

“You broke covenant: The Lord is wearied”.

A sermon taken from Malachi 2:10-3:5
Given by Mark Landrum
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Good morning. Thank you, Steve for the chance to share our ministry and our message with the people this morning at St Matthews Anglican Church. I hope as a result of our time together that you will be drawn that much closer to Jesus and be encouraged to follow Him with one another throughout your days. Also I hope you will pray for and work for the salvation of my Jewish people that much more also.

Bob Mendelsohn was supposed to be here, but unfortunately, we had two church coordinators who didn't exactly coordinate things well, and as a result, Bob is in New Zealand today. However, he wrote most of this sermon and I think you will like what he has to say about Malachi.

Our text and topic were pre-assigned months ago, and thus we heard the reading from the prophet Malachi chapters 2 and 3. Before we dig into the text and see what it has to say to us as 21st century people, may I tell you about the book of Malachi itself? I borrow the picture from Amy-Jill Levine, the Jewish head of New Testament studies at Vanderbilt University in the US. Amy-Jill is not a believer in Jesus, and has seen a significant difference in Jewish and Christian construction of the Old Testament. Maybe it will help you to see this also.

She uses the imagery of a baseball game in contrast to a football match. I know, most Aussies don't watch baseball, and I don't watch much of it either, but this imagery helps me to see how the different religions see the prophet Malachi.

The Jewish Bible like yours starts with Genesis of course, but the books are in different order, and then the Older Testament ends with 2 Chronicles. There the chronicler's final statement reads: "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, May the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'" (2 Chronicles 36.23)

In other words, the Jewish Bible ends with a statement about the Land of Israel and the Temple and about Jewish people going to Israel.

Amy-Jill likens this to baseball. Why? The Bible begins with God creating heaven and earth, and the Hebrew word for "earth" is the same as the word for "The Land of Israel." In baseball, the batsman starts at home plate, hits the ball, then runs the bases and comes back home. That's what Amy-Jill says of the Jewish Bible. And thus of Jewish hope today. She says that for Jews, 'going home' to Israel is the final summary of the Bible.

Compare what we have in our Bibles this morning. The Older Testament ends with Malachi and the whole Bible ends in Revelation. Why does the Hebrew Bible in the layout for Christians end with Malachi? Because Christians see the Old Testament hoping for a messenger who introduces to us the Saviour and that's exactly what we find in today's reading about the messenger, chapter 3 "Behold, I am going to send My messenger, and he will clear the way before Me." That's the ministry we know of John the Baptizer, and then finally in chapter 4

with:

“Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the LORD. He will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers, so that I will not come and smite the land with a curse.” (Chapter 4:5-6)

Amy-Jill likens this to a game of football. We start by receiving the ball on one end in Genesis, and spend our life and lives trying to reach the other end. No going back, this is forward marching. And Malachi as a final statement of the hoping ones, introduces to us the one who will first appear in the Newer Testament as John the Baptist, and thus the story is all connected.

I like her imagery and find it helpful in sorting out how Jewish people see the Bible differently than most Christians. Maybe that will help you as well.

The name ‘Malachi’ is a Hebrew word for the English phrase ‘My messenger’. Malachi is just that, a priest and prophet to the Jewish people in the 5th century before Christ. He is God’s messenger to both the leaders of the Jewish people and to the people themselves.

I’m sure you have covered a basic outline of the book in your previous studies, with four major themes very visible. Let me then reiterate. First, Malachi bases everything he is about to say in light of the Election of Israel. God chose Israel, and thus we are both blessed and responsible to carry on His work in the world. This is the covenant to which God continues to refer throughout the prophecy. 2nd, Malachi named and shamed the priests for judgment. They knew what God wanted and they failed to make it happen. Their offerings were cheap and unworthy, the priests lacked sincerity in their service, and they had no real commitment to God. If the religious leaders went wrong, why should the people act any differently? James the apostle says that leaders and teachers in the Church will also incur stricter judgment.

Malachi’s 3rd theme is that the people had not learned the lessons of the exile. The Babylonians captured my people in 586 BC and the Jewish people were again doing wrong things, worthy of another exile. The rabbis teach that Solomon’s Temple was destroyed for three reasons: adultery, idolatry and murder. Now it’s as if Malachi is saying, “If you don’t straighten up, you will suffer exactly what the folks 200 years ago endured.”

Like so many prophets, Malachi ends his prophecy with the 4th theme, hope for the future. For some it would be judgment day, but God says he will purify the priests, the temple, the righteous, and all this would be announced by the messenger who would prepare the way of the Lord. We know this role was fulfilled in John the Baptist.

So with that as my introduction, let’s look at today’s section to learn about what God wants for us today.

The Jewish people were marrying in, that is, keeping marriage in the Jewish family, and then later finding foreign women to their liking, the Jewish

men were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying out. Two mistakes in one quick move. Doubly wrong bringing double punishment.

And God confronts them. Isn't that terrific? God confronts us when we do wrong to help us do right in the end. I appreciate that God cares enough about us and about His world to make us feel badly about our wrongs and to help us repent and do the right thing.

In verse 15 we read, "What did that one do while he was seeking a godly offspring?" That of course is a reference to Abraham who mistrusted the Almighty and the promises He had made to a much younger Abraham. God promised him a seed, a blessing and a land, and Abraham had waited a while, but grew impatient. So he took his wife's handmaiden Hagar and had a child Ishmael a full 13 years before God's timing brought him Isaac. The reference here in Malachi is to putting away his own wife Sarah for such purposes. The meaning? Don't do it; it will have disastrous results!

And what is the name of the women the Jewish men marry? In verse 11 we read that the Jewish men were marrying "the daughter of a foreign god." That's the real problem with marrying people who don't worship and don't belong to the same people. They will lead you astray into the number one sin on the planet: idolatry. Brothers and sisters here at St Matt's, I don't know you well enough to know if this is going on, but it's right for you to hear it from me today. If you are considering dating or entering deeper into a relationship with someone who doesn't believe like you believe about Jesus, if you are considering marrying someone who is not a believer, you are in danger, and Malachi and I would both warn you today against this. Seek godly counsel and do what you believe Jesus wants you to do.

One more point on divorce. God says he hates divorce because we are covered in Hamas, **חַמָּס** the Hebrew word for *violence*. And the answer is taking heed to your spirits. That word is in the plural. Thus we need to help each other in this regard. You are not an island; no man is an island. We need one another and that's part of the function of the Body of Christ. When someone is tending toward domestic violence or in breaking the covenant God made with Israel, we as God's people are required to take heed, to help one another. Don't take that lightly.

The conversation between the people and the Almighty continues in verse 17. Malachi says that the people are wearing God down, and wearying him. They respond, "What? When did we do that?" The people are incredulous. But God chides them for dismissing his standards, by calling "good, evil" and "darkness, light." Isaiah the prophet had said something very similar a few hundred years earlier. And we hear it today in the language of the streets where *good* means *bad* and *bad* means *good*. But beyond the lexicon of today's languages, the tossing of the morals of yesterday into the tip of irrelevance is peaking in these days in the arguments about same-sex marriage and greed and lying in Parliament. What is standard and 'good' in God's eyes, the marriage of one man with one woman is seen as old, as fuddy-duddy, as *old school* and thus irrelevant

today. The statistics are startling and exponentially growing in favor of living in sin and living outside marital bounds in Australia and around the globe. Good is evil and evil is good. Or so we think. But we are wrong! And our 2nd annoyance in verse 17 is that even if we live well, that the God who makes all things just is nowhere to be found.

Listen, God is concerned for the family unit and will punish the wrong behavior of the Jewish people with foreign wives and thus with foreign gods. King Solomon had done this hundreds of years earlier and led himself and the Jewish people away from the Divine plan. Chapter two ends with God saying “I hate divorce” or so says most of our Bible versions. The Hebrew however says that God hates “Shalach” שָׁלַח or ‘the sending away.” God says, “I hate it when you send your wife away.” And what will God do in light of his hatred of this action? Chapter 3 says “I will send” (same Hebrew word) my messenger and he will clear the way for me.” Most Bible believers think this is a word of God’s favor. But it is not even close to that. It’s as if God is saying, ‘You sent your wife away; that really bothers me. I’m going to send someone to deal with you, and then I will come myself to deal with you.” This sounds like a warning, and it is!

The final section of our reading today, is part of the lyrics of Messiah by Handel. “But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap. He will sit as a smelter and purifier of silver, and He will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, that they may offer unto the LORD offerings in righteousness.” (Mal 3.2-3)

The purpose of the coming of the Malachi, of the messenger of the Lord, is to clean the people. That’s YOU, Israel. That’s a description of the Israel today. It’s a description of most of us. We all need a good cleansing, don’t we?

And from what do we need to be cleansed? Verse 5 says, “*Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers and against the adulterers and against those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,*” says the LORD of hosts.”

Sorcery, adultery, lying on witness stands and at the water cooler, on Facebook and in family meetings, oppressing wage earners by withholding their earned moneys, and not supplying help to widows and orphans, even resisting helping aliens who want to join the people from outside. God sums all that up as not fearing the Lord. Wow, is that today’s society or what? Harry Potter books and Avengers glorify the mystical; Hollywood glorifies the adulterous, truth has taken a beating since Watergate, and each corporate magnate who takes his Golden Handshake while the people of Ansett or HIH go without basic subsidies and entitlements. Aliens at our shores, we won’t even talk about that today.

God is right to judge Israel. God is right to judge Australia and God is right to judge me, and you.

But listen, and here's the message of hope I bring you today. God wants to pour out his love and life on you. Even if you are summed up as a crook and a criminal, even if all these listed sins have hit you in the heart. His mercy is towards all men, even us in West Pennant Hills today. Listen to verse 4: "then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years."

When God sends His messenger to us, and when we repent, He forgives us our sins and cleanses us, so that our offering is pleasing to him. Awesome is the Lord. Amen?

I began my message today with "I hope as a result of our time together that you will be drawn that much closer to Jesus and be encouraged to follow Him with one another throughout your days. Also I hope you will pray for and work for the salvation of my Jewish people that much more also."

I've covered the first two; now let me remind you about the 3rd topic. My people the Jewish people desperately need to hear what you know and believe about Jesus. We are weakened by our own strength, by our own comforts, and by our passive rejection of the Messiah. You can help us reach them. And you can reach them as well. I'm going to show you a quick video in a minute of our work that you might be encouraged to stand with us, and to help us declare Messiah to them. And I hope you will fill out that white involvement card you each received in your bulletin/ notice sheets as you came in today. Please fill that in, with your name and details, and email it to us here online at the website (mail@jewsforjesus.org.au) or ring our office please. +61.2.9388.0559