

Exploring Malachi

Rediscovering Awe for God

Malachi 2:1-16

Introduction

This topic could be called rediscovering covenant with God. Covenant is absolutely central to God's way of relating to his people. This is still true of us today, though we often don't use the language of covenant much. To demonstrate this though just think of Jesus words at the climactic moment of the Last Supper. "This cup is the new covenant in my blood."

Firstly there is an address to the priests in v 1-10. But then the whole nation is called to account for its own failings when it comes to covenant in the last few verses.

Background

It's good to remind ourselves of how the old covenant priests functioned and what their role was to be. The first thing to be remembered is that the Levi's were appointed to be the tribe that priests were drawn from. Why could no-one else but a Levite be a priest? The answer is told in gruesome detail in Exodus 32:25-29. What was it about this situation that caused God to give to them the priestly function?

Deut 33:9-10 gives a summary of what a priest should be. The qualities that God is looking for in the role. So it is the priest who guards the covenant by teaching the people truly about God and his requirements. This of course seems not to be what Malachi has found them to be.

Issues in Malachi 2:1-6

2:1 begins bluntly enough. This generation of priests will be admonished. V3 is a very blunt and rude message. We have a very sanitised form of worship compared to the Old Testament sacrificial ritual. Worship was not then lovely music and soft seats with flowers up the front. It was bellowing animals and hot smelly blood and offal. You can imagine the rest.

All this warning and admonishing is because the covenant is being treated lightly. They are failing in their duty of teaching and preserving it v4

V5-7 is a reminder of what a priest should do. V8 is a reminder they have failed. What is interesting is just how much the health of the nation's relationship with God depended upon the priests being true to their function. The covenant was essentially lost if the priests lost their way.

This leads us to a question? Now that the Old Testament priesthood is no more how is the New Covenant to be modeled, remembered and preserved? (1 Peter 2:9)

This concept is so ingrained in Baptist ecclesiology that although we have Deacons and Elders and Pastors etc we never ever use the title Priest. If you truly believe in the priesthood of all believers it is a little redundant to appoint Priests or even Bishops. This leads to a bit of a vacuum of obvious titles when we come to appoint denominational leaders.

Issues in Malachi 2:10-12

The topic of covenant is continued but now broadened to refer to all the people, not just the priests. Malachi selects an analogous situation to their covenant with Yahweh to illustrate the point. He refers to the covenant of marriage. Yet v10 refuses to see breaking a marriage contract as a private affair. It indicates it is a direct betrayal of the wider covenant with Yahweh.

A very very very very important principle is thus established. **Faithfulness to God always includes faithfulness to others.** This of course is counter cultural. We want today to run our own affairs and deal privately with our own relationships. Its is a bit confronting that the way we treat others is the way we effect God and the consequences of our interpersonal relationships is felt deeply by God,

V11 tells us they were marrying pagan wives. This was a direct contradiction of the law. 1 Kings 11:1-8 is the ultimate example. King Solomon is the (So why do we have a book of the Bible called Ruth about a non-Jew vrs Jew love story? Hint. Stories are always the most important way to teach in Scripture. They give a context that straight law statements lack.).

The point is that the covenant is destroyed by their bad marriage practices. Their relationship with God through his covenant would not abide another covenant with pagan women. Thus v12.

Issues in Malachi 2:13-16

Now come some startling words. In effect don't bother praying or sacrificing because your relationship with God is ruined because you ruined your relationship with your wife.

God tells us he hates divorce. We often tend to think of marriage covenants as a legal document. But its not a document it's a relationship. Clearly and startlingly

it's a relationship between man and woman and God. This is because

Faithfulness to God always includes faithfulness to others.

In v16 the solution is "So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith". A solution that requires grit and determination, nothing here about romantic attraction and eternal compatible romance.

This mysterious element where God involves himself in our marriages is amplified in Eph 5:32 Where Paul tells us marriage is really about the relationship between Christ and the Church

Concluding Thoughts

We live under a new covenant. Yet there is nothing to cause us to think that God's involvement of himself in our relationships as part of his covenanting with us has changed. God is still passionate about how we treat each other and regards that as an essential part of our relationship with him.

So this should give us the basis to consider the thorny questions anew. Like should we marry non-believers. Or what happens when we get divorced?

The principle at every stage is that God wants us to be faithful, considerate and loving. He hates divorce not because some bit of paper was annulled, not because a wedding ceremony was made false. He hates divorce because people are mistreated, hurt and often thrown into turmoil like loneliness and poverty.

Q1 Should we discourage marriage outside the faith today?

Q2 Does the concept of being unequally yoked only apply to marriage?

What else should we be careful of that might influence us away from worship of God?

Q3 What sort of attitude toward divorce do these people hold? Is it possible that there are victims and abusers in divorce today?

Q4 Is God angry at the Israelites just because they make mistakes?

Q5 If your answer was no then what is it that God hates in their attitude?

Q6 Which is better? Loving to speak about God or loving to faithfully serve others?

Q7 How does God view non-believers who are faithful in their conduct towards others?

Whether it be the priests who broke their specific covenant through bad teaching and example, or the widespread marriage of pagan women, or the abandoning of the wives of their youth, God seeks to teach us that **Faithfulness to God always includes faithfulness to others**

This is a basic principle of God's covenant with us still.