

From the rising of the sun

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[0 : 01] Good morning. My name is Bo. I'm one of the elders of the church. I'd like to thank the other two elders who tried to help me with my microphone just now. Thank you.

Holy, holy, holy. As we hear what you heard, Simon reading the verses from the Bible today, I hope that we can sense the holiness of God.

But you see, what was happening in the nation of Israel with their priests was that they somehow lost contact with God, and God became something routine, something common, something that is in competition with the world.

But if they realize that there's no competition, their attention would not be so diverted. And what God has said in Malachi would not need to be said.

Today, the sermon, the title, From the Rising of the Sun, I'm taking it from chapter 1. We're talking more on chapter 2 of Malachi, because in chapter 1, God said, For from the rising of the sun, this was 11, to its setting, my name will be great among the nations.

[1 : 28] Let us pray before we start. Almighty God, we know that we are so much like those people whom you have spoken to in Malachi, that we are so quick to forget your greatness and your goodness.

May you have mercy on us and bring us back to you, bring us back to the cross as we consider your words, as we want to lay your word in our hearts today.

Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. So, in thinking about greatness, I've been trying to find out what is considered great in the world in our day and age.

In the world where God is not considered great, what is? What is actually great? We have, during the children's talk, we look at the young children.

As Catherine asked them about whether their fathers were great. They were a bit hesitant, weren't they? But even as Catherine asked them how they would respond to their father's greatness, again, they had some problem answering that.

[3 : 02] It's, yeah, you know that children, young children, they would consider their parents great, but if you ask teenagers, then I suppose it's very hard to get anyone who raised their hand.

It's just that we are so self-focused, self-centered. Even from young, as we get older, as we are more realized about ourselves, what we can do, then we are, we are considered, it's hard to consider anybody else great.

So, who is a great person to us? So, it's someone who influences our decisions and directions in life, a person that we look up to, and in a world without God, who would that person be?

I think usually it's our own self. I don't think I'm the greatest, but I want to be great in any case. Many things that we do each day can show us that.

Think of a time when we argue with someone. In an argument, we usually want to win. Otherwise, we wouldn't argue. I mean, if we don't want to win, we won't argue.

[4 : 22] The fact that we argue, we want to win the argument. And why do we want to win the argument? Because we want to be great. And if we do, we lose the argument, then we will replay that in our mind, until we win the argument inside us.

That's how we are. That's what we are making up of. And we are looking at Malachi, and these people, they were trying to argue with God.

The fact that they, to try to argue with God, is just that they are putting themselves at the same level as God, sort of, at least they are not giving the respect that they should have towards God.

So the book of Malachi deals with the nation of Israel about 500 years ago, before Christ. So it's about 200, 2,500 years ago now.

And Malachi was a prophet, sent by God to speak to the Israelites. Israel, Israel was a unique nation. So it was a nation that was chosen by God to make his name known among the nations. [5 : 32] And to help Israel to fulfill that mission, God made a covenant with them, with the people of Israel. Israel. And Israel became the only nation that governs itself, solely based on God's law.

You see, what are the nations govern themselves with? Usually based on, if there's a king, the king's law. In a democracy like Australia, it's mostly to do with economic, what would give people the most wealth that make decisions.

But Israel was different to any other country. They need to base what they do on God's laws. So by the time Malachi conveyed God's message to the Israelites was about 1,500 years when they first make the covenant with God.

So it's quite a long time already. And we know that God's name, so over the 1,500 years, God's name did not actually become great among the nations over those times.

It wasn't even great among the nation of Israel. And what, by the time, I mean, maybe during David, King David's time, God's name was considered great for 50 years.

[6 : 57] Among that, that's over the 1,500 years, there's only that short period of time after that. people just forgot about it. And they consider God as the helper, mostly.

And so they would give God some sacrifice and return to God's help to fulfill their wishes. So usually, people just like us will pray to God to pass our exams or find a job.

God. And if we don't get it, like in chapter 2, verse 13, it says that those people cover God's altar with tears. They were disappointed that their prayer didn't turn up.

And we can be the same as well. So they would follow God's ways if it was convenient to do so. But they would follow the ways of the world when such ways offer more comfort and pleasure.

So, what happened to the covenant their ancestors had made with God? In chapter 2, as we read it, the breaking of this covenant is represented by the breaking of their marriage covenant with the wife of their youth.

[8 : 09] The wife of their youth also can mean that during the earlier days with God and now they have forgotten their first love. also we can see that they were marrying daughters of foreign gods.

I mean, they start having relationship with other gods. So in chapter 2, while it happened in the society, in the families, but it also implies or represents a bigger picture of the whole nation, what they are doing as we read that.

And as we are reading Malachi, bear in mind that we are reading God's heart, the heart of God, the heart of the Creator, the heart of the Father is with some sadness in that this thing will happen.

So why did Israel renege on their covenant? in your bulletin there may be renegade, but there should be a noun and this is a verb.

Thanks for Catherine Gibbons telling me that. I've never used this word before, so renege is the covenant with God.

[9 : 28] Israel. So over those 1,500 years there have been a lot of changes to the nation of Israel. So they had civil wars, the country broken into two parts, and then they were conquered by pagans and taken into exile.

They were exposed to foreign governments, religions, and cultures. So by the time of Malachi, they had been permitted by the conqueror to resettle back to their homeland.

It was difficult for them to build their cities, which had been destroyed by wars, and consider their living condition. It wouldn't be very impressive. And they are all wanting to make a living.

There were some who remained faithful to God and led them to rebuild the nation starting from the temple, and that's where the temple we're talking about. And those people like Ezra, Nehemiah, they really wanted a place to worship God.

But there are not many of them, unfortunately. Most people, the temple to them is a place, yes, they could exchange favour with God, but also temple and the city of Jerusalem become an identity for them.

[10 : 42] We are the Jews. So that's mostly what people do, just like us. In the Western society, many years ago, the church become an identity issue.

I'm a Christian, I identify with this culture, and it's not much to do with their allegiance or worship of God.

And the people who were supposed to help people to worship, the priests, and they are from the tribe of Levi. Levi. As you know, the tribe of Levi are not allowed to own land, unlike other tribes.

I'm not sure during the Malachi time whether they had any land. They might have, because the society has been changed. But in any case, their livelihood is mostly dependent on other people who give offerings.

under these circumstances, we were surprised that these priests offer animals if Brahmishes buy animals or animals that nobody wants.

[11 : 52] Because economically, it makes sense. You sacrifice the cheapest animals, because those animals were going to be burned anyway.

I mean, why you sacrifice a perfect one while you can sell them for higher prices? price. And in doing that, the priests are making it easier for people to give offerings.

And they then can make sure that they have enough for themselves. They need to do what the people want to do or what people are seeking for.

So they will only teach people what they want to hear and not what God wanted them to teach or people to hear. And that's why all these things gradually change.

I mean, it doesn't happen overnight. As you know, when we do something or going to sinning or doing something, committing a crime, it doesn't change, happen only overnight.

[12 : 54] It happens over a lifetime, gradually, with one step at a time, and then we get to this state of Malachi when people just somehow forgot about the holiness of God and the relationship with God.

And so when the priests started to compromise with the ways of the world, the people followed them. And how did God point out to the Israelites that they had broken faith with him?

He told them to look at their marriages. They disobeyed God by marrying daughters of those who worship foreign gods and they divorce their wives of their youth.

So we need to think about marriage first to understand this. Soon after God created men and women, men and women, he decreed that there would be marriage between a man and a woman, and this union was meant to be binding for as long as they were alive.

In Malachi 2.15 it says that did he not make them one with a portion of the spirit in the union. So the marital union was meant to be a strong covenant where the two parties became one body and God was in the union.

[14 : 12] So anyone who broke this covenant also revealed his dishonor towards God. So a nation's being unfaithful to their covenant with God is reflected in their being unfaithful to their marital covenant.

In the past, most culture would expect wives to be faithful to their husbands, but not the other way around. So Israel saw that the other races could divorce their wives easily, and they thought this would be the way.

In their thinking, their careers, their marriages, their choices of friends, whatever, were for their own personal happiness, and God had no part in their day-to-day decisions.

They just did what was right in their own eyes. So each man would want to find a wife who make him happy, and as the head of the family, he should be entitled to replace the wife who did not satisfy him.

In Matthew 19, 3-10, there was an interesting reading. Pharisees came up to Jesus and tested him by asking, Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cost?

[15 : 29] He answered, Have you not read that he who created them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?

So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together and let not man separate? They said to him, Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce and to send her away?

He said to them, Because of your hardness of heart, Moses allowed you to divorce your wife, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marriage and another commits adultery, the disciples said to him, If such is the case of a man before his wife, it is better not to marry.

Do you notice how the disciples responded to Jesus' view on the permanency of marriage? They said, It is better not to marry.

What do you think they said when they said it is better? What is better? Better for what? Who is better? What was in their mind? It's the same in our minds.

[16 : 55] When we say something is better, it usually means that it gives me more comfort, gives me more pleasure. It's better for my life if I'm not married, than if I got married to a wife who turned out to be a major annoyance, I could not divorce her.

That is the idea about better. It just betrays the person's heart. When we say it is better, this job is better, that is better, we should ask ourselves, what do we mean when we say it's better, what is better?

God's way seems to make it so narrow in one's choice of a spouse and so difficult to renege on one's marriage while we can understand why the Israelites found it wearisome to follow God's laws. Because they want to enjoy themselves, they want to follow the world, and God's law just was in the way, and they couldn't get rid of it fully, so they would try to compromise and do a bit of it.

So we look at Israelites, we look at ourselves, we know that when we make decisions, unless we know God and love God, we would make them according to our own pleasure, what we think would give us the most comfort or pleasure.

[18 : 29] It's like choosing to eat excessively delicious takeaway food, McDonald's or Kentucky fried chickens. We may not know what long-term consequences are in doing that, but even if we know, we don't seem to care.

When I was young 50 years ago, most of the television programs were sponsored by cigarette companies, smoking and so promulgator to smoke cigarettes is such a man eating, such a socially respected thing, and people pick up cigarette smoking, this is a world, we just do things that we are promulgator, and we think that it's good, it's better for us to do that.

We didn't even know the effects of cigarette smoking, but even so, in this age, even if you know that the base of cigarette smoking, there are still so many people still smoking.

It's just how we are. So the consequence of reggetting God's way, not just following our own way, we have to look at the nation of Israel, so that the priest who choose to not to honour God, but follow the ways of the world, will become weak in their characters.

The weakness in their characters will in turn establish a nation that will put individual pleasure as a goal in their life. No one will be willing to sacrifice their comfort or their life for their country.

[20 : 08] So when an enemy came to invite them, they were defeated quite easily. A nation which does not fear God will fear the enemies. The priest who choose to follow the ways of the world will also be enslaved by the world.

The world does not know kindness. It is a place where the powerful would consume the weak. So one day, as God said, this priest would be led away by the conquerors with the dunks of their blemished offerings on their heads.

The dunks of animals in the Old Testament were the unclean things that were burned outside the camp or outside the city or outside the temple.

So dunks on the heads of the priests imply that they were no longer fit to serve in God's temple.

Because they disregarded God's laws and choose to marry anyone they like, and to divorce anyone they like, their community would break apart.

By marrying those who worship idols, they introduced idol worshiping in their families. By divorces, they created many broken and unstable families.

[21 : 23] God was seeking the family to bring up godly offspring, but they were producing offspring who worship idols and who live for their own comfort. So, what's wrong with idol worshiping?

We will become what we worship. If there are many idol worshipers in the community, then we will live in a community with people like the idols that they worship.

So, would you like to live in a community that people would like their idols? Or would you like to live in a community that everyone lives like the holy God if they worship that God.

And so, you can imagine how the society or the community gradually degrades and becomes difficult to live but people don't have choice.

We just live like that because their parents live like that. The children are doing the same and it seems there's no way to get out of it. So, when a nation does not honor God, men will not honor their roles as heads of the family and they have nothing bigger than themselves to live for.

[22 : 36] They use their head to satisfy their little pleasures and they will not sacrifice themselves for the nation or their families and they want others to sacrifice for them instead. So, we can see why God insisted on Israelites keeping their covenant.

There are two reasons. In verse 10 of Malachi chapter 2, it says that God is their father and their creator. So, one reason is who God is.

Who God is to Israelites even more special than non-Israelites because God rescued them from Egypt and called them to be God's children.

And so, God is their father. Not only that, God is their creator, so God created them. So, on these two counts alone, the Israelites were supposed to obey God, because of what God has done for them and who God is to them.

In verse 2, we actually say that we have one father and one creator, and the one is there to emphasize the fact that Israelites are like one family, and they should be faithful to one another besides being faithful to God.

[24 : 12] So, but it's not only who God was to them or what God did to them, but keeping a covenant is good for their characters and for their societies, for their communities, and when they did not keep it, then the community broke apart.

sometimes we may not understand the purpose of God's ways. In the covenant, why do we have to sacrifice the perfect animals?

Couldn't we just do something with premises? We think deeper, we look back, we know the perfect animals represents the perfect son of God who was to come, but the time Israelites may not understand that.

It's just like a child may not understand why the parents forced him to eat broccoli or broccoli, but keeping covenant with God was the way to know God and eventually to enjoy God, and it was the way to build up a person's character and wisdom.

Character cannot be given, we have to understand that. We can be forgiven in Christ and have the status of righteousness, but the character of righteousness cannot be given to us like magic and change, because that means it's not us anymore or not me anymore.

[25 : 49] The character can only be learned. Even Christ learned obedience as a son. And the process of learning, we grow, we change, we get to know God, we get to know ourselves better, and that is all part of life.

A person may not want to do things God's way at first, but because he fears God, he would do it God's way. And as he looks back, such a person will always be thankful that he was able to live by God's way and not his own way.

A person who is not willing to do hard things, it's hard to build a character. If you ask God to make your patience, God will, and a lot of things will happen to try your patience, and it's hard to go through that.

But if we do not want to try hard things, we will never enjoy the fruit of hard work. If our fallen nature, we choose to follow the easy way of the world rather than follow God's ways.

in one, I mean, actually the people who do hard things in our midst as well, not only can't say that nobody wants to do hard things, there are people who finish HSC this year, and there's a hard thing, and there are people here who finish uni this year, and it's hard.

[27 : 16] People finish the fellowship exam, like Sarah, passed that, there are so many people here who would do hard things.

As Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9.25, he said that athletes would try very hard to discipline themselves, everything, to get a crown that is temporary, but he said for spiritual discipline it's an eternal crown, and to have that spiritual discipline is even harder, and I hope that we would take heart and be willing to sacrifice the small comfort that we enjoy every day when we can spend our time to know God in a deeper way.

So what do we think God means when he said his name would be great among the nations? We may think that God wants people to fear him.

This is half correct. The other half is that God wants people to love him. Why does God want us to fear him and to love him? Does he think that he is the center of the universe?

No, God does not think that he is the center of the universe, but God is the center of the universe. He doesn't think that he is. And he is the ultimate beauty, purity, and wisdom.

[28 : 45] So who else should we fear and love besides God? And when we fear and love God, we will follow his ways. The Israelites had written laws and covenant to help them to keep following God.

They failed to do so. They simply loved themselves too much. What else could God do for people to fear him and love him? God's covenant will stand.

His covenant with Levi, the tribe of Moses, will not fail. He will have a priest who will be faithful to the covenant. This priest will honor God. He will walk with God in peace and uprightness.

He will speak the truth regardless of opposition from the world. He will teach the way of God truthfully. He will challenge our conscience.

In fact, he challenged our conscience so much that we wanted to kill him. He obeyed God's way despite suffering. He was nailed on the cross to die slowly for his obedience to God.

[29 : 55] We know that Jesus Christ was the priest that was to come to fulfill God's covenant with man. he did not pay for Jesus to obey God because the world would be against him.

Why did he do that? Because Jesus knew and he saw that this world is broken. It's not going to be permanent and it's not going to be the ultimate.

Why will we enjoy this world? It will be nothing compared to the world that is to come. Because Jesus had much bigger purpose to live for and to die for.

For the joy that was set before him he enjoyed the cross and despite the shame which he suffered in the world, Jesus knew that all that was in the world in this world is transient and trivial.

He was looking forward to the godly world which was to come and he wants to bring with him many people. In that world, God's name will be honour. In the world where God's name is honour, people can live in peace and freedom at last.

[31 : 03] He could only bring us into this godly world by dying for our sins. I suppose that we all want to have a happy life and we also want our descendants to have a happy life.

Like our ancestors, we will try all sorts of ways to be happy. We often consider ourselves as the smartest and cheat our ways to get what we want.

Even the Israelites in Malachi, they were cheating their ways with the covenant of God. We will do the same in whatever we do in life.

And we are often disappointed. It is not only because we often fail, even as we try our best to be happy, but even as we succeed in getting what we want, it often has unexpected side effects.

The world is full of all these unexpected side effects from just like I said about the cigarette smoking 50 years ago. It was in fashion, but now we know that it will kill you.

[32 : 13] And many things that we do turn up the same because we don't have the wisdom to know the future and we just hold on to pleasure so much.

So we are like the Israelites often end up with choices which will bring destruction and sorrow to us and our descendants. In Malachi, God is not standing there helplessly blaming the Israelites for their unfaithfulness and foolishness, but he's there to pronounce judgment and mercy.

We will look at this in the future two weeks as we look at chapter 3, chapter 4, and he is there to proclaim what he's going to do. His name will be great among the nations regardless of Israel's response.

Since the time of Malachi, Jesus Christ has come and become the perfect priest and the perfect sacrifice. Through the cross, the church has been established. God's name has been made known throughout the nations.

We see changes in people's lives as they begin to worship God. 35 years ago when Lei and I were serving in Malaysia the Bonniak Evangelical Mission, we were in contact with a tribal people called Long Bao Wang people.

[33 : 38] The Hmong people were considered as the worst tribal people in Malaysia about 70 years ago because they were drunker.

They just want to have wine to drink until they become drunk.

They hardly do anything. They are very dirty, filthy, immoral. Basically, the government has given up on them and let them die off. 70 years ago, one event mission came to that tribe.

35 years ago, when we were in contact with them, most of the leaders in the church were Long Bao Wang. Even doctors, lawyers, political leaders, the Long Bao Wang.

It's such an amazing turnover to their lives just because God's name was great among these people. And this thing happened over and over again in the world, in different tribes and in our life as well.

[34 : 59] From the rising of the sun to his setting, God is making his name great among the nations. We can choose to either submit to his sovereignty and continue to seek or continue to seek

our own small fortune.

Through the covenant of blessings and curses with Israel, God accomplished his justice by placing all the curses on his son, Jesus Christ. It was as if the dung of the animals were placed on Jesus' head as he was crucified outside the camp.

Jesus has shouldered all the judgment of God on the cross. Jesus has fulfilled the requirements of the covenant. What more do you think God should do for us to submit to him in love and in fear?

Jesus said, while you have the light, believe in the light, that you might become sons of light. Let us pray. Father, we thank you.

Thank you, Father, for your goodness to us. Despite our frequent regret of you, you keep calling us. [36 : 24] We want to acknowledge that you are great and good. We want to live a life that is worthy of your calling and your character.

May you help us to do so. For those of us who are yet to know you, may you also help us to do so.

Thank you, Lord. We pray in Jesus' name.

Amen.