

PostExilicProphets 22-05-18a

Greetings, welcome to the Wednesday evening Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 18th day of May 2022, continuing our study in the book of Malachi. We're in chapter three.

We're at a transition point at verse eight where he is going to begin talking about tithing and we'll see if we're going to convert our policy and all become good solid tithers or not. I think we should, as will become evident here shortly. Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our fellowship, our time of worship and celebration of the goodness of God.

Shall we pray? Father, we are so grateful for the continuing expressions of your mercy and your grace toward us, your provision, your protection, the orchestration and careful calibration of testing and challenge that comes into our lives. We're so privileged to be your children, to be brought up in your nurture and admonition. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word together, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to each of our hearts, help us to understand it, to see how it pertains and how it applies in our lives day by day, as we have our eyes on the sky and are watching for the return of your son, Lord Jesus Christ, our savior to take us to himself.

And if we qualify to present us before your throne, we pray these things in Jesus name. Amen. The passage before us has begun with an indictment.

Remember that the book of Malachi begins with God charging and challenging Israel because after his expressions of love, there is not reciprocation. When you say this is basically what chapter one is about, God says, I have loved you and you don't appreciate it. You say, in what way have you loved us? And I give you an illustration of Edom, a nation I have not loved, and they have come on extremely hard times.

Can you not see the difference? Does Edom in any way resemble Israel in terms of God's provision of a land, provision of blessing, opportunities for a purpose above and beyond themselves, a promise of a future, a promise of resurrection? So many things that are a part of God's love expressed to Israel, and they are seemingly deaf and blind to this wonderful potential. And it's a sobering thought, and you can stop it after the first few verses of Malachi chapter one and say, I don't want to do this. I don't want to fail the grace of God by failing to appreciate the grace of God.

It's easy to get down. It's easy to get discouraged. I've been fighting discouragement in recent days just watching the news and thinking we, in fact, I quoted this verse earlier today, we are all as an unclean thing.

All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags. We all do fade as a leaf. Our iniquities like the wind have taken us away.

And politics is a discouragement no matter which side of it or party you look at. It just reminds me of the evil, wicked imaginations of men's hearts all the day where God sent the flood. And you really have to discipline yourself to try to look and realize that there are 7,000 that haven't bowed the knee to Baal.

They're just not to be seen very often. So we can look at ourselves and say, I am sure that there are ways and aspects and areas of my life where I am not appreciating the love of God expressed toward me. And drawing that conclusion ought to produce an action.

It's not enough to say, well, I'm sure not doing what I'm supposed to. We can look at ourselves in the mirror and say, I'm not working out enough. I'm not eating right or whatever.

But that doesn't really do any good unless it sparks a change and a policy and an effort to do better and to do differently. And if there's nothing else for us in the book of Malachi, the example of Israel failing to appreciate the special and unique covenant relationship they have with God ought to be a warning, ought to be a sobering reminder that there but for the grace of God can go us, we, and we need to do something about it. It's not enough to note it and say, well, that's just really a sad fact.

Let's do something. Do something. The Eagles have a song called Do Something.

And I found out from a piano client yesterday that the Eagles were actually in Tulsa over the weekend. And this lady who's in an online dating deal met a guy, and she said, he is just great. I am just gaga over him was her exact words.

Well, the reason is he bought these manifestly expensive tickets and took her to the Eagles concert in Tulsa. And she's pretty much close to my generation, grew up listening to them. And so she said it was just fantastic.

Their harmonies were to die for. Vince Gill plays with them now, and he's very talented and so on. And, but he likes her.

This is, they've had a few dates and, and his expression of love was greatly appreciated. And she couldn't quit telling me that this, by the way, was not my piano client. It was a friend of my piano client who came over while I was finishing up.

But it's very interesting. We talked about one thing and another, and both of these ladies, it turns out, are, are dating online. And the other lady who is my client is getting married the end of this month to an individual that she met online.

And I said, well, I know people that have met online and ended up getting married. And I think that's great. You know, we're in a, we're in a new age, things work differently than, than they might have in days gone by.

And you never know from what avenue a provision is going to be made. These ladies are also

believers and, and they're grateful to God that their periods of loneliness and, and a lack of relationship are seemingly over. But it puts you in mind of what people will do to express love and what God has done to express His love.

But the whole reason I went down that little trail is the Eagles have a song, one of their more recent efforts, it's called Do Something. Before it's too late, if you see that, that things are not traveling along as they should, do something, get after it. And if we realize that we're not fully appreciating the love of God, do something.

And that's what we're doing tonight is understanding what it is that we should do. How can we enter into the fullness of relationship with God? He has initiated, He has, remember, God commendeth His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. We are blood bought.

We are redeemed. Atonement has been made in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. How ought we to then live? What should our priorities be? How should we invest our time? How can we fulfill the great commands to love God and love one another, to reciprocate God's love toward us? Well, that's what the book of Malachi is about.

And this is a clue, and this is a key to some of the more difficult sections of this book as we have seen. So when we got to chapter two, and the priests who are not rendering to God His due, they are charged, they are tasked with presiding over the sacrifices and ensuring that those sacrifices are qualified, that they meet the requirements that God set up. This is the job of the Levites.

They should turn someone away who brings a flawed sacrifice, a corrupt, a crippled, a lame, a blind sacrifice. And instead, they have allowed this stuff in and they have defiled the altar of the Lord. And more interestingly, they have defiled the table of the Lord, the table of the Lord.

We are going to see the connection here tonight to this indictment of the Levites in terms of their failure when it comes to the sacrifices, because what's another word for these sacrifices? Starts with an O and ends with I-N-G. They are offerings. What is it that accompanies offerings as you get to chapter three, verse eight and following? Will a man rob God yet you have robbed me? But you say in what way have we robbed you? In tithes and offerings, in tithes and offerings.

Sandwiched between this charge against the Levites that they have presided over, allowed, and even participated in the corruption of God's altar and God's table. And this section that is going to resume that idea, robbing God, because the tithes and offerings that he should be receiving are not happening. In between that is this section we've looked at in recent weeks, beginning in Malachi chapter two, verse 10 and extending through verse 16.

And this was the divorce, marrying the wife of a heathen God, and so on. And having, it

reminded me of our trip through the Song of Shlomo, which I eventually renamed the Song of the Shulamite, the Song of Solomon, where I started that and the more I studied it, the more I realized that I felt like I was on the wrong tack and went back and figured out something new. We did the same thing in chapter 10, where we started out saying, well, you know, the days of Ezra, and this is a historically well-traveled path that, well, after the return from the exile, then they came back to the land and there were people that had married foreign women.

And in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah, they said, oh, these marriages, you've got to send these people away. And they turned their families into widows and orphans in the name of piety. And that this is a chiming in and a reiteration of God's viewpoint that they should purge these people out.

And I just couldn't get a comfort level with that. And after studying it, you will remember that in the past few weeks, I suggested to you that what I believe, and completely in the unbroken snow here, it occurred to me that this is a metaphor and the God's holy that has been profaned is still talking about the temple and talking about worship and that the covenant he's talking about is the original covenant, the covenant with the fathers, the covenant that he talks about before and after this. And he hasn't diverged off to suddenly start talking about marriage, but that Judah marrying the daughter of a foreign God is a religious problem.

It is a spiritual problem. And he has left the wife of his youth, which was fidelity to the covenant of God, and that the holy here is not the covenant of marriage. It's the covenant of Moses.

It's the covenant of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And I arrived at this independently just by working and working and working through this passage and looking at the context. Well, I am gratified to tell you that out of nowhere, as if by magic, I was looking at something completely different and stumbled across an article that I want to share with you from the Journal of Biblical Literature, an article by R.A. Torrey published in that journal, volume 17, back in 1898.

And my perambulations, you know, I cast my net far and wide and I stumbled across this article and lo and behold, what would that be? 135 years ago, R.A. Torrey drew the very same conclusion for the very same reasons. And I like to share with you people who agree with me because I don't want you to think that I'm just a complete, you know, guy off in the weeds alone. So I'm going to tell you that there was somebody else in the weeds.

And so this is an article, as I said, it's volume 17. And I was able to find, I thought I was going to have to buy the Journal of Biblical Literature to get the full article. We come to find out the first several years of this are available for free.

But I want to read this article to you because he justifies this. This is the very first article in volume 17 from 1898. And it's titled, The Prophecy of Malachi, Dr. C.C. Torrey in Andover, Massachusetts.

And many of his conclusions are the same as the ones we have drawn. But I had not seen this

article or even heard of it before studying, preparing for this week. The short prophecy known to us by the name Malachi deserves more attention than it has generally received.

Its real value as a source for the history of Judaism has hardly been recognized by students of the Old Testament. This is chiefly due, I believe, to the fact that one or two of the most important passages in the book have been generally misunderstood. And one of those is the one at which we are looking right now.

But partly also due to the fact that problems presented by its title and the question of its date tended to draw off the attention of students from its contents. The aim of this present investigation is to make some contribution to a new interpretation of the book. Without attempting any thorough criticism of the text or even touching upon the many minor difficulties of exegesis, I hope to present in consistent outline the main features of the prophecy viewed from a standpoint somewhat different from that usually occupied.

And the untrodden ground is familiar to us. We often have a standpoint somewhat different from that usually occupied. So he goes on to talk about the name and recognizing that this is not a proper name, a conclusion which we also drew.

But he a little bit further down says, the charges brought against the priests, the foremost being that of gross misconduct in the performance of the temple service. This is chapter one, verses six through 13. That which is holy, they treat not only with indifference, but with open contempt.

This is verses seven through 12 of chapter one. Defective and worthless offerings are habitually offered upon the altar without scruple. The priests themselves provide, as they also readily accept from others, the cripple and disease of the flock as good enough for the worship of Yahweh.

They have thus publicly desecrated the sanctuary and profaned Yahweh's name. Such worship as this is worse than useless. It would be better that the service of the temple should cease altogether.

And he cites here verses nine and 10 of chapter one. Will he accept you favorably? Where is there even among you who would shut the door so that you would not kindle fire on my altar in vain? While it is primarily the priests who are addressed in this section, the prophet's rebuke concerns the people as well. The sin of bringing unworthy offerings lies also at their door.

And in verse 14, it is they, the laymen, who are warned. The second item in the indictment of the priests is the charge that they have betrayed their trust as the official guides of the people in religious matters. This is chapter two, verses four through nine.

And we saw this when he's talking about Torah and the fact that the priests are not properly guiding the people. This is the teaching. Torah is put here for the teaching of God's word, the teaching of the law.

This second accusation is made to grow out of the first. After the prophet has warned the priests of the punishment that awaits them if they persist in dishonoring Yahweh and his worship, he also reminds them of the sacred trust which they inherit as members of the priestly tribe, especially as bearers of the Torah or oral teaching concerning the religion and worship of Yahweh. This is verse seven of chapter two.

The lips of a priest should keep knowledge and people should seek the law, the Torah from his mouth. Now we have seen the application here because the indictment of the priests who were charged with these tasks of bringing offerings and of teaching the word of God falls to us by way of application and by way of parallel because we are believer priests with the Lord Jesus as our high priest and we are charged with bringing sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to God as our reasonable service. Romans 12, one and two, not to be conformed to the world, to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

Our minds are renewed by washing them, renewing them, soaking them in the word of God, the Torah of the Old Testament and the communication of church age truth we find in the New Testament after the Gospels especially. So we are directly instructed, rebuked, corrected and indoctrinated by the book of Malachi in our priesthood and in our service. Well, this is going to become particularly important to understand when we come to the section on robbing God by not bringing tithes and offerings.

We could imagine that our offerings are ourselves, we present ourselves living sacrifices. What are the tithes and why are they separated and distinguished here? This is a really fascinating study that we're about to undertake, but I want to finish reading Torah here because I want to get to the good part. In the days of old, the house of Levi was worthy of this trust and walked in the right path.

The people were shown the way and many were saved from error. This was verses five and six of chapter two and you can compare that with Deuteronomy 33, nine and ten. But now the priests have broken the covenant, turned aside from the path, their teaching has become a stumbling block to the people.

As it says in verse eight, you've departed from the way, you've caused them to stumble at the law, you've corrupted the covenant of Levi. In verse nine, until the last clause is reached, we seem to have the announcement of the punishment which the priests are to suffer for the unfaithfulness just described. But the last three words of the verse give it an unexpected turn, for they seem to contain an entirely new accusation, namely that of partiality in the use of the teaching.

The meaning of the charge is not clear, especially in the present context. And you recall that, therefore I also have made you contemptible and base before all peoples because you have not kept my ways but have shown partiality in the law. One way to understand this and the way the attack that we have taken in taking the text as it stands is to say that they have become selective in the portions of the law that they are willing to apply.

And we have ample examples of this, I like that ample example, in the days of Jesus and his condemnation of the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites who selectively apply the law, amplify portions of it with tradition and delete, diminish, and otherwise obfuscate other parts and are not teaching the whole truth. And a partial truth is a distorted truth. This is why context and comparison with the rest of scripture is so important.

Taking nothing away from that, Torrey has, and I had not heard or seen this before, but these are the days, remember in the 18, latter part of the 1800s, you had Wellhausen and the other German scholars who felt freedom to amend the text or to see that there might be corruption. And this can and has happened. And there are portions of Malachi that are extremely difficult in terms of the Hebrew as it stands.

He'll go on to talk about this in verses 15 and 16 of chapter two. And it is difficult. Did he not make them one having remnant of the spirit? Why one godly offspring take heed to your spirit and let none? Torrey's opinion of this verse and the next one is interesting.

We're not quite there yet, but he says the partiality and use of teaching, the meaning of the charge is not clear, especially in the present context after this long and severe arraignment, this condemnation. Moreover, its position in the passage is a still greater difficulty for it appears quite incidentally as though it were an accusation that had been previously made or implied, and thus brings confusion into the whole context. The cause of the difficulty is probably a scribal error by which the original, and then he goes on to talk about some Hebrew, and his idea of the true reading would have been because you do not keep my ways nor regard me in your teaching, which is not greatly different.

If you choose to focus on the regulation and leave the intentions and the honor of God out of it, you've basically done the same thing. There's not a great deal of loss in that kind of an emendation of the text. I don't really have a problem with it.

I think it could be either way. With chapter two, verse 10 begins the second main division of the book containing admonitions designed for all the people. As in the part addressed to the priests, the laymen were not forgotten, but were included in the rebuke.

So in this second part, it is evident that the priests still hold a prominent place in the thought of the writer. The passage to 10 through 16 is well marked off from the rest of the book, both by its isolated position and by its contents. Remember now, chapter two, verses 10 through 16, this is the marrying the daughter of a foreign God.

God hates divorce. That whole thing we've spent some time going through. Almost all interpreters since Jerome, I'm reading Torrey here.

Pay attention now. If you started to drift away, this is what I've been aiming at. Almost all interpreters since Jerome, looking at verses 10 through 16 in chapter two, have seen in these verses, the prophet's rebuke of two evils, marriage with heathen women, so also the Targums,

and divorce.

But this interpretation fails to meet the requirements of the text. See below, and we're going to skip part of this article and go to where he addresses this in detail. The rebuke is rather directed against the encroachment of some foreign cult in Israel.

And this is evident, he says, when you look at the Septuagint translation and the Syriac, where they take a different tack in their translations into Greek and Syriac. The unfaithfulness of a part of the people threatens to forfeit for all the covenant of the fathers. Judah has dealt falsely with the wife of his youth, the covenant religion.

Torrey says the wife of his youth is the covenant worship of God. And he has wedded a strange cult. The sanctuary of Yahweh is thus profane.

The worshipers, who of course insist that they are still worshiping Yahweh, lament because their offerings fail to bring a blessing and are strangely unable to see why ill fortune has come upon them. This is verses 13 and 14. Such sin merits the severest punishment, and Israel may well be warned, verses 12, verse 15, verse 16.

In each of these three verses, the text is very difficult, and it is. The remainder of the book, starting at chapter 2, verse 17, and going through chapter 3, verse 21, is more homogenous. The people is rebuking, the prophet is rebuking the distrust and indifference of the people, as shown in various ways.

I'm going to skip forward now to where he revisits the section that we are looking at, which is the departure in chapter 2, verses 10 through 16, where he's talking about marrying the daughter of a heathen god. So a passage of foremost importance for the right understanding of Malachi is chapter 2, verses 10 through 16. These verses, which have always attracted special attention, have been generally thought to contain a rebuke of the custom of intermarriage with Gentiles, and it has been well nigh universal belief, at least since the first centuries of the Christian era, that the historical setting of this prophecy is to be found in the narratives contained in the book of Ezra.

We looked at those, but as has already been said, the current interpretation here is untenable. It doesn't work in this context, and the context is what persuaded me that it doesn't work. The text of the passage is unfortunately very corrupt in verses 15 and 16, beyond all remedy in Torrey's view.

But the greater part is intact, and it is not difficult to recognize the nature of the charge brought by the prophet against his fellow countrymen. Now this is important because to understand what the nature of this, leaving the wife of the covenant and marrying the daughter of a foreign god, this is where our application, if we understand the observation properly, the interpretation and application becomes much more clear. And it isn't about, well, we've got to be sure and stay married through thick and thin, because he's not really talking

about marriage.

He is using marriage as a metaphor. What is the metaphor of, and what does it signify? That's what we need to understand. So what Torrey says, the sin which he is attacking is one of unfaithfulness, a false dealing with Yahweh.

He cites the Hebrew in a parenthetical comment. The accusation is first stated definitely in verse 11b. Judah has profaned the sanctuary of Yahweh, which he loves, and has espoused a bat al-nakar, the daughter, bat, remember bar mitzvah, bat mitzvah, the daughter of a foreign god.

A few verses further on, verses 14 and 15, occur the words, thou hast dealt falsely with the wife of thy youth, the wife of thy covenant. And what he says is the same conclusion that we have drawn, which is the wife is the covenant, and fidelity to the covenant, covenant worship of God in the true heart, soul, mind, and strength sense. To treat these expressions literally as referring to actual marriage and divorce involves one in insuperable difficulties.

You have to love the way people used to talk and think and write in olden days. I'm going to read that again just because I enjoy it. To treat these expressions literally as referring to actual marriage and divorce involves one in insuperable difficulties.

To assume in the first place that divorce of Israelitish wives stood in any necessary or even probable connection with wedding women from other nations is ridiculous. In other words, if guys were going to marry heathen women, why is it only that they have first married an Israelite and they're divorcing her and then married? Why would they just cut straight to the chase the way, for example, Esau did and other examples in the Old Testament where you want to marry a daughter of the land, you just go marry her. You don't start with an Israelite wife, divorce her, then go marry.

So it's an unnecessarily complex. Why doesn't God just say, I can't believe you're marrying these women in the land. Why is it you're divorcing the wife of your youth and then marrying? Because literal marriage is not in view.

That was a point that didn't occur to me, but I like it. So this assumption that the divorce of Israelitish wives stood in any necessary or even probable connection with the wedding of women from other nations is ridiculous. Jews occasionally married Gentiles, not because they were dissatisfied with their own country women or with their religion, but because they found some of the Gentile women attractive, which makes sense.

Jewish women were married to foreigners for a like reason. Many modern commentators in the desire to avoid this difficulty have supposed a change of subject from intermarriage with Gentiles to divorce in general. But it is not possible thus to separate verses 13 through 16 from verses 10 through 12.

Wife of thy covenant religion is plainly contrasted with daughter of a foreign God with whom

thou hast falsely dealt refers to the charge made with the same word in verse 11 and verse 19. Better evidence of continuity could hardly be desired. There is one and only one admissible interpretation of the passage, namely that which recognizes the fact that the prophet is using figurative language.

Judah, the faithless husband, has betrayed the wife of his youth, the covenant religion, by espousing the daughter of a strange God, i.e. a foreign cult. Compare, this is a parenthetical thing here, compare the striking passages in Isaiah chapter 57 through 66 in which the Jews are also accused of this sin. Isaiah 57 through 66, sporadically throughout that section, you have the same syndrome called out.

So Torrey continues, the whole passage from beginning to end is a telling rebuke of unfaithfulness to Yahweh, which would prove to be the suicide of the nation. Verse 10, wedding, a strange form of worship necessarily involved divorce from the covenant religion. You see how one is necessitated by the other if this spiritual defection is in view, this unfaithfulness.

The wife of the youth has to be abandoned, i.e. covenant relationship and worship with God has to be abandoned to marry the daughter of a foreign God participating in a cult. Now here's something I'm going to add that's not in Torrey's article, but having this confirmation makes me somewhat bold to say. Because he says, you know, it's really not right to connect this with what we saw in Ezra in terms of this legalistic notion that, well, we can please God by driving these foreign women and children away.

Let me just suggest, let me hypothesize that this section of Malachi is composed, written, and prophesied after, but within recent memory of the days of Ezra. And God turns that operation on its head. And he says, it's not getting rid of the physical marriages to foreign ladies that you should have been occupied with.

Your problem is that you have happily divorced yourself from the heart, soul, mind, and strength devotion to the covenant made with God by the fathers and have embraced the daughter of a foreign God, i.e. a return. We've always said, well, there was no further idolatry in Israel after the captivity. Well, evidently there was.

And they were already beginning to return to this syncretism and incorporating elements of the worship of surrounding nations, which they had first seen in Babylon, and then returning to the land. And they're mixing, they're homogenizing these elements while they still try to come to the temple. They say, oh, well, we're still worshiping God.

We're just doing these other things. And he says, you've left the wife of your youth and you have married yourself to the daughter of a foreign God. And it is heathen cultism, which notice that even the sacrifices in chapter one, they are still following some of the forms and practices that the law requires, but the substance of it is corrupted.

And they're still coming to the temple and worshiping, but they are bringing in these corrupt and unbiblical non-Torah ideas, which are not being corrected by the priests. The priests are participating. The priests are collaborating and they're conspirators after the fact.

They are, what do you call somebody that collaborates in a crime? Accomplices. They are willing accomplices to this. So you begin to see that this theme in Malachi is constant all the way through.

He doesn't break off and say, oh, by the way, shame on you for divorcing wives. He says, you want to talk about divorcing wives? You missed the whole point. It's the spiritual defection.

It is the spiritual side where you're engaging in syncretistic bringing in of heathen cult practices that is defiling God's holy covenant. You've left the wife of your youth. So what is our interpretation and application? Look at Christianity today, how much psychology, how much social justice, how much righteousness by works, how much feel good at the expense of the instruction, rebuke, correction, and proper biblical doctrine that ought to be a part of our worship, that ought to step on our toes, that ought to call us up short, that ought to enable us to cleanse our hearts and renew our minds.

Once again, how do you bring an acceptable sacrifice? How do we accomplish our reasonable service? Be not conformed to this world. Christianity is more and more conformed. It is more and more in harmony with worldly ethics, worldly standards of morality, where immorality is no longer called out.

The pursuit of righteousness by faith by individual believers has been sacrificed on the altar of community and social service and social action and social justice and virtue signaling and going along, get along and seeing if we can entice people into the church by being more like them. Look around at the vast witness of Christianity and Christian churches today, and it's pathetic. We have married the daughter of a foreign God, and we have forsaken the true worship of God with all our hearts, all our souls, all our strength, and all our minds.

That calls out sin when it needs to be called out. It takes the biblical view seriously and doesn't insist on going along to getting along. Well, more about this when we come back from the break.

But one thing you see here is, as Torrey sees and as we have seen, when you look at this middle section, the heart of the book here in chapter two, verses 10 through 16, it is all about our fidelity to God first and foremost that defines us. We either are or we aren't. You're either faithful to the wife of your youth or you're not.

And there's no real middle ground here. And it's consistent with the message of the which, in the Hebrew Bible, that there's only three chapters. Our English breaks off into chapter four, but there's only three in the Hebrew.

And that's what we'll see when we come back.

