

(Through the Bible) Malachi

by Zac Poonen

Zac Poonen's sermon on Malachi emphasizes the importance of recognizing God's love, the need for personal burdens in ministry, and the call to offer our best to God in worship.

Duration: 53:44

Scripture: Malachi 1:1, Malachi 2:5-6, Malachi 3:1, Malachi 3:16, Malachi 4:5

Topics: "Faithfulness To God", "Family Discipleship"

Description

This sermon delves into the book of Malachi, emphasizing the importance of faithfulness, purity, and reverence in serving God. It highlights the need for leaders to have a burden from the Lord, to be faithful in marriage, and to raise godly children. The sermon also contrasts Old Testament practices like tithing with New Testament principles of offering our bodies as living sacrifices. It concludes with a call to prepare for the coming of the Lord and to bridge generational gaps in families.

Transcript

Okay, we'll come now to the last book of the Old Testament. We have rushed through this pretty quickly, but like I said, I'm just putting a few pieces of the jigsaw puzzle in place. You take your time to fill up the other pieces and see the beauty of God's Word, this beautiful picture.

I don't want to rob you of that joy or the connection with the Holy Spirit that you can get when you go to the rest of the verses yourself and find what God wants to speak to you. I believe that is the way we should minister God's Word, that we don't give everything, we create an appetite in people. Okay, in chapter 1, you see Malachi was the last prophet that God sent before John the Baptist.

He lived about maybe 430 years before Christ, and towards the end of Nehemiah's time, he was probably a contemporary of Nehemiah. Some of the sins that he describes in chapter 2 and chapter 3 are similar to the sins that you read in Nehemiah chapter 13. The condition of God's people was pretty bad, and Nehemiah's warnings and all didn't seem to have much effect, and when Nehemiah went back, these people continued to live in sin.

The word Malachi means, my messenger, and very similar to the word for angel in our Indian language is Malaka, from Malakai. And this is the message the Lord gave to his messenger, a burden. Notice that the prophets always speak about a burden, burden, burden.

The burden God lays on your heart is usually the indication of the ministry that he has for you. So seek to get a burden from the Lord. If you serve the Lord without a burden, you're going to get bored after a while, or you'll seek for other things.

You'll seek for honor, you'll seek for money, you'll seek for comfort. So many things you can seek for. So many people serve the Lord today without a burden.

These prophets had a burden. They all each had a different burden. They all had a burden for holiness, but different ministries.

In the church today, God may give a man a burden to work among children. He may give another person a burden for evangelism, and even there, some may have a burden for evangelism in this area, that area, different parts of the land, other lands. Burden is different for different people.

Don't try to get somebody else's burden, and please don't put your burden on somebody else. See what burden God has for you, and don't let somebody else put their burden on you. I'll tell you that through the years, even though I am now so old, there are people still trying to put their burden on me.

Now if it is to carry their burdens, that's okay, but they are trying to convert me to have their burden, and for 35 years I have resisted it. And because of that, I fulfilled the ministry which God has wanted me to fulfill. Because so many people have tried to make me fulfill their burden, and I say, you can say what you like, I will never be interested in your burden.

You fulfill yours, I'm not against it. I'm going to fulfill the burden God gave me. God will give you a burden.

These prophets had a burden, and they fulfilled it, and they never allowed anybody to deflect them from their burden. If you don't have a burden, go and ask God whether He's called you. And if He's called you, He will definitely have a particular task for you to fulfill, which will be His burden for you.

Otherwise you'll be like all these wandering preachers with no burden. They just go to whichever organization will give them the highest salary, and join that, and one day they have a burden for radio work, then tomorrow that child evangelism organization is giving a higher salary, suddenly they get a burden for child evangelism, and then that literature ministry is offering a higher salary, suddenly they get a burden for literature. This is all garbage.

Don't serve the Lord like this. If you have a burden, you're not deciding which organization is giving you the higher salary, and you don't go where you get a good salary or comfort. You got a burden, and you're going to do that, you're going to fulfill that.

That's the only way to serve the Lord, and that is what these prophets had. And in verse 2, we read, you say, wherein the Lord makes a complaint, I've loved you deeply, and you say, wherein have you loved us? Seven times that question comes, right through in chapters 1, 2, 3. How? How do you say that? Have you really loved us? They question back to the Lord when the Lord says something. And the Lord says, you see, notice here, the very first thing, it's very important for us to see it, they question the love of God.

You know that that is the way sin begins in a life? When Eve, when the devil wanted to tempt Eve, he put in her heart a little doubt about God's love. Do you think God really loves you to not give you this beautiful fruit? And once she had a little doubt about God's love, she said, yeah, perhaps God doesn't love me. She sinned very quickly.

When the Lord prayed for Peter, he said, Satan has asked for you to sit to you as wheat, Luke chapter 22, but I have prayed for you that your faith, Peter, should not fail. What is that? That Peter, even after you've fallen and you're down in the dumps, that you will still believe that God loves you. That is faith.

You know, that's what the prodigal son had after he had ruined his life, messed up his life, lost everything. He believed in one thing, my father still loves me and I'll go back home. So we may fall, we may mess up our life.

And when you come to that place, brother, sister, if you do come, don't lose faith that God still loves you. Hold on to that when you have lost everything else in the world, hold on to the fact God loves you. That's the first and most important thing.

In verse two to five, he speaks about the sovereign way in which he chose Jacob. He says, how did I show my love for you? Because I chose your ancestor Jacob. I rejected Esau.

I turned his inheritance into a desert for jackals. And I have, and when they tried to rebuild it, I'd demolish it again. And he called the land of wickedness, the people with whom the Lord is forever angry.

But I have chosen you. So what is the proof that God loves us? That Christ died for us, that's one proof. And that he chose us from so many millions of people in the world to be among the very few who can find the way to life.

That is the greatest proof of God's love. Why should he choose me? Why should he choose you, my brother? Is it because you were more righteous than other people? I certainly was not. I have relatives who are unconverted.

And I tell you, God knows and I know that I was not better than them. God did not choose me because I was a better man. God did not choose you because you were better than others.

He chose us because we were sinners. He came to call sinners and not righteous. I was not a righteous person.

I was a sinner whom God picked up from the gutter. And that is to me the greatest proof, which I'll never forget, that God loves me. And I want to say to all of you, never, never forget it.

That out of all the millions of people God picked on you and wrote your name in the book of life. Don't ever, that is a sovereign choice. It says before the children did good or evil, God said, Jacob, I have chosen.

And you read Romans chapter 9 sometimes, it speaks of the sovereignty of God in choosing. I have chosen. It's not got anything to do with good works.

God chose me. And if you think that you chose the Lord first, no. John 15, Jesus says very clearly.

You did not choose me, but I chose you. I think that's verse 16 or 19, I'm not sure. John 15, I chose you.

You didn't choose me. Never forget that. That's the mark of God's love.

God's sovereign choice. And in verse 6, we read, the Lord Almighty says to the priests. Notice, always to the leaders.

I believe it's the leaders throughout Israel's history who led them into sin. And it's the leaders who have led the church into a compromise and worldliness. And that's why every now and then in Old Testament history, he would send a prophet.

Here were all those priests and princes and official leaders of the Israel. In would come a prophet who rarely, once in a hundred years, a prophet may come. And he would speak.

And he would be hated, persecuted. They never let him preach in their groups. They throw him out.

They say he's preaching false teaching. But that prophet was different. He didn't want anybody's money.

He proclaimed the truth. Offended a lot of people, and especially the leaders. And it's been the same throughout church history.

The official leaders don't speak God's word prophetically. And they lead the church into compromise and worldliness. And every now and then, God will send a prophet to proclaim God's word.

And invariably, that prophet will be misunderstood and rejected, except by a few people. And what Malachi says to the priests and the leaders is, You fellows are supposed to be leaders. Okay, listen to this.

A son honors his father. And a servant respects his master. The Lord says, I'm your father, and I'm your master.

Where is the honor and respect that you give me? You have despised my name. You care more for the rich people in your congregations than for me, says the Lord. You don't care for my word.

You just want to butter all those rich people and make money from them. Where are you honoring me? Am I really your father? Am I really your master? What sort of offerings have you given me? You've given me offerings that are defiled. So, these people, as leaders, wanted honor from the people, but they themselves did not honor God.

They wanted authority over the people, but they would not have the Lord have authority over them. You remember the Roman centurion said to Jesus, I'm a man under authority, and then I have authority over soldiers. I tell a soldier go, and he goes, come, and he comes.

You want your children to respect you, and you don't respect God. You want your wife to respect you, and you don't respect God. That's what the Lord is saying.

How can you demand respect from your wife? If you don't respect me, aren't you my wife? Am I not your husband? The measure in which you respect me, that measure you can expect respect from your wife. Otherwise not. If you seek to please people, how do you respect God? If you offer to God sacrifices which are defiled, that is an insult to God.

See, that's what these people were doing. They did not fear Him. They did not reverence Him.

They did not worship Him. Why? Because when they were offering sacrifices, it says here, they were giving blind animals as sacrifices. They were giving animals that were crippled, verse 8, and diseased.

See, the Old Testament law said that you have to give burnt offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings. There are many offerings to be given. And they had to offer a sheep, or a goat, or an ox.

So these people, when they wanted to give an offering, they would go into their flock and pick out, Oh, this sheep is blind. It's pretty useless. Let's offer this to the Lord.

And they go through all their bullocks and keep all the good ones for themselves. And they say, Oh, this one is a bit lame. It's a bit of a nuisance to me in any case.

Let's sacrifice this to the Lord. So they were picking out the worst. Do you think Christians don't do that today? What do they give to the Lord? I've had people who write letters to me, Brother Zach, I've retired from government service.

Can I spend the rest of my life serving the Lord? The best part of their life is given for the world, and now the dregs for the Lord. And the Lord says, try and give that to your governor, verse 8, and see how happy he will be. When you give a gift to an earthly governor, you pick out the worst thing possible, but is that what you give to the Lord? You give the end of your life to the Lord? That means the governor comes to my house, the governor of the state comes to my house, and I sit there, and I want to give him a cup of tea, and I drink the whole cup, I've only got one cup, and I drink it all myself, and there's a wee bit left behind.

I say, sir, would you like to have a little tea? This is what people are doing to the Lord. They live for the world, and then when they're just about to retire with one foot in the grave, they say, Lord, I'd like to do something for you, can I join some organization and make some money in my retired life also, in Jesus' name. Garbage! Christendom is full of this.

In your youth, when you're young, give your best to the Lord. What about money? It's the same. The best part of my money, for myself! And then, the bottom of the cup, after I've drunk everything possible, spent as much money as possible for myself, there's a little bit left.

Lord, would you like a cup of tea? Here's something for you. This is how Christians give money to God. No wonder they are so spiritually poor, no wonder they are not anointed, because they don't give the best to the Lord.

Is it only these people here? This is the sacrifice people are giving to the Lord today. And you expect God's anointing upon your life? Never! Not in a thousand years will you get to God's anointing. Not in a hundred years.

Can you learn to honor God? Give Him that cup of tea before you touch it. Let Him give you after He's finished drinking. You take the rest.

That's the way. Lord, the best part of my time, for you. All my money, the best part of it, for you.

My life, not after I've retired, from my youth, for you. Now, I'm not saying that God calls everybody to be a full-time worker. To give up life for the Lord does not necessarily mean being a full-time worker, but it means putting God first, from my youth, whether God calls you to full-time work or a secular job.

From my youth, the best part of my time, the best part of my money, every day, the best part of the day for God. Do you give the best part of your day to God? Or the best part of the day for the world? And then when you're half-sleepy, okay, now I must read my Bible and pray a little bit. Is that how it is? Are you honoring God? Best part of your time, money, energy, life, your intelligence.

What do you use your intelligence for? Is it to glorify God? Or to get something for yourself? There are Christians who use the best part of their intelligence for themselves. One little corner they give to God. It's exactly like these people.

They go and pick some blind sheep, some lame ox, and some diseased goat, and say, okay, let's give this to the Lord. And the Lord says, what you would not even give to your governor, you give to me. So that was the state of affairs in those days.

They gave to the Lord that which cost them nothing. And so they did not know how to worship. Do you know what worship means? To worship God means to give Him the very best.

Malachi has got a message for our time because he was the last prophet before the coming of the Lord. I mean, excluding John the Baptist who came at Jesus' time. But the last prophet, and once Israel had rejected his message, and they rejected it, for 400 years, God said, no more prophets.

I've had enough of speaking to you. I'm not going to speak to you anymore. Now the only thing left for you is judgment.

And if you look at the conditions in Christendom today, it's the same as the condition in Malachi's time. And we need prophets today in Christendom with Malachi's message to prepare people for the coming of the Lord. Verse 11.

But my name is going to be honored, and in every place around the world, there's going to be a pure testimony for my name. This is what God desires in every part, from the rising of the sun to the setting of it, all over the world. What God is looking for in every part of India is not a large offering, but a pure offering.

He's not looking for a big bullock. What's the use of a big bullock if it is sick? Let it be a small lamb, but it must be healthy, spotless. A lamb without blemish.

That's how the Old Testament said. It didn't say it has to be a big lamb, but it must be a lamb without blemish. If you bring an ox, it doesn't say your ox must weigh so many kilos, but it did say your ox must be free from disease.

What is the emphasis in all these commandments? Quality, quality, quality. Not size, not weight. Quality, free from sickness, free from disease.

That is what the Lord is looking for even today. A pure offering, not a large offering. When you build a church, make sure it's a pure church, even if it's not a large one.

A lot of people want a large church. Well, praise the Lord if you can get a large church. If you can get a large bullock and give it to God, that's fine, but make sure it's healthy.

It's no use giving a sick one, even if it's a large one. God's not impressed with a huge bullock if it is sick and lame and blind and deaf. He'd rather have a small turtle dove which is free from sickness.

A person could bring that, and that would be more acceptable to God than that huge bullock that is blind and deaf. Please learn this lesson from the message that God gave to Malachi. And we read here in verse 14, Curse it.

See, seven times in the book of Malachi, the word curse, curse, curse comes, and the last word in the Old Testament is curse. You know that? Curse, curse, curse, curse, curse, curse, curse. And 24 times comes the word, the Lord of hosts, the Lord of the armies of heaven.

All these prophets, I think Zechariah used it more than 50 times. The Lord of hosts, the Lord of the armies of heaven. The Lord who is ruler, the general of the armies of heaven.

That's the one we serve. But a curse, verse 14, on those who promise to give a good ram to God and then sacrifice a defective one. Oh, that's serious.

When you offer to God, when you promise to give the best, and then after you got your answer to prayer from God, you don't give the best. You say, Lord, here is my life. I decide that I shall serve you till the end of my days.

And then something happens and you are disappointed with some of the things you see in Christian work, disappointed with some of the Christian workers you see, and you back out and decide to, well, I might as well live for the world. I faced many, many, many disappointments with Christian workers, Christian churches, Christian organizations in my younger days. But it never changed my desire to determine to serve the Lord till the end of my life.

So what? Let other people be like that. Let other groups be like that. Let other churches be like that.

Let other organizations be like that. That's none of my business. I'm not their judge.

I say, Lord, you called me, and even if I have to starve, I'm going to serve you, and I'm going to live for you. It makes no difference. Let me go on to chapter 2, verse 1. Again, Malachi's message is to the priests.

It's like saying, I'm not speaking to the congregation. I'm speaking to the leaders who are sitting on the platform. The priests, listen.

My command is for you. He says, take it to heart. Honor my name, or I will bring a terrible curse upon you.

Again, the word curse. I will even curse the blessings you receive. Indeed, I've already cursed them.

I will rebuke your descendants, verse 3, and I will throw, you know, your sacrifices, the ox that you give as a sacrifice to me. When the ox gives out some dung there, I will take that dung and throw it in your face. And I will add you also to that dung heap.

These are not these gentle, nice preachers who stand up in pulpits and say very pleasant, pleasant things that keep people very happy. These prophets, boy, they use strong words. How would you feel if a preacher came and said, I'm going to throw dung on all of your faces? These prophets were like that.

Because things were so bad. I tell you, all this teaching people to be very nice and gracious and gentle, it's alright, do all that when you're talking to them outside the pulpit. And you're talking to them, please be very kind and gracious and humble and all that.

But when you get up to speak God's word, you forget all that. And be like a lamb in the pulpit and like a lamb outside. That's my recommendation to you.

All your life, be like that. That's how Jesus was. And he used his strong words.

And then he says, you know, that I was sent by God with this warning. Okay. And then he speaks about the Levites in the old days.

He says, do you remember how the Levites were way back in the beginning? Today you fellows are descended from the Levites. How are you today? And the Lord reminds us, do you remember how the apostles were? Those people who first heard my call, left their jobs, their boats and their accounting tables and came out to serve me, compare yourself with them. That's what he's saying here.

Compare yourself with your forefather, the original Levites. The purpose of my covenant with the Levites, chapter 2, verse 5, was to bring life and peace. And this is what I gave them.

This call for reverence from them, they greatly revered me. I want you to notice here in verse 5 and 6, seven things that characterize those early Levites. Characteristics of true servants of God.

The Lord reminds them of seven qualities. Number one, they feared God. They had a fear, a reverence for God.

If you want to serve God, first of all, reverence him, respect him, honor him more than you honor the governor or anybody. Honor him. Secondly, they had a concern for his name.

They greatly revered me and they stood in awe of my name. Hallowed be thy name. They had a concern.

Have a concern in your heart that the name of Jesus should be glorified in India. That's the second thing. Always carry that burden in your heart.

The tremendous reverence for God, the tremendous concern for the name of Jesus to be honored. Number three, they passed on to the people all the truth they received from me. Love the truth and pass on all of it to God's people, not part of it.

There are a lot of preachers today who do not preach the whole counsel of God. They pass on some truth because if you preach some more, you'll be unpopular. Have you been tempted like that? You go to some place.

I remember one place where they invited me for special meetings and I was the only speaker. They arranged everything over there. The bundle, the notices, everything.

And about one week before the meeting, they sent me a letter saying, Brother Jack, no one is meeting the rings by everybody. Please don't speak on water baptism when you come here. So very graciously, I wrote a very gracious letter back.

I said, Dear brother, please find somebody else to preach for you. You can't invite me to speak to your people and then tell me what to speak. Go and get somebody else.

If you call me, I'll speak whatever the Lord lays on my heart. I'm sorry, I'm not going to come. I don't know what happened to those meetings.

I never went there. So that's how it is. They passed on the whole truth.

Then number four, they hated sin. They did not lie or cheat. There must be a tremendous hatred in your heart for sin of any sort.

And then number five, they walked with God. They walked in harmony with God. They walked in fellowship with God in their private life.

They walked with God. And number six, they lived uprightly. Everything in their life that was an uprightness, the way they handled money, the way they conducted themselves, everything, there was an absolute like a straight stick without any crookedness in it.

That's how your life must be. There must be no area where people can suspect something crooked there. And then number seven, they turned many people from lives of sin.

The last part of verse six. See, just in those two verses, you have a complete picture of what a true preacher or prophet should be in the last days. That's how we are to be for the Lord.

Please take that seriously. Verse seven, the priest's lips should guard knowledge and people should go for instruction because the priests are the messengers of the Lord. We must go to the Lord and receive what he has to say and then go to the people and give them what the Lord gives us.

A messenger must have God's word in his mouth. But you, you have left God's paths. Your so-called guidance has caused many people to stumble.

Verse eight, you have corrupted the covenant. You have. And therefore, I have made you despised and humiliated in the eyes of the people because you do not obey me.

Verse ten, he says, are we not all children of the same father? Are we not all created by the same God? He speaks here about marriage in verse 11 onwards. A servant of God must have a godly home. He need not have a godly wife.

Job did not have a godly wife. Many servants of God did not have a godly wife. But they must be godly in the way they live in their home whether their wife is godly or not.

That's the point. Well, you can't make your wife godly. If you are unfortunate enough to have an ungodly wife, well, make the best of it.

But that's why, if you are not married, it's good to think about that before you get married. Are you marrying someone who is interested in going the same way with you or just somebody who's got a pretty face? So, he says the children of Judah have been treacherous. They have married women, verse 11, who worship idols.

If you marry a woman who loves money, even if you don't love money, you're going to have a tremendous problem. If you marry a woman who is stingy, miserly, tight-fisted, you're going to have a tremendous problem. She's a worshipper of idols and you worship God.

You're going to have a tremendous problem. You'll have to give to God secretly without your wife knowing about it. You'll have to help other people secretly without your wife knowing about it.

Because she's so stingy. So, be careful that when you get married, you get married to someone who's got the same goals as you. Someone who desires to love the Lord like you.

So, that's one thing he says here. And the other is concerning children. First of all, being faithful to your wife.

Verse 13. Even as you go on in life, a practical word of warning. See, this message is so relevant to our 20th or 21st century Christianity.

He says in verse 13, you cover the Lord's altar with tears. You pray, you weep, you have fasting and praying, all-night prayer meetings. But he doesn't listen to you.

I want to ask you a question. You know, I heard this expression many years ago. I said, what this, the expression was this.

What we need these days is not more prayer. What we need is more answered prayer. You know the difference between prayer and answered prayer? Bayal's prophets prayed for hours.

Elijah prayed for one minute. This was prayer, this was answered prayer. What we need is more answered prayer.

Why do I say that? Because sometimes we can get a comfort in our heart. Every week, I'm going for fasting and prayer. For seven hours a week.

Every morning, I pray for one hour. And we glory in that. Secretly, you glory in that.

You measure your prayer, not by fellowship with God, but by a wretched thing called a watch. Is that how you measure prayer? That proves that you don't love God at all. And I'll prove it to you.

Supposing a young boy and girl, say, we are deeply in love with each other, we want to be by ourselves, and always the girl is looking at the watch. You know that they don't really love one another. If they love one another, they'll put their watch over there and say, forget time, we just got to be with each other.

But if the boy and girl are always looking at the watch, okay, half an hour is up, you got to go. You can be sure, that's an arranged marriage, not a love marriage. If they love one another, they don't look at the clock.

I want to ask you, my brothers and sisters, how many of you measure your fellowship with God by the watch? I have never done it once in 41 years. I say, no. It may be one minute, it may be one hour.

It's love relationship. It's answered prayer we do. It's a heart God looks at.

And so with your wife, he says, I'll tell you why the Lord doesn't listen to your prayers. Here's the reason. Because the Lord has witnessed, verse 14, the vows that you and your wife made to each other on your wedding day when you were young.

And you have been unfaithful to those vows, even though she, your wife, remained faithful to you. See, preachers, like those priests, are always in great danger from other women. Why? Because we're standing up in the pulpit so much.

And so many religious, not spiritual women, religious women get attracted to you. A spiritual woman will not get attracted to you. She'll be attracted to the Lord.

But there are a lot of religious women sitting in our congregations who admire you. The great preacher. The great prophet.

The one who does signs and wonders. The one who lays his hands on the sick and casts out demons. That religious woman gets all excited about you and you're a married man.

She comes with a coy face and all and tries to talk to you, brother. I have a question for you. And I've had people come to me like this, and I know.

Now the Lord says, be careful. This is the old servant. I say, Lord, save me now.

And if she is married, I say, sister, you've got a husband. Go and ask him. But brother, he's not so spiritual.

Never mind. Never mind. You go to him.

The Bible says, let a woman ask her husband at home. You please go and do that, sister. And if he still cannot answer your question, tell him to come and meet me.

I'll explain it to him. I have solved that problem so easily. Do you want to protect yourself? Then follow this advice.

But there are some preachers who don't want to protect themselves. They love it when somebody comes like that, shaking their head and blinking their eyes and all that type of stuff. And those are the ones who fall.

Keep these sisters at a respectable distance. I'm not saying don't talk to them. Be careful of these flirtatious types.

They toss their head and their eyes are all... These are the ones. Watch the head and watch the eyes. And you're okay.

So he says, you've not been faithful to your wife because maybe you didn't touch her body. Maybe you've not had sex with her. But there's a little flirtatiousness there which is not good.

It can be even nowadays, people are working in offices where men and women are working together. And I've told people in our church, the way you speak to that pretty girl who's sitting in the office and laughing and joking and all that. If your wife suddenly comes in, will you continue in the same way? Or suddenly you'll start concentrating on your work? I say, what is this? You are taking advantage of the fact that your wife is not sitting there next to you.

And that's why you say, I'm not touching her. But why do you change your way of conversation if your wife walks in there? That is something impure, even in conversation. You know you can have sex in conversation without ever touching a person's body? There's a lot of impurity in the world today promoted by television, videotapes, all these filthy movies, cinema posters.

And that gets into our system. And I want to say to you in Jesus' name, if you want to be a servant of God in these days, be faithful to your wife. Let every man have his own wife because there's fornication in the world to protect himself.

It says in 1 Corinthians 7.1 And when you get married, be faithful. It says here, be faithful to the wife of your youth. That means, think of your wife, even when she's with white hair one day, the way she was when she was young.

That's the way I look at my wife. My wife's got gray hair. But I see her today as I first saw her 33 years ago.

And she's just as pretty and attractive to me today and has always been all these years. I want to say to you, my dear brothers and sisters, be faithful to your marriage partner. That's a very important requirement in these last days.

Malachi spoke about that. Don't break your marriage vows. If you have slipped and fallen, repent deeply and say, Lord, I want to come back to you.

I want to keep myself faithful to you. And not only your wife, your children, they are also important. Why did the Lord make you one with your wife? What does he want? Verse 15.

Godly children from your union. To have children is easy. To have godly children, that's the work of a lifetime.

So why did God unite you with your wife? To have children? No. To have godly children. So, remain loyal to the wife of your youth because I hate divorce, the Lord says in verse 16.

Unfortunately, even divorce has reared its ugly head in the Christian church, particularly in western countries where pastors are divorced and remarried. People sitting in the church are divorced and remarried. Evangelical fundamental churches.

And they endorse it. They conduct the marriages in those churches of divorced remarried people. Now, I'm not saying that if a divorced remarried person comes to the church, we should reject him.

He may have been a godless man without light and he did all types of stupid things in his unconverted days and he comes, we have to lead him to salvation and lead him to become a disciple of Jesus. But how do these churches conduct marriages of people who are divorced? That is after they have come here. You're still leading them further into sin.

What all goes on. I've seen it happen in India. In believer's churches.

I'm sorry to say. It's very, very sad. The influences of the West are corrupting very often.

A lot of churches in India in many ways. And if you don't stand for the principles of God's word, God says, I hate divorce. And if you're a servant of God, you will hate divorce and you will proclaim that God hates divorce.

Okay. It's as cruel as putting on a victim's blood-stained coat. You kill a man and put on his coat.

That's divorce. If a man does not live in an understanding way with his wife, the Bible says that God will not listen to his prayers. 1 Peter chapter 3, verse 7 or 9, one of those verses.

God will not, verse 7 I think it is. God will not listen to a man's prayer if he does not live in an understanding, respectful way. If you don't respect your wife as a fellow heir of the grace of life, that verse says that when you pray, God will not listen.

The reason being, you did not respect your wife. And I'm sorry to say here in India, many, many men, they do not respect their wives. They do not value their wives as fellow heirs.

They don't pray together with their wives about anything. They only pray with brothers. What about praying with your wife about something? What about sharing things with your wife, spiritual things? Well, if you have a difficult wife who's not interested in those things, that's another thing.

But before you get married, think about that. And seek with all your heart for God's help to bring up your children in a godly way. I have to say, after many, many years of being in the Lord's work and observing the Lord's servants of various types and various denominations, I say, I have the highest respect for any man who has brought up his children in a godly way.

He may have many other weaknesses, but I will take my hat off in respect to that man because he's brought up his children in a godly way. That's a tremendous testimony in a godless age. I'm not saying that if a man is in full-time ministry, his children should all be in full-time ministry.

I'm not talking about ministry. Ministry is God's calling. I'm talking about character.

Character is a million times more important than ministry. There are many preachers today whose aim is to promote their children into their ministry. I couldn't care less for that.

I say, there must be character in the man, and he must impart that character to his children. Character is primary. Godly children.

Not preacher children, but godly children. That's what it says here in verse 15. Okay? Then we go to chapter 3. The Lord says, I am sending my messenger who will prepare the way before me.

That is John the Baptist. And then the Lord whom you are seeking will suddenly come into the church, the messenger of the covenant. This one is Jesus.

The first messenger is John the Baptist. The second messenger is Jesus Christ. The Lord whom you seek, almighty God, is going to come in flesh, and suddenly come into the church, and he's going to come like a blazing fire that refines metal.

When the Lord comes into his church, what is he going to do? He's going to sit. He's not going to stand. Because this refining takes a long time.

You see, we stand and do things which we can do, finish quickly. When we sit down and do something, we know that that's going to take a long time. So it says he sits down and judges like a refiner of silver, watching closely till all the dross of worldliness and sin is burnt away from your life.

He's going to purify, verse 3, God's servants, refining them like gold and silver. And when will he stop? He will stop when that gold becomes like a mirror in which he can see his face. When the likeness of Christ is seen in you, then he will stop refining you.

When will that be? When he comes again. So the Lord has to refine us until he comes again. Purify us, refine us.

1 John 3, 3 says, all those who have the hope of the second coming of the Lord will cleanse, purify themselves. How much? As much as he is pure. That is our calling.

To allow the Lord to take us into the fire, burn out all the dross, make us lose money, make us lose property, make other people ride over our heads, make people accuse us. This is all the fire. Circumstances, difficulties, trials, sicknesses, thorns in the flesh, all types of things.

So that his likeness will be seen in us. Then we will be able to offer a pure sacrifice to God. And if you allow the Lord to take you through those fires of testing and persecution and tribulation and trial, misunderstanding, false accusation, and gradually you respond in a good way, loving way, then when you give a message, there will be an anointing in it.

There will be a power in it. It won't be just a repetition of what you hear somebody else say. It will come from your heart.

That's the type of ministry God wants you to have. Okay, then the Lord will accept the offerings. Verse 6, I am the Lord, I do not change my glory, and that is why your descendants of Jacob are not consumed.

It says here that even though this is the end of the Old Testament, there are some people who feel that when it came to the New Testament, God suddenly changed and became a gentle type of person. No. In the last page of the Old Testament it's written, I don't change.

I am the same yesterday, today, and forever. The same God who hated sin in the Old Testament is the God who hates sin in the New Testament. I don't change.

I was merciful and compassionate. That's why you sons of Jacob are not consumed. He's rich in mercy.

And therefore he says, then he goes on to another subject, sorry, verse 8. Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me. He said, where did we cheat you? You cheated me in tithes and offerings. This is the favorite verse of many pastors.

Bring the tithes into the storehouse, verse 10. And if you don't do that, you will be cursed. If you do it, I'll open the windows of heaven for you.

Tithing. Do you know that tithing is not even mentioned once after the day of Pentecost? When the new covenant was instituted. Something more difficult than tithing is mentioned after that.

Giving. And what do we have to give first? Our bodies. As tithing was emphasized in the Old Testament, presenting your bodies is emphasized in the New Testament.

This, just like they offered a land in the Old Testament, and they offered Jesus, was offered for us in the New Testament, just like they had a day of rest called the Sabbath in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, we have an inward rest. In the Old Testament, they offered a tithe. In the New Testament, we offer our body.

Romans 12, 1. I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, not present your tithes, but present your bodies. A living sacrifice to God. Tell me, what does it mean? What does it mean to offer your body? That means I give my eyes to God, and I never want to use it for myself again.

Is that easier? Or is it easier to give 10% of your income to God? You tell me. Any day, giving 10% of your income is easier. That's why people talk about tithing.

And usually, a lot of people who take that verse from the Old Testament, it's because those preachers themselves are lovers of money, and they want the tithe from everybody. And that's how these pastors become rich. See, if 10 people give one-tenth of their income, you got one man's salary.

Right? Simple multiplication. Arithmetic. 10 into 10% is 100%.

So, 10 people give their tithes, you get one man's income. That's enough to support a pastor. When 100 people give their tithes, what happens to this pastor? He becomes a millionaire.

This is what's happening. This is not... This is Old Testament. I will curse you.

The New Testament, it says, give your body. Let me tell you that God doesn't want your money. He wants your body.

And when you give your body, then give as you feel happy to give. Okay. I hope that liberates a lot of you.

And further, let me go on to chapter 3, verse 16. The remnant there, some characteristics about the remnant, they feared God. They were careful in their speech.

How many times I've emphasized these days, speech, speech, speech. They were concerned about His name. And the Lord wrote another book.

This is not the Book of Life of those who are born again. Another book. It's called the Book of Remembrance.

The Scroll of Remembrance. And there He writes the names, verse 16, of those who fear Him. Who love to think about Him.

Who are concerned about His name. And who speak to each other about Him, about the Lord, about His word. Not gospel.

And they will be my special treasure. And in that day, I will reveal them to the world and show you that day who really served God and who were these other people who only pretended to be my servants. Who was really righteous and who was wicked.

Chapter 4, coming of the Lord, the day of judgment is coming. First of all, the proud will be judged. Notice the emphasis on pride again.

But for you who fear my name, the Son of Righteousness will arise. And, verse 5, I'm sending you the prophet Elijah, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord. John the Baptist came in the spirit of Elijah.

And in the last days, before the great and dreadful day of the Lord, the church and the ministers of the church has to go forth in the spirit of Elijah. Who stood on Mount Carmel and said, if the Lord is God, serve Him. Don't serve two gods.

Don't serve God and mammon. Choose whom you want to serve. Choose this day whom you want to serve.

You live for God or you live for this world. You live for God or you live for mammon. And He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the children to the parents.

The generation gap is again broken like we saw in Zachariah. No generation gap. Parents and children in glorious fellowship.

Don't believe these cults that split parents from children. God have mercy on you if you go and separate parents from children. God wants to bring parents and children together and children and parents together.

Otherwise, I will strike the land with a curse. The last word in the Old Testament is curse. Just like the last word in the New Testament is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

So that's how the Old Testament ends. With a curse. And that curse is lifted when Christ comes again.

And today we are called to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord. Let's pray.

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