

You have Broken Covenant - I Am Bored

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 25th of May 2003. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled, You Have Broken Covenant, I Am Bored. It is based on Malachi 2.10 through to 3.5.

We have seen the miracle of birth twice before. We have our beautiful Olivia and Georgina. Both times were very quick labours.

Both times were ten days early. We're finished doing the final touches to the baby's room. The baby clothes, well they've all been cleaned.

They've been purified, renewed. They've been neatly placed in an old set of drawers that I stripped back and polished for the occasion. The bags are packed.

[1 : 08] People are on the standby. I have a phone here with me today. Fully charged, ready to go. If she does ring, I'm going to be a very short sermon.

All the instructions written out carefully. Everything is ready. People promised us that when this baby came, it would come very quickly. It's come quickly the last two times.

Therefore, this time, it will be a very quick labour. Well, approximately ten days before the due date, last Friday, things started.

The great promise of this baby we looked forward to. We sat up all night, watching the clock, taking timings, readings.

After everything through that night, and many nights since then, including last night, nothing. A huge anticlimax.

[2 : 13] Instead of a baby, we have sleepless nights, which I assume will come later on as well. But at the moment, we have nothing to show for it. It has come to a point where at this moment, well, actually yesterday, there was a point where I thought, will this baby really come out?

Will I get to see this thing? I'm a little doubtful. I'm a bit weary of sitting on the edge of my seat, waiting for that moment.

Because I know I've got to go very quickly, I've been told. God's people had seen the miracle of being returned from exile by God's mighty hand.

It wasn't the first time that they'd seen God work powerfully in their midst. He'd worked powerfully in their midst many, many times. They'd just put the finishing touches to their second temple.

The temple that the prophets promised that they should fix up, if they were to enjoy the great promises and blessings of God. They'd renewed their sacrifices, cleansed and purified everything.

[3 : 18] The great promise of the messianic age was about to break in. The promised land was going to be a paradise. There was going to be great blessing for Israel, God's promised people.

They are waiting for that moment, for the birth of the kingdom. The God's kingdom here on earth. So much promise, but nothing.

An anti-climax. They waited and waited. Instead of the promised land, the crops had failed because of the locusts and the drought. They were still subject to the Persians.

They were sitting on the edges of their seats for a long time. And they'd become burdened by it. And last week we saw they lost their first love.

They doubted that God really cared for them at all. Last week we saw in particular two charges that Malachi brings against his people. The first charge was that they doubted God's love.

[4 : 16] They doubted that this mighty God cared for them. They turned to other gods. They turned to other things.

We saw also the second charge last week was that to the priests. The way they had despised God's name by disregarding the sacrificial system. By being sitting light to the system that God had

put in place.

They turned aside from God's ways and they were causing many to stumble. Well today we're going to see the way that these priests had caused his people to stumble.

Today we have two more charges brought against the nation. The first is that they are breaking covenants. They are breaking the promises. Faith promises.

And the second, which we'll see a bit later, is that they are boring God. God is wearied by them. In particular, weary of their cynicism about him and his authority.

[5 : 18] So let's have a quick look, first of all, at the first charge that Malachi brings to the people. That of breaking covenant relationships. It would be helpful for you to have the Bibles open at page 778 as we work through this section of the Bible.

All of us enter in some type of promise agreements. All of us have signed contracts of one form or another. Or we've made promises to different parties.

I think of work contracts. Where the employer sets down all the obligations and all the things that he requires of the person. And the other person brings their contractual agreements and they sign them.

There is a signing of housing contracts. Wedding vows. And of course, the latest trend at the moment is prenuptial agreements. A covenant is just an agreement.

It's like a contract between two parties, two or more parties, promising certain things. I went for a run in my utter frustration during the beginning of this week.

[6 : 22] It was raining. It didn't matter. I needed to go for a run after such a frustrating weekend. And as I was running in the rain, I got to Ruffy Park. And there was the most magnificent rainbow I have ever, ever seen.

The colours were so vivid. It was there I could see from beginning to end without any break. And it was just there in the sky, in the afternoon sun.

It was just awesome. And as I was running along, I was reminded of God's promise that he would never flood the earth again.

Here is a covenant that God made, made with the people on earth, that he would not bring another flood. And the rainbow stood out to me, screaming, saying that God would uphold his word.

Well, there are many other covenants in the Bible. There was the covenant to Abraham, that Abraham would be a great nation in a promised land and bring great blessing to the rest of the world. There was the covenant that God made with his people at Mount Sinai, where God promised that he would bring great blessing on Israel, bring them to the promised land, if only they would trust and obey him.

[7 : 38] Well, because of these great covenants, where God bound himself intimately with his people, where he tied himself in a deep, intimate relationship with his people, not because they were particularly attractive, not because they were a great and mighty race, the Israelites, not because they were more intelligent than anyone else, but because God chose them.

His choice. Because of this great bond that God has between himself and his people, it puts a great bond between that family, a great covenant bond, a faith bond, between its different members, We see there in verse 10, Have we not all one father?

Has not God created us? They look back to their father Jacob, or Abraham, or one of their ancestors. They're all from this one family line.

They were bound together by a very deep covenant, a covenant created by God himself. And yet they were sitting lightly to it. They were treating each other faithlessly.

They were breaking the covenants between each other. We see there, Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our ancestors?

[8 : 57] In the rest of the verses, from verse 11 and verse 12, we see, I'm sorry, verses 11 through to 16, Malachi gives two examples of where they have broken covenant with one another, where they have let each other down, not treated each other as family.

The first is mixed marriages, which is verses 11 and 12. And the second is found in verses 13 through to 16, that of divorce. Let me read verses 11 and 12 for you.

Judah has been faithless, an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign God.

May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this, any to witness or answer, or to bring an offering to the Lord of hosts.

Here we see the first covenant they are breaking. They are being involved as a people in mixed marriages. That is, they're going out and marrying women from foreign nations.

[10:10] Rather than marrying, as God had stipulated it within the people, they were seeking other wives or husbands outside the covenant people. As we look through the Old Testament, we see occasions where this happens.

Ruth and Boaz, for example. Ruth was a Moabite. Boaz, part of the covenant people. The problem is not so much that they're marrying foreign people, but the fact that when they marry these foreign people, as we see in verse 11, the problem is that they are marrying the daughter of a foreign God. When they're involved in mixed marriages, they bring in other gods. They bring in other gods like a virus. And the virus spreads within the people.

It's just a little weakness. It's surely one little god, one little idol brought into the house. It won't make a difference. But it does. It gets in amongst the members and it breaks faith between them.

They are not a holy people, not set aside for God's purposes. Notice God's anger at this. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob anyone who does this.

[11:25] May they be cut out from his presence, cut out from the great blessings of God. Well, there's the first of the covenant breaking that the Israelites are involved in. The second is that of divorce.

As we've been looking through this book of Malachi, Malachi often uses a pattern of God making a statement, the people questioning that statement, and then God answering their question.

So we see there in verse 13 that God makes a statement that he does not accept with favour the offerings they bring before God. Even though they are weeping and crying, crying out for God to accept these offerings, crying out with great passion that God would do something, God does not listen to them.

And they say, why? Why do you not accept? And he gives the answer there in verse 14, because the Lord has a witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless. Though she is your companion, your wife by covenant, did not one God make her? Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire?

[12:35] Godly offspring. So look to yourselves and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.

So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless. Here God declares that he hates divorce.

Nowhere else in the Old Testament is such a strong picture of marriage held up. Here is the picture that God has set before us, that of a bond that cannot be broken, a bond that is made between two people with God as witness.

We see that it is a bond based on the covenant love that God has for his people. He is the one that has instituted this great promise, this great covenant.

The second thing we see there is that it is the place of godly offspring. Godly offspring needs faithful marriages. Some see here at this point that mixed marriages is in the background.

[13:47] That the reason why the people are getting divorces is so they can go and marry foreign gods. This may be true. It may be true that they are indeed breaking their marriage vows, going for other people who are more attractive, better looking, so that they can marry foreign gods.

But it stands on its own that it could be just that people are divorcing their first wives. And God's attitude to it is, it is breaking faith. It is breaking God's covenant.

Well, it's no coincidence that Malachi speaks against breaking covenants in the context of divorced and mixed marriages. For at its heart, this is the problem of the people's hearts.

We saw last week that they did not know God's love, that they were following other gods and other things. God was not their first love. They were breaking the marriage between them and God.

So what we see here is just a little picture of what they're actually doing to God. Turning their backs from God and his love. Breaking his vows and covenants.

[15:00] Let me make a few brief comments about us here and now in relationship to marriage, divorce and mixed marriages. As we look around society, the statistics are very sad.

We see that one in two marriages end in divorce. It's interesting also to see that statistics are showing that this is very alarming, particularly for family members for those who are involved in

these things.

On our trip down here to Melbourne, beginning of last year when we were coming down to move down here, we stayed at different places on a six-week tour down here and we were struck as we went to different churches the number of divorces there were within churches.

Within one church, there was a couple who had divorced, remarried, and both sets of couples were still in the church. Today's passage, like the rest of the Bible, screams out that God hates divorce. Marriage is an intimate bond between two parties where they give each other whole, their whole body, their mind, their heart to each other where they become one, one flesh.

[16:21] It is a bond that is made before God. God is the witness of this covenant that people make together. It is not to be broken. The Bible does speak about divorce.

It speaks that there are grounds for divorce but it makes it very clear what these grounds are. If the partner is unfaithful to the other partner and this partner who is unfaithful then turns his back on God or her back on God and runs away from God and wants nothing to do with God, then there are grounds there for divorce.

But if two Christians are struggling in their relationship, they are to work at it. They are to continue to work at it. They are to continue working very, very hard forgiveness needs to be brought into it. They need to work at it because God hates divorce. Well, the other little thing that was spoken about was that of mixed marriages.

The New Testament makes it clear also that it is wise not to be married to go and yoke yourself with an unbeliever. I guess for the same reason why here there is this temptation of bringing two people who have different gods in many ways, different focuses.

[17:46] The Bible sees this as very unwise. But the Bible also speaks about people who are in this situation and encourages the spouse, the Christian spouse, to be godly, to be faithful to that partner, to continue working at that relationship.

Why? Because God hates divorce. Well, let me find one more final thing about this section here.

We see in this section a group of people who are passionate about their religion. Look there in verse 13. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping, with groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour at your hand.

The people are offering sacrifices to our God. They're coming before this God with tears and weeping. They're passionate about what they're serving.

Look up there in verse 12. The problem is, although they're offering these sacrifices, because their lives don't mirror the God that they are worshipping, God does not accept it.

[18:55] Look in verse 12. Speaking about these mixed marriages, bring an offering to the Lord of hosts. Look there in verse 16. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel.

And covering one's garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. This picture of covering one's garment with violence is the picture of blood that comes from the sacrificial animals. Here was a group of people that were still coming and performing many sacrifices, trying to worship God in a passionate way.

Their garments were covered in blood of the sacrifices. Yet their lives were that of disobedience. They had a passionate religion, but they were disobedient in their lives.

Through their sacrifice offerings, they professed to be piety, great piety. But it is indeed a profound transgression.

It is detestable before the Lord. He does not accept this passionate religion. In 1 John 4, verses 19 to 21, we see there Jesus, someone who has created a people for himself, united the people to himself through love.

[20:15] He has made a covenant of love between himself and his people. In that part of the Bible, in 1 John 4, it talks about how we are to be loving one another.

For if God loves us, then we are to be loving one another. If we hate one another, then how can the love of God be in us? We must be people who are loving one another, caring for one another, not gossiping or backbiting or talking behind each other's backs, failing to meet the needs of others. We need to be a community of love. This section screams out how the Israelites were breaking faith of one another through divorce and mixed marriages.

But it can be done in so many other ways as well. Well, that's the first section. That's the first charge that Malachi brings to his people. The second charge is that of boring God, of putting God's patience to the test, of continually burdening him.

Again, we have in chapter 2, verse 17, this same pattern that Malachi uses to declare God's word. Malachi declares God's charge.

[21 : 28] They ask, how have we done that? And then Malachi gives God's answer. But the question we need to look at is, how is it that God can be wearied?

How is it that God can be bored? Surely we worship a God who is infinite in patience. A God who continually lavishes his love upon us all. God is patient with each one of us all the time.

As we look in today's passage, we see that God is indeed a merciful God. A God of patience. But not unlimited patience. God is going to do something about the way things are.

So, let's have a look. How is it that these Israelites back in the time of Malachi actually weary God? How you have wearied the Lord with your words? Yet you say, how have we wearied him?

By saying, all who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord and he delights in them. Or by asking, where is the God of justice? There are two charges that the people bring before God.

[22 : 38] Two cynicisms. Two areas which they don't trust God. The first is that they claim that God approves of evil. They look around themselves and they see that evil has been committed all around them in their very midst and God is not doing anything about it.

Therefore, rather than trusting in God's word and trusting in the picture that they have of God, that God has made himself known, they decide that God is actually a God who approves of evil.

That he is not a God of righteousness and truth and holiness but a God who loves evil. The second charge that the Israelites bring to God is that God is a God who does not care for justice.

God does not care about justice. He allows the wicked to get away with wrong. Again, they are cynical about their understanding about God. Both of these two charges that they bring are instances where they do not trust God at his word.

They are cynical of God's word. They are cynical of God's promises that God would bring about justice and curses. They change their understanding of God to suit their own lifestyle, to change their own understanding so that it fits in with them and fits in with the circumstances that they see around rather than trusting God at his word.

[24 : 01] Well, in the next three paragraphs that we have in chapter three, we see God's reply, God's answer. In the first paragraph, verses one and two a, we see God's general answer about these two charges that the Israelites bring.

In the second paragraph, we see there God's answer to their first charge that he approves of evil and in the third paragraph, God gives his answer to the second charge that he does not care about justice.

So let's have a look first of all at God's general answer to these charges that they bring. See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me.

The Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, indeed he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. But who can endure the day of his coming and who can stand when he appears?

This first paragraph has an emphasis on the shore and certain fact that God will do something about it, that God will indeed come.

[25 : 08] That day is described as the day of his coming, the day of the Lord. It will arrive suddenly and it will be unpleasant.

As we look there in those verses that we've just read, there are two characters that stand out. The first character is that of the messenger. We see that there are a messenger who is going to go before the Lord and prepare the way.

A messenger was someone who went before a visiting king to the inhabitants of that land, to tell about the coming of the great king, to pave the way, to make it passable, to remove all the obstacles, get rid of the boulders, fill in the ruts, get the way ready for that visiting king.

Malachi declares that there will be a messenger who will come and prepare the way for the Lord. And the Lord, well this Lord will come.

In the second sentence we see there the messenger of the covenant. This is not referring to the messenger preparing the way. Another name for messenger, another word for messenger is angel, the angel of the covenant.

[26 : 18] This is actually talking about the Lord himself and is associated with the Lord himself. The angel of the covenant is the one who would bring blessing and cursings on the people, the one who would bring salvation or terrible judgment.

When the Lord came he would bring blessings and curses, salvation and judgment. Let's look at the next paragraph where God answers the charge that he proves of evil.

For he is like a refiner's fire, like full of soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver until they present offerings to the Lord in righteousness.

Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old, as in former years. Note that when God appears, the Lord appears, he will be a refiner's fire, like a burning flame, heated to such high temperatures that it burns away the impurities.

The other picture that we have there is that of fuller's soap, soap that washes away the stains from garments, scrubbing them clean. The picture here is that when the Lord comes, he will get rid of the impurities from Israel.

[27 : 38] He will wash them away. God does not sit lightly to evil. He will do something about it. And notice how he starts there with the Levites, the priests. He's going to purify them first, get the leaders right.

And then notice in verse 4, it will spread to Judah and Jerusalem, to the people. It's interesting as we look around our diocese at the moment with all the allegations of sexual abuse going on.

The diocese has now just brought out a whole lot of guidelines for leaders, those involved in children's youth work and pastoral work, new guidelines to make sure that our leaders are right.

God starts with his leaders and purifies the Levites, so that he may purify our people to himself. In verse 5, God answers in more detail the second charge, that God is not a God of justice.

In verse 5, we see that God's judgment will draw near. Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers.

[28 : 44] At that time, there were much witchcraft going on around that time. So God is going to witness against them, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien.

The picture here is those who treat others badly and poorly. They run over the top of them. There are people, as this very last section says, who do not fear God.

God will indeed draw near in his judgment. God will bring about his ways.

Here we see a picture today of a people who, first of all, as we saw last week, did not know God's love. They despised, the priests despised God and caused many to stumble.

Here we see a group that are breaking faith with one another. Here is a group of people who are cynical about God and his promises. Yet there are passionate people with a passionate religion but their lives were disobedient.

[29 : 54] There are people who changed their understanding of God to suit themselves. But God's answer is that of what Malachi had to bring, the message that Malachi had to bring, that one day the day of the Lord would come.

Well, when is this day of the Lord? When will God bring about his judgment? As we look at the New Testament, we see that that day of the Lord has already started but it has not come in full.

As we look there in the New Testament, we see that John the Baptist is the one who is the messenger preparing the way of the Lord, the one who would call his people some 400 years later from Malachi, calling people to repent and be baptized.

John the Baptist was the one preparing the way, the way for Jesus, the Lord, the one to bring about purification and judgment and salvation, the one who would inaugurate the day of the Lord, Christ's first coming.

It's at that point in particular where Christ on the cross, where God pulls out his judgment and salvation. salvation. It's the day when the day of the Lord began.

[31 : 13] But we wait for when we will see the glory of this day, when everyone will see it, when Christ returns. When Christ returns, we'll be able to see this great and terrible judgment day.

And the question then comes, that question in verse 2, who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? It's easy for us, isn't it, here sitting now, to start doubting these promises, to start thinking that, you know, it can't be true, start doubting God's love.

We get burdened by sitting on the edge of our seats waiting for God to turn up again. So what do we do? We start becoming cynical of God's promises. We start changing our understanding of God to suit ourselves and our lifestyle.

We do not heed God's voice. We do not trust in his words. It was interesting, Michelle and I have just started watching Andrew Denton's new show.

I don't know if you've seen it. I think it's called Enough Rope. And there, Andrew Denton interviews different people. Last week, Andrew Denton had a fascinating interview with Renee Rifkin.

[32 : 27] And in the interview, Andrew said, asked Renee whether he was afraid of death. And Renee said, no, no, I'm not afraid of death.

There's nothing after death and so, you know, I'm not afraid of death at all. Then Andrew pushed him a bit further and he said, well, you have nothing to fear after death. There's nothing. Then why don't you take your life right now?

Well, at that point, Renee backed off a little and stated that he wasn't quite sure what happened after death so therefore he wasn't prepared to take his life now.

A friend of mine in Sydney had a similar attitude, if not a little stronger than Renee's. I asked him what he thought of death. Mind you, he was a person who did not believe in God.

He was a strong atheist. He said he was terrified of death. Why? Because he wasn't certain of what happened after. He knew the claims of the Bible and if they stood true, he knew that he was in for a hell of a time.

[33 : 34] He was afraid of death. Peg Warby was a lovely lady. Peg Warby, this last month, has been knitting a shawl for our little baby.

It's one of the last things she's made. It was the last bit of energy that she had. She knitted this beautiful shawl and I went and visited her last week to tell her how happy we were to have it and that I was looking forward to bringing her the news of what the baby was.

the day that I went and I was walking through the nursing home and the nursing home sister told me that the palliative care unit had just been through and had seen Peg and said that Peg did not have long to live.

Peg had declared to the palliative care unit and to the nurses that she wasn't afraid of death. But this nurse wasn't convinced by that and so she said it was good that I was here just to reassure her and try and talk her through the whole situation.

When I went in to see Peg, Peg was of right mind. She was sharp as ever. She was confident of what would happen. She knew the love of God.

[34 : 48] She said she was ready to die and be with her saviour. Such confidence. Well she died yesterday as I said at the beginning.

A woman full of faith. A woman ready to meet her Lord. How will you be when you come to that day? How will you be able to stand when he appears in all his glory?

Will you have that same love that Peg has? Or will you go underneath the refiner's fire of Christ the day of the Lord?

Amen.