



NEWS BULLETIN

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“Faithfulness to the Lord, and to Each Other” - Malachi Chapter 2 v 1-17

1 And now, O priests, this command is for you. 2 If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honour to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. 3 Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it. 4 So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. 5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. 6 True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. 7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. 8 But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, 9 and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction."

10 Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? 11 Judah has been faithless, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the LORD, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. 12 May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts! 13 And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour from your hand. 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless." 17 You have wearied the LORD with your words. But you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the LORD, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

In this chapter we find Malachi having to confront a bunch of priests who had gone “off the rails” and were not giving good sound teaching to the people of Israel. God’s ministers bear special responsibility when teaching His people. When they neglect or misuse this responsibility, then they face God’s disciplining wrath. Professional ministry is not a reason for pride but an opportunity for service.

Worship leaders have specific, special functions: 1) to listen to God; 2) to honour God; 3) to reverence and worship God; 4) to follow the highest moral standards; 5) to turn other people away from their lives; 6) to instruct God’s people; and 7) to be God’s messengers.

God’s intention, even in chastising was to renew the solemn oath and purpose He had with Israel. Levi, the representative name for the priestly tribe which acted as mediator before God, provided the true teaching and honest interpretation of God’s will for His people. Revealed teaching seeks to turn people from sin to God. The agent of God’s revelation is expected to live a life of wholeness and moral uprightness.

Those who lead others must display characteristics worthy of leadership. Malachi discussed the covenant God made with Levi, a covenant not otherwise explicitly described in the Old Testament. Levi was the ancestor of the line of priests. The prophet reminded the priests that their ancestor served God faithfully and discharged his duties in a remarkable way, but many of them were causing people to stumble through false teaching.

Malachi presented one of the most exalted views of the Old Testament priesthood. Every minister should exhibit these characteristics. 1) Ministers should fear God, standing in awe before Him. 2) Ministers must instruct others concerning God’s way by word and deed. 3) The minister is the messenger of the Lord of hosts.

God had to reprimand, admonish and discipline unfaithful priests, but His plan was to ensure His covenant with the priests continued. God blesses those who serve Him by giving them meaningful relationships both with God and their fellow servants. The blessings of the Lord continue forever.

God’s covenant with Levi promised life and peace, but required reverence and awe of His name. Because today, here in Broadstone, all of God’s born-again people are now priests, we owe reverence and awe to Him. Every person who is responsible for teaching the Word of God has something in common with the priests of Israel, who bore the primary responsibility for teaching the people.

As messengers of the Lord, God-called teachers are responsible for the accuracy and soundness of their instruction. When they carry out their teaching duties faithfully, they will have an impact on the behaviour of individuals and on the moral standards of the community.

The line of priests designated by God to interpret God's law and will were distorting the message and deceiving God's people. The people did not receive the truth of God. Revelation was being thwarted by those trusted to reveal God's truth. No one office has the monopoly on God's truth. He used prophets and priests to reveal His will.

The priests obeyed the law as they chose to and with whom they chose. They were partial in interpreting the law to the various social classes as we see in Leviticus Ch 19 v15. *"You shall do no injustice in court. You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbour"*. When they were not fair with all people in applying God's law, they transgressed His law. God is not partial to one group over another. We must not be either.

God's people find common identity as the children of God. He created us as members of the human race and as His special people. This obliges us to serve Him and Him only, doing nothing that would place some other person, power, or thing in His place. Not even human love and marriage should cause us to devote ourselves to someone other than God.

Creation is the basis for the emotional, physical, and spiritual ties that bind the human family together. The prophet reminded Israel of their common bond with one another. God created them all physically. More important, however, He had united them within the framework of a covenant relationship. The prophet emphasized two things which should result from God's bringing them together through His creative power. They should love one another, and they should be careful to keep their family life tied closely to their religious heritage.

Creation means we are related to all people. God's election means we belong to a special community, the children of God. Our actions establish the reputation of God's people among the "worlds" people. Even the reputation and honour of deceased spiritual ancestors depends on our faithfulness to God's way of life. Actions defaming the community deserve punishment.

God gave Israel a covenant based on trust in and love for both God and fellow members of the covenant. Israel broke faith by dealing treacherously. This treachery consisted in marrying women with idols for gods and infesting Israel with false worship.

Gods people are tied to Him in two ways, creation and covenant. The covenant ties Gods people to God and to one another. Lack of loyalty to a follower of the Lord shows we do not maintain our obligations to God. See John Ch 3 v 10.

This is where it gets serious for Israel.

Israel at this time lived among peoples who had no problem participating in worship services for several different gods. Marriage meant simply adding another worship service - that of the spouse's god - to the schedule. The one true God does not accept that. He is sufficient to handle all functions attributed to any god. We must devote all worship and reverence to Him.

Two offences prevented God from accepting the offerings of the people, marriage to a pagan and divorce. A right spirit not an emotional outpouring, would make the offerings acceptable. Family relationships greatly affect our prayer life, one way or another.

Giving or ceremonial worship does not remove the necessity for right living, including respect within families. The holiness of God means unforgiven sin separates us from Him. Israel thought nothing of divorcing wives who had long been faithful for younger, more attractive foreigners. Then they entered worship and expected God to hear their prayers and accept their gifts. God refused. We must find forgiveness of sin before we can worship the holy God.

The Bible does not record when divorce first began. In Deuteronomy Chapter 24 we find a passage that neither institutes divorce nor forbids it but does specify two things:- 1) The man divorcing his wife must give her a written statement intended to protect the woman, and 2) A divorced woman who remarries cannot return to her first husband if her second husband dies or divorces her. At that time, the process of divorce was a matter between families rather than being a legal one. This passage is central to the discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees about grounds for divorce (Matt 19 v 3-9 & Mark 10 v 2-12).

Malachi's generation thought worship rituals qualified them as God's people even when they openly disobeyed God's will for their marriages. God showed them a different way. This passage is the strongest statement in the Old Testament against divorce among the covenant people. The passage in Deuteronomy 24 describes a process for the Hebrew people. Ezra in fact commanded divorce from heathen wives in his book and Chapt.10.

Malachi on the other hand condemned the practice of divorcing older wives married within the covenant community to marry younger women or women of the mixed tribes who had remained in Israel during the Babylonian captivity. Marriage is **NOT** a trade-in business.

At this point I need to stop for you all to contribute, trusting that our Lord and Saviour will guide and guard both our thoughts and our comments, that they may be constructive and in-line with His loving will for us this morning.