

**Sunday 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021**  
**Malachi 2:10-16**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us come to God in prayer. Let us pray.

Holy Spirit, come among us and soften our hearts to the word of God.

Holy Spirit, be in our midst and give to us wisdom and revelation.

Come Holy Spirit, with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus' name.  
Amen.

If you do have a Bible with you or on a phone or some device, I encourage you to have it because it won't be appearing on screen due to our tech problems, and you might want to follow along with us. This might be a good reminder to bring along a Bible. We can't actually give you a physical Bible just now because the cleaning process afterwards is so thorough. So, you might want to come prepared with a Bible just now, so that you can make sure I'm not preaching just some nonsense and you can make sure it's matching up to the word of God!

Before I was a minister my job was as a development officer for the Scouts across the southeast of Scotland and that took me down into the deepest darkest Borders in the deepest darkest of winter and so, one winter evening, I'm down I think near Coldstream and our car at that time had some issues, I don't know exactly what it was, there were battery problems and it wasn't keeping its charge and such like - you can tell I know a lot about cars - and I come out the meeting and there's a bit of an issue with it again and so I decided to just start it up I'd managed to get it started up maybe I should like rev the engine try and charge the battery or something so here's me revving the engine the revs are really high and I must do this for a couple of minutes or something and eventually I have to stop because the temperature gauge is going off the scale. I get out the car and there's the radiator red hot and I'm like 'Oh, I've made a really bad decision here', and I have to phone and get help to get me out of that situation. And looking back on it you can understand I'm just embarrassed to tell that story and how little I know of cars and what I should have done in x, y and z, and it's easy in retrospect to know maybe what you should have done. And I tell that story for two reasons because firstly, we can look back on and these readings from Malachi and think of the people 'Why were you so silly? Why did you do this? Why did you make these choices? This is just crazy!' But then on the other hand there's that accumulation of problems, like with the car I had, one problem and then I did another thing and another thing and it just led to a real mess of a situation, and I'm sure you've experienced in your own life that sinful choices can be very similar. You make one choice, you know it's not the best choice, and then that leads to something else and to cover that up you make another choice and before you know it sin starts building and accumulating, and it just gets worse and worse and worse. You've probably known that in your own life and it's true of the people. That because the priests hadn't been doing their job, the people start to doubt the Lord's love and they start to dishonor the Lord rather than seeking to honor Him, and it just spirals down and down and down. As I said each week and so we get to this point today where there's not just one issue, there's multiple issues, and they're all feeding into one another and so, in our passage today, if you were to look through it you would see that five times the Lord says the people are unfaithful, five times, it's just a repetition and so this is part of the prophecy where the Lord wants to deal with their unfaithfulness and

the word here for unfaithfulness in the original language conveys the idea of treachery, and so in your English translation you might see the word treachery used. That they have been treacherous towards one another or towards the Lord. That has that connotation to the word. The idea of being disloyal, of even infidelity, and so the Lord comes with this challenge and every bit of Malachi is a challenge but as we heard last week, He brings that challenge for good reasons. He brings that discipline for good reasons, and so I almost want to flip what we might take initially. We might just think it's a challenge but actually there's an invitation here. There's an invitation, there's a call to renew loyalty to the Lord, to renew their loyalty too, for us to renew our loyalty to the Lord and Malachi focuses on three areas of life. Three areas of life where they need to show greater love to the Lord and how they love and how they love in three particular areas.

And so the first area where they have to show loyalty to the Lord is in love to the Lord. They are doubting the Lord's love. They are dishonoring the Lord and so I want to start there even though it's not necessarily where Malachi starts. Because that's the crux of all their issues, and so we find in verse 11 that Malachi says Judah has been unfaithful, a detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying women who worship a foreign God.

And, at first, we might be like 'What is this about?' like 'Is God racist?' 'Why is he against marrying people of another nation and another people?' like 'What is that about?' And well, God's not racist, He's not. This isn't an issue of race, it's an issue of protection, because He knew hundreds of years before that His people started to marry into other nations, that they would be led away in their worship of Him, their love of Him would be diluted. And so you can flick back into Deuteronomy chapter 7 and He said through Moses hundreds of years before 'Do not intermarry with them.' these other people, groups, do not intermarry with them, do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn your children away from following me to serve other gods by intermarrying. There would be this conflict of faith, this conflict of religion. Who would they follow, and some would choose to go and follow other gods or there would be a whole mish-mash of religion and so they would try and worship both and still that would be idolatry. There'd be that turning away from the Lord and so He wants to protect their love, protect their worship, and so He gave that command and in what we read here in verse 11 that a detestable thing has been committed in Israel, Judah has desecrated the sanctuary, it seems to have come true. It's not they might turn away and desecrate the sanctuary or this is going to happen, No, it has happened and so the Israelites have worshipped other gods and then come to the temple and said 'Oh God here I am, you know, here's my sacrifice, here's my prayers. Welcome me, accept me, hear my prayers.' and God said 'No, no, no, no! You've been idolatrous, You've worshipped other Gods' and he can't then receive that sacrifice and that prayer, that worship. They have been unfaithful, they have been disloyal, and I think in verse 15, I think there's this hint that it breaks the heart of God. The verse says 'Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring.' He seeks a nation He seeks children who are Godly not just in being a nice person and coming to church, He seeks children who are holy,

who are given over to Him, who are holy as He is holy, who respond to His love with love. That's God who gave Himself for them, to respond and like mindedness to respond, to respond the same way, to give of themselves in love of God and they haven't done it. They've wandered away, they have been disloyal and I think here there's a lot of just the heart of God breaking, that His children have become disloyal. There's been infidelity on behalf of His people and it just breaks the heart of God because the first and greatest commandment of all the commandments in the scriptures - Do you remember it? Do you remember what Jesus said? 'To love the Lord your God with all your heart with all your soul and with all your mind this is the first and greatest commandment.' Jesus said and they have broken it.

Friends, the people of old broke it and it breaks the heart of God that His people were disloyal in that way and so He sends Malachi to bring them back to loyalty by renewing their love for Him and as followers of Jesus we too are called to love God in such a way, we too are called to love God with all that we are, that the idea of our mind and our soul and our heart, it's all of us, all that we are, but it's not just a love that's internal, it's then seen in every facet of life that we order our lives around loving the Lord.

So, what does that look like for you? Do you need to order your life a bit differently going forward this week, to show your love to the Lord, to renew your loyalty to the Lord? It might be seen in your time. Do you prioritize time in the secret place with the Lord to be in His word, to be in prayer, even if it means you have to get up before the kids, get up or whatever it might be or before you go to work or you make sure that you switch the tv off at nine o'clock so that you get a better time before you get to bed at 10 o'clock? What is it that you, how you show your love to the Lord? How do you need to structure your life to safeguard that love and to show that loyalty to God? Or maybe it's giving of your time and getting involved in His purposes because if you're just sitting on the fringes and you're like 'Well, I'll just let someone else do that job' or 'I don't have the time or I can't be bothered' Is that really showing your love for the Lord when you just discard His purposes? So, maybe you have to get involved in Pre-Fives, maybe you have to step up, maybe that's how you have to show your love of the Lord in response to His word today.

There's a second area of life though that Malachi comes to challenge and it's the love of God's people. He says in verse 10 'Do we not all have one father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?' And so, let's remember that the people of God, this great nation, they started from one family, the Abraham family, and God grew them and nurtured them and they became this great nation and He brought them into the promised land and Yes, they were unfaithful and so that God worked up the scale of discipline as we were talking about last week and, eventually, that resulted in their exile, so they get taken off to exile but then God is still with them there and He brings them home and He enables them to rebuild the temple and rebuild their land and yet again, we see them being disloyal, of idols giving worship to others idols. This God who created them, this God who is their father, and so they are a people who are bound together, they are bound together by covenant by promise and yet they are threatening that. They are profaning that. They

are profaning, has much the same meaning as desecrating, of treating it as ordinary, as spoiling it.

They were carried into exile because of idolatry and here are people engaged in idolatry again and risking that. They go through all that again and go into exile they are not loving one another; they are threatening the welfare of one another by their choices. How can they do such a thing? How can they do this to one another? They are not valuing one another as they should.

And you know, we are also bound together, brothers and sisters, by a covenant. Not the old covenant. We are bound together by the new covenant through Jesus. We spoke about this in our last series on our Purpose and Values. We are a family, brothers and sisters together, one family together, and out of that we are to show love to one another. We're to show love to one another such that Jesus says by our love for one another we will be recognized as his disciples. Do we live in such a way? Do we treat each other in such a way that the outside world knows that, that we are disciples of Jesus, that we overflow with the love of Jesus? Is that seen in our lives? And that 'one another' phrase, I've been wanting to bring this in for weeks, if not months, because there's been this thought in my head, just jogged by various bits of preparation, that He says 'If you love one another' and if you go into your Bible or go online and you look for the 'one another' phrases in the New Testament, there's about 60 'one another' phrases. That's how important loving 'one another' is to God that he has included so many 'one another' phrases. Now, some of them duplicate but there are still about 40 individual phrases or so.

Let me give you a flavor of some of them:

'Be devoted to one another in love' Romans 12

'Don't grumble against each other' James 5

'Forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the Lord forgave you' Colossians 3

So, what would it look like for you to grow or renew your loyalty to God by loving one another better?

That first one 'be devoted to one another in love'? Is that seen in your life? Do you just come to church and tick the box or do you involve yourself in some shape or form in the life of this congregation? Do you serve? Do you know people in this congregation that you're supporting? You can't know everybody, I'm not expecting you to serve and help everybody but who is it here, who is it that's a housebound and can't be here that you are loving and supporting? Because, if you're not, if you literally just come to church and tick the box, is that really devoting yourself to the other in love really? And, you know, being part of a community is tough work, sometimes we grate and rub up against each other. What you say isn't quite what they'd like it to be said, or something's proposed that we do, something or we change something, or who knows, there are so many different ways in the life of a community that we just rub each other up a little bit.

Are you prone more to grumbling and moaning than cheering on? Could we learn to be the greatest cheerleaders of one another rather than the greatest grumblers and moaners? I'm not saying you are, I'm just saying it's a possibility that it happens in churches. I've been around a couple. Could we try and learn to love one another such that we don't grumble? It's not don't grumble a little it's just don't grumble at all. Could we try and eradicate grumbling and moaning as a church? And you know there will be times when something is done that you feel grieved in your spirit, a choice is made, something changes, something's not done that you think should be done, someone says something and you take it one way and they'd completely meant it another way, and there's this grievance, can we learn to forgive as the Lord forgave us and keep the bond of unity between us? Or do we hold on to that grudge and nurse the bitterness?

Because if we are just living for ourselves and we just come to church for ourselves, if we are ignoring the command of God not to grumble, if we are ignoring his call to forgive as we have been forgiven, you know, friends that's not being loyal to God, that is saying we know best we want our way, and God you can take a hike, I'm not listening to you, it is being disloyal to Him and so He calls us to hear Him and to love His people and so as to renew our loyalty to Him.

But there's a third area that Malachi picks up on. It's covered in a number of verses and it's the love of family. We read earlier already, just in point one, we read these words 'Judah has been unfaithful the detestable practice has been committed. Judah has desecrated the sanctuary, the Lord loves, by marrying women who worship a foreign god'. So, we covered that bit already but He goes on in verse 14 to say 'You have been unfaithful to the wife of your youth, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. And so, what is going on here is that first of all we need to remember the context that at the time of writing, only men could initiate divorce and so the men are divorcing their rightful Israelite wives and going off and marrying foreign wives who are leading them into idolatry. There's this double sin that as I was saying at the introduction that accumulation and that building up, they are casting off they are dismissing their wives simply because they want to marry another woman. They are abandoning their current rightful marriages and Malachi comes to challenge that, to challenge such despicable behavior, to challenge their practice of divorce, because God, the Scriptures have a really high view of marriage, and I hope that we do as well as a church, that verse 14 the wife is described as your partner that your companion your help. And please don't see that as a poor term or me being derogatory to a woman in any shape or form, because who else is called the helper the Lord - the Lord is called 'the helper', it is the most respectful term you could think of. So, please don't think I'm being derogatory there.

And what is more, she is the wife of your marriage covenant, this marriage promise made before God in the presence of God made to be lasting unto death. And then that use of covenant to show that it's meant to portray something of the relationship between God and His people, that is how high a view God has of marriage and I'm not really going to say an awful lot more about, divorce today because I just don't think it would be very pastoral. There's so much that could be said, there's so much of individual

situations that would be said that I think it would probably just I'd end up saying something unhelpful or the wrong thing or you'd misconstrue it the wrong way too and so all I want to add on that little bit of this is to say that if you are feeling unsettled because of something in your past or previous relationships then I'd ask you to come and just talk with me, let me hear something of your story and we'll just take it from there, not to challenge you or correct anything, but if you just maybe to bring you peace about what it was about a choice made maybe, because I just don't, as I say, you feel it's right to go into lots of detail in our time together this morning, and what is more I'm conscious that there are folks amongst us who are not married, there are folks amongst us who are widowed, there are folks amongst us, thankfully, who are happily married so if I was just to go on about divorce with, are they just to switch off, are they just to get some information that they file away, is this there's nothing of greater relevance for them in this portion of scripture. So, what I've been thinking about this week is, what is the broader principle here? What is the broader principle here? Talking about home and family life and how we treat one another, and I think it is that love of family that's the third area God would want to speak into today. Do we love our family well? Because the New Testament has so many instances where it talks about family. Paul writes to Timothy 'If a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God' or you could go into Colossians or Ephesians to see verses there about how parents should relate to children, children to parents, husbands to wives, wives to husbands. The New Testament is interested in all the facets of life including home life no matter your circumstance.

We still love one another well and there, that way in that part of life too but in thinking about home and family life. There's one area I want to touch on, because of the final verse in Malachi today where Malachi says on behalf of the Lord 'The man who hates and divorces his wife' which we can understand with all that we've covered, he's divorcing his wife and it's a form of hatred because it's certainly not love. The man who hates and divorces his wife does violence to the one he should protect. Does violence to the one he should protect.

Why is it a doing of violence? Why is it a doing of violence? Well, we need to go back to Genesis chapter 2 and there we read that when a man and women come together they form one flesh, not just physically, but in their whole life together, they are seen by God as one flesh, are coming together. Such unity weaving together, or cleaving as the scriptures talk about, cleaving together, that they are seen as one flesh and so in the act of divorce that flesh is ripped apart there is a doing of violence, a tearing of that one flesh bond. But I'm conscious that violence and relationships doesn't necessarily just come at the end with divorce, there can be violence and relationships well before that point, and you in your own relationship sadly maybe experience some violence. It could be a physical violence, a sexual violence, it could be violence of words, and we'll speak more of that in a second, it could be manipulation, control and someone at home, someone in your family could be doing violence to you in your relationship and I'd want to take the opportunity to say, please don't suffer alone or in silence, please come and talk to us, talk to me. We recently set up a gender-based violence team within the

church. We've not really promoted it much yet because we're still learning, still learning how best to support, how best to educate our congregation, how best to educate ourselves, but there are people around who can listen who can signpost you to other sources of support. So, if you are suffering violence of some form in your relationships in your home life, please take that really brave but scary step and come and talk with us please.

But I am conscious too that that violence can take many forms and I'm reminded of Matthew 5 where Jesus says 'Anyone who murders will be subject to judgment, but I tell you also that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment' and he goes on to give the example of things that we might say that would bring judgment upon us and that idea that our words carry the power of both life and death, that expressing anger through our words can be akin, it can be on a par in some shape or form, with the violence of murder.

And I wonder if that is something that you experience in home life, might not just be in a relationship, it might be towards your children, it might be from a parent, it might be from a partner or spouse, the doing of violence can take many forms and too often we in the church have not talked about it, we have ignored the fact that it exists, that it happens and that we too can commit it. We excuse it, we overlook it we 'Well, it was circumstances or whatever' but we fly off the handle and we hurt our children, we hurt our partners and spouses with our angry words and rather than bring life and encouragement, we bring death, we bring violence of a form, and I wonder if part of the call today from God is to repent of that, to acknowledge that, to just be honest that that is going on, that in your relationships there is anger and it is hurting others.

And if you will give God the space and the opportunity, I believe He would want to work in you to bring the fruit of the spirit of kindness and of gentleness and of peace and of patience and of self-control, so that, what has been, does not have to be the future.

It's a tough word again through Malachi to hear.

But as I was listening to a podcast the other week. Repentance can't happen without us naming the truth and too often we don't name the truth in our own lives and in the life of the church. Repentance leads to life and repentance can't happen if we don't name the truth. So, can we name the truth, friends, in our own lives and hearts. Where is the anger in your life? Where is the lack of love for brother and sister in your life? Where is the lack of God in your life? Can you bring it to the Lord that He might then open a door into newness of life for you and for the others around you.

God's call today is a call to greater loyalty to Him or to renew that loyalty and to live that out as three spheres of life: love of Him, love of his people and love of family. I pray it may be so. Amen.

We're going to close our time together with our final hymn which is Love divine, all loves excelling. It's a hymn that reminds us of the love of God, this love that we are to

emulate, this love that we respond to, this love that we are to show to one another so we sing together Love divine, all loves excelling.