts.

You are uniquely related to God, the prophet tells the people here through that covenant. So if you are related to God through that covenant, why would you deal treacherously with each other? Your love for God, your honor for God that he spoke of clear back in the first chapter, if I am a king, where is my reverence? And so on. That relationship and that proper giving what belongs to God to God, render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, render to God the things

that are God's.

When Israel focused on that at the beginning, truth was on Levi's lips and Judah was faithful to rule and to govern in Israel. You have this in David and in the early days of Solomon and a few righteous kings in the Southern kingdom after that, as we saw. But here, if we all have one father, I would put Abraham in parentheses there, has not one God created us? And I would put in parentheses as a nation, because God, if one God created us, well, that includes the Hittites and the Edomites and any other ites you wanna name.

And that doesn't call for any specific behavior, but being created together into a nation and a holy people to God, that does relate Israelite to Israelite in a unique way. So why do we deal treacherously with one another by profaning the covenant of the fathers? It's all one thing here, each of these three statements. What would be the application for us? Are we related to each other through a covenant that first and foremost reconciles us and enters us into relationship with God? I believe Jesus talked about it in the upper room.

This is the new covenant in my blood. We are under the new covenant, the new Testament. And it not only relates us to God, but it relates us to each other.

And even though there is a sad level in my humble opinion of misunderstanding when it comes to the Jesus hermeneutic and kingdom this and enemy love that, it's not wrong in recognizing that there has been and continues to be a problem where believers are failing to properly love one another. That's a real problem. Their solution is not going to fix it.

Understanding the message here in Malachi, which is repeated many places in the new Testament, will fix it. And that is we need the entirety of God's communication to us, not just the example of Jesus as the suffering servant, but also the example of Jesus as the coming conquering King. Not only the elements of the new covenant and of the Sermon on the Mount, but also those warnings that we find from the same Lord Jesus in Revelation chapter two and chapter three.

It isn't consistent with the loving gentle Jesus with a child on his lap to see him talking about spewing someone out of his mouth because they are neither hot nor cold or coming in judgment and his garments dyed red. Who is this coming from Basra with this crimson garment? More about which here shortly. We need the entire witness of scripture to balance us, to inform us, to enable and empower us, to please God.

And partiality in teaching, having a partial Bible, a partial Jesus, a partial program for the church is fatal. Why do you think there is no Israel today? They never figured this out. So we deal treacherously with one another.

You can just make a mark there by treacherously. This treachery is repeated over and over again in this section. Now we switch from Levi to Judah.

The two tribes mentioned here are Levi, the priests, and Judah, the kings, the leadership, the

governors and so on, right? So in spiritual relations, connecting the people to God and God to the people, as it were, you have Levi. Ensuring that people treat each other in justice and righteousness, you have Judah. This is the horizontal relationship, the horizontal aspect of the covenant.

But Judah has dealt treacherously and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem for Judah has profaned the Lord's holy, which he loves. What is the Lord's holy? We have been given to believe and understand that it is marriage. It's the holy institution of marriage.

This is where I'm gonna shift the emphasis because I do think that marriage is in view here as a metaphor and as a figure, but he's not talking about husbands and wives and that they're somehow violating the parameters of their marriage. Look closely. We saw this a few weeks ago.

He has married the daughter of a foreign God. Oh, this is interesting. I've been puzzling on this for two weeks and more.

Judah has dealt treacherously by marrying the daughter of a foreign God. So think about this figure now. This is a special and an unusual figure.

The people of God are now basically viewed as a single individual, Judah. Judah represents the people. The priests are separated to God.

He's already dealt with them. Now he's talking about the population at large, horizontal relationships. Remember, it doesn't mean that the Levites are excluded from what God is about to say, but the Levites are put for here's what you're doing wrong in your vertical relationships.

You are being taught and you are embracing and practicing partial truth. And through that, you are corrupting and defiling God's table. You are saying the wrong things and you are believing the wrong things.

Let me just give you a quick review because this is critical to understand. Malachi is a tough book to understand. And it's got a verse coming up that many commentators have said may be the single most difficult verse in the whole Old Testament.

And context keeps us straight. So what is the context in the vertical with Levi? What is the problem? People do not have truth. They are not speaking and believing and communicating and practicing truth.

What do they say? The first thing they have, they've got about, I marked them down here, 16 statements that they make. And 10 of them are questions and six of them are claims. They've got 10 questions and six claims throughout this text.

And you've seen these. In what way have you loved us in chapter one, verse two? That was

number one. In chapter one, verse six, at the end of the verse, in what way have we despised your name? That's the second question.

In what way have you loved us? Implying you haven't loved us. In what way have we despised your name? Implying we haven't despised your name. And God says, oh yes, you have.

And then God says, you've defiled my altar with defiled sacrifices. And in verse seven, they say, in what way have we defiled you? So they've already asked three silly questions that reflect misunderstanding of truth. And God says, here's, you say the table of the Lord is contemptible.

That's a claim. That's claim number one there in verse seven. And offering the blind as a sacrifice and so on.

Then in chapter one, verse 12, you say the table of the Lord is defiled and its fruit, its food is contemptible. That's the second bogus claim. The third bogus claim in chapter one, verse 13 is you say, oh, what a weariness and you sneer at it.

And God responds by saying, cursed is the deceiver who has a valid animal in his flock and takes a vow, but then sacrifices something that is blemished. I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts. And my name is to be feared among the nations.

Why is his name to be feared among the nations? Because they look at Israel and see a unique and separated and called out and holy people. But they don't see that. If you skip a whole page and come down to chapter two, in our upcoming context, we're going to see more of these questions and claims.

But Judah has married the daughter of a foreign God. So here's what I want to suggest to you to chew on over the break. We're not really talking about Ezra and Nehemiah and the foreign wives that they called on to be put away.

Although that resonates, there's nothing wrong with making that connection. It is also true. But what is being spoken of here? What did the entirety of chapter one and the first half of this chapter talk about? You are not honoring and reverencing and respecting God.

This is critical to understanding the rest of chapter two and the beginning of chapter three. The condemnation, the charge here is you have not rendered to God what is his due through covenant. Marriage is a covenant.

And the husband is to love his wife. We know from Ephesians that he should love his wife the way Christ loved the church. So husbands should be looking at their wives and reflecting the love that God has for his people, right? God has loved Israel and has blessed them and delivered them and benefited them and even chastised them and brought them up short in judgment when they needed it for their own wellbeing lest they be destroyed.

God left them a remnant. He judged them before there wasn't anybody left so that his promises

could continue and he could continue to fulfill his end of the covenant to Israel. So now Judah is pictured as treacherously breaking a marriage covenant by marrying the daughter of a foreign God.

And this is the only place in the whole Old Testament where this phrase is used, the daughter of a foreign God. And it emphasizes the spiritual fornication, the spiritual adultery, if you will, because if Judah has profaned the Lord's holy covenant by marrying the daughter of a foreign God, this is an illicit and forbidden marriage that violates the proper marriage that he is supposed to have, the proper covenant. What covenant is in view? What holy has been in view in this context? It's the covenant that established Israel as a nation through Abraham, the father, God as the creator of the nation.

And they have profaned the covenant of the fathers. So when Judah has profaned the Lord's holy, it's a repetition of what we had in verse 10. He has profaned the covenant of the father by marrying the daughter of a foreign God, he has broken the Abrahamic covenant.

So this is marriage being put for spiritual unfaithfulness, spiritual illicit marriage. And this is what's gonna make sense of what follows. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, the man who does this, being awake and aware, yet who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts.

So now he's gone off and married the daughter of a foreign God, but he's coming back and acting like he is still within the bounds of his faithful covenant marriage to worship of God. Marrying the daughter of a foreign God is entering into relationship. You know what happened when you would marry someone's daughter? This is how kings made alliances, right? Well, you marry my daughter and we will now be related with a covenant of peace and a covenant of mutual benefit.

And so you've basically married the daughter of a foreign God, you have entered into relationship with this foreign God, and that violates your unique covenant relationship. Thou shalt have no other gods before me is the first thing written on the first table of the law, right? But you've, by subterfuge, you didn't just go hug the foreign God, you married his daughter. And so you're trying to maintain this air of respectability, but what you've really done is enter into covenant with a foreign God, instead of being faithful to the true God, the covenant that's spoken of in verse 10.

So, and the Lord is gonna cut off from the tents of Jacob, the man who does this knowingly, and yet tries to keep up appearances by bringing offerings to God. This is the second thing you do. You cover the altar of the Lord with tears, with weeping and crying, so he does not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.

This is the offering of verse 12. You bring it and you've got this superficial, emotional approach. This is clearly emotion, right? There's no thought involved here.

It's tears, weeping and crying, and God is unimpressed with the emotion. Why? You've married

the daughter of a foreign God, now you're coming back crying to me, and trying to get on my good side with emotion, instead of with faithfulness. You're treacherous, but you come back with emotion, and this is what often happens.

People who tell falsehoods will often get very emotional if that falsehood is challenged. They'll get angry, they'll make accusations, they'll tell outright falsehoods. You know, they're standing there holding a smoking gun, saying, I don't have a gun, I didn't fire it.

It's emotion, and God says, all of your tears and protestations and weeping and crying as you bring this blemished sacrifice to me, the blemished sacrifice is right here in front of me, and you're weeping and crying, saying, why don't you accept my sacrifice? You've married the daughter of a foreign God, and you're coming back to me. Proper worship, proper covenant relationship to God here is pictured as marrying the wife of your youth. So this chapter is really not about divorce in the human realm, it is about spiritual infidelity, spiritual adultery, and spiritual bigamy, and trying to pretend before God that you haven't done it when you have.

And he says, you've laid the evidence right before me. Look at this blemished sacrifice. You're awake and you're aware, well, so am I. Why are you weeping and crying and shedding tears before me? Look at what you've put on the altar.

And it is emblematic of, look at the way you are living your life. You have placed your faith in a foreign God, you have wedded his daughter, and yet you're trying to act like nothing is wrong and we're all still good here. I will not regard the offering anymore, nor receive it with goodwill from your hands.

You say, for what reason? And this is the fourth big question. Why, why won't you accept it? Which is just a nonsense question. Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth with whom you have dealt treacherously.

The wife of Judah's youth is tabernacle worship. The wife of Israel's youth is spiritual relationship with God, but the roles are reversed here. Instead of God being the husband and Israel being the faithless wife, God switches the roles.

Now Judah is the husband who has gone off and married the daughter of a foreign God, and he is dealing treacherously with the wife of his youth. This is the covenant. It's the same covenant all the way through.

Do you see it starting in chapter 10? The covenant of the fathers, God's holy, Judah has married this foreign God's daughter. That's the covenant that has been broken. It's one covenant.

It's God's holy, ultimately enshrined in the holy of holies, the most holy in the Ark of the Covenant, inside the temple. You've dealt treacherously, yet she is your companion and your wife by covenant. It's no accident.

He doesn't say you're being mean to her, you're turning her loose, you're treating her, you're

actually marrying a bunch of foreigners. She's your wife by covenant. Same covenant all the way through.

But did he not make one having a remnant of the spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring. God wants subsequent generations in Israel to be faithful to God, to be a Judah who will marry and remain with the wife of his youth. Faithfulness to the covenant.

And having used the opposite figure of God being the husband and Israel being the wife in other prophetic passages, here he switches the role, but it's still all about the covenant. It is about faithfulness, spiritual faithfulness. We have a lot more to see on this score, but this irons out the wrinkles in this somewhat difficult passage and helps us parse some messed up Hebrew when we get to the beginning of chapter three.

And that's what we'll pick up after the break.