

# Wearying God

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[ 0 : 00 ] God, we thank you that your word is so powerful that it pierces to the very core of our being, to the centre of our heart, to change us indeed from the inside out.

And we pray tonight as we sit under your word and its authority over us, that you will effect that purpose in our lives. For your glory's sake. Amen.

Amen. Please turn again to Malachi chapters 2 and 3 on page 778 in the Bibles in the pews. And this is the second of our three-part series on the last of the books of the Old Testament, this prophet Malachi.

Last week we saw that God begins this book of prophecy with a warm and firm declaration I have loved you.

Not just I have loved you in the past, but I still love you. I love you, he says. For this book is a bit like the words of a lover to somebody perhaps slightly estranged.

[ 1 : 12 ] It is God, the wooer, trying to woo back his partner, his wife, ancient Israel, who, as we'll see again tonight, has been somewhat faithless.

I'm just reading what I've discovered was the last of the Graham Greene novels I've yet to read. I love Graham Greene, the author, and I discovered that this novel I'd never read.

And I've almost finished it this afternoon. And it's the end of the affair. It's a fairly dreary sort of novel in a way, although beautifully written, set in wartime Britain.

And it's the affair of a wife with a single man who lives on the opposite side of the common, and yet the strange friendship also, in a way, between this man and the wife's husband.

And in a sense, her faithlessness to her husband, despite his apparent love for her, yet no action for her, reminded me of this passage in Malachi.

[ 2 : 17 ] Malachi, God the wooer, wanting his faithless wife back. And Israel, as we saw last week, felt that their plight, which was fairly pedestrian, was all because God had left them.

His love for them, they thought, had waned. You see, Malachi is a prophet in about 450 BC. Israel has come back from exile, from where they'd been captured by the Babylonians, and then under the Persians, were allowed to come back to their land.

But it didn't reach the glory days that the other prophets had expected. Yes, there was a temple, but it wasn't as good as Solomon's temple. The nation was not a nation. It had no king.

No king descended from David. It was a province of Persia, very much under Persian authority. And so they felt that this lack of blessing that had been promised by the prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah and others suggested that God's love for them had waned.

And so God began this book reaffirming his love for his people. And we saw that last week in a sense. And what he shows them is that their plight, their pedestrian nature as a Persian province, is not because he's to blame, because his love had waned.

[ 3 : 45 ] Their plight was because they were indifferent to him. That was seen in the fact that they offered sacrifices of animals that really cost them nothing, blind, sick animals instead of the best of the flock.

It was seen in the indifference of their priests, their religious leaders, who did not heed the word of God and indeed didn't bother teaching properly the word of God so that the people who listened to them were not actually kept from iniquity, but actually caused to stumble and go all sorts of different religious paths.

God says to them, I love you. You might think you love me or you might think that my love has waned, but no, he says, I love you.

And we see in this book of prophecy a glimpse of the true nature of the love of God, what real love is all about.

A love that endures, a love that is faithful, but not just an enduring faithful love, an enduring faithful love to an object that is faithless and unloving in response.

[ 4 : 59 ] It's one thing to commend the love of God that is faithful and keeps enduring, but that's even more remarkable when we realise that the object of that love, God's people Israel, was far from loving in response, far from obedient, but rather was faithless.

And so we see the true nature of God's love is that it is in some respects not dependent on the object of that love. You see, so often we love things because they give something back to us, whether that's a person or an object or an experience.

And very often people confuse love when they think they love somebody, but actually it's because of the good character or the good things that that person gives back to them.

It can actually be a selfish love in that respect. But not so with God because we see here that He loves them despite their indifference, despite their faithlessness, despite their sin, despite their going astray.

And we also see, and we'll see again tonight, that this love of God for His people is not a fleeting thing or a casual thing.

[ 6 : 16 ] It's not something that God wakes up in the morning and thinks, wow, you know, I think I've fallen in love with Israel. Not at all. There is a deliberateness, a contractual nature to this love.

That is, it is a firm commitment pledged and promised even publicly by God. It is grounded in the covenant promises that God makes to His people in the early parts of the Old Testament.

God guarantees that love in those promises, in effect, in that contract or covenant. That is, love is not simply an emotional feeling that will last as long as it lasts and may fade away to be replaced by something else.

Not at all. God pledges and promises publicly a firm, enduring love regardless, in effect, of the response of the object of that love, ancient Israel.

And in that respect, God's love for His people is the basis of how we are to view marriage, for example. So that when a couple marry, it is a public, contractual, or covenantal love that is to be endless, or at least on earth, for the rest of our lives together on earth, till death do us part.

[ 7 : 42 ] That is, God's love for His people is expressed by way of covenant, contractual promise, and that then is the model or basis for human love, especially human marriage.

In this passage tonight, at least the last part of chapter 2 that we're looking at, two levels are running simultaneously through this passage. God's covenantal love for His people is one of the threads, but at the same time, the other thread is human marriage between a husband and a wife. And these two threads are running through this passage together, intertwined, so to speak. And on both scores, that is, on their relationship with God and on their relationship husband-wife within ancient Israel, the ancient Israelites were faithless.

the key word in verses 10 to 16 is faithless. It's there in verse 10, it's there in verse 11, it's there in verse 14, there in verse 15, there in verse 16.

Five times. Significant. Faithless. On either or both of those scores, their relationship with God and their relationship within marriage, Israel is faithless.

[ 9 : 09 ] This section begins with an accusation in effect. Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? That is, the people of Israel, special in God's sight. Why then are we faithless to one another?

That is, at the inter-human dimension. We are profaning the covenant of our ancestors. And that makes it at the vertical level as well. Because their faithlessness to each other is at the same time a faithlessness with God.

And the covenant of the ancestors is the covenant God made with Abraham in the first book of the Old Testament in Genesis that pledged and promised and guaranteed his love for Abram and Abram's descendants thereafter for eternity in effect.

What are the details of profaning this covenant? Verse 11 goes on to tell us, Judah has been faithless, that's a name for the people of God, and abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem.

Judah and Israel are often used as groups of or together the whole of the people of God, Jerusalem the capital city, so it's all standing for the people of God. And we're told they've been faithless and abomination, that is something absolutely despicable in God's eyes, a clear breach of his covenant law has been committed in Jerusalem the capital city which points towards its temple and sacrificial

system, for Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord which he loves.

[10:43] How has he done that? He's married the daughter of a foreign God. Remember the two levels are intertwined here. The covenant relationship that is meant to be exclusive between God, the real God, and his people Israel or Judah and human marriage, husband to wife.

The crux here is that as we saw last week they're offering bad sacrifices, they're treating the sacrificial system casually, hence they're profaning the sanctuary, the temple that is in the centre of Jerusalem.

But part of that is not just the actual ritual of sacrifice that's not being carried out correctly, but actually their life has been corrupted and therefore whatever sacrifices they would actually offer would be unacceptable in God's eyes.

Their key crime is that they've married the daughter of a foreign God, not a sort of another God figure so much as they've married a person, a wife, who belongs to a different religion.

That's the idea. It's a religious intermarriage that they have committed against God. That is, simply, what's happening is that these Israelites are intermarrying with pagans, worshippers of other gods who are, in effect, no gods.

[12:12] We know this was a serious problem in the 5th century BC of ancient Israel, not only from here in this book of Malachi, but the book of Ezra and the book of Nehemiah both come from the same period of time.

Ezra about 458 BC, Nehemiah perhaps 444 BC or thereabouts. And both of those books detail the significant sin of the intermarriage of the Israelites with pagans of other nations.

So in Ezra 9, for example, it begins telling us, after these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, the people of Israel, the priests and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations from the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians and Amorites.

For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way.

There exactly is the sin that Malachi is exposing here at pretty much the same period of time as Ezra chapter 9 and Nehemiah 13 for example gives us the same sort of statement.

[13:27] Not just the people in general but even the priests, the Levites are marrying pagan wives and thus corrupting their purity as a nation because they are compromising their faith in God by marrying women who come from pagan nations and pagan groups of people.

It's a serious problem. It's not a racial problem. It's a religious problem and it compromises faith in the same way that Paul exhorts the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 6 do not be yoked to unbelievers. That is for Christians as for the ancient Old Testament people of God we ought not be yoked married to unbelievers. So too here is that exhortation.

And so for those of you who are not yet married we I should say we ought to pray that if we are going to fall in love with someone and eventually marry them pray that it's not going to be a non-Christian because so often I've seen people who are Christians and they go out with somebody who's not a Christian believing that somehow they'll be converted and occasionally that happens but mostly it doesn't and when it doesn't the Christian's faith is compromised they are weakened now there are plenty of Christians who are married to people who are not Christians and they keep going in their Christian faith but it's a bit like a bonsai tree its roots are sort of trimmed it's not able to grow to its full height and depth and fruit because it's compromised within their marriage they are limited in the ways they can serve in the ways they can give in their attendance so for those of us who are not yet married let me urge you and plead with you that your relationship with God is so important eternally important and marriage is only for this life which even if it's 65 years is not that long don't run the risk because the first steps which you might think are innocent may take you down a path from which you're unwilling to return no wonder that we get such strong words in verse 12 if marrying if marrying of pagans compromises faith and leads people away from God Malachi's words or God's words through Malachi 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 that is they will be cut off from the people of God either literally through exile or being kicked out of the land it may even be through death or capital punishment the details aren't clear but the end result is clear they will be cut off from God because of such intermarriage with pagans as a result these sorts of people they find that their tears and crying to God are actually in vain this you do as well

verse 13 says you cover the Lord's altar with tears with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favour at your hand here are people acting just like the pagans do think of Elijah on the top of Mount Carmel along with all those pagan prophets who cry and dance and cut themselves and rant and rave all day and it falls on deaf ears

[ 17 : 06 ] Ezekiel 8 the same sort of depiction of pagan worship lots of crying lots of tears lots of emotionalism but God's ears are deaf to it and hear the same thing God will have nothing from such people why why not they ask verse 14 why doesn't he because the Lord was a witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless though she is your companion and your wife by covenant now the two levels running through here coalesce at this point they are faithless to God in taking pagan wives but the actual context of this is that they have already been married to an Israelite wife the wife of your youth in those days people would often marry as teenagers and now they're actually wanting to dump their Israelite wife to go after some exotic beauty from Canaan or the

Amorites or wherever so at the one time they're faithless to God at the same time they're faithless to their wife the two levels come together both are relationships of covenant with God and with their wives not only that in a marriage between a wife and a husband God is the witness to that covenant marriage that is a person in marriage is not free to dump their spouse to go after someone else basically God says it's a covenant and at the back of their mind as they hear Malachi's words would be the opening words of the book I have loved you God says Israel is profaning both covenants marriage covenant and the covenant with God and God wants his people to marry each other that is within the bounds of the people of God so that as verse 15 tells us they will produce godly offspring that is so often

I mean it's so hard anyway for Christian parents to bring up Christian children but even harder is it when one parent is a Christian and the other a pagan for their children to grow up as Christian in effect that's the exhortation in verse 15 as well and so the end of verse 15 says so look to yourselves and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth stick to your marriages don't abandon them and certainly don't abandon them for a pagan wife because in doing that you're abandoning the covenant with God himself it comes then as no surprise when we read the striking words at the beginning of the next verse verse 16 I hate divorce an unequivocal statement by God I hate divorce and yet how often we forget that and how often we pretend that that is not the case how often we rationalize just earlier this year

I met with a member of our church I suppose in a sense now a former member who told me that he decided he was leaving his wife there'd been no love there for years he was going to live and marry or live with at least to start with somebody else and he thought that he was repentant even though he was doing that and that God would therefore look in favour on him I said he'd got it all wrong but he didn't listen and I've heard Christians say that divorce was an enriching experience from which they've learned lots of things as though somehow it's quite noble in fact almost one of those experiences that we all want to have in life God says I hate divorce so when we contemplate that bear those words in mind but bear in mind at the same time

God is speaking to a faithless people who've been in a sort of marriage with him and his opening words of this letter were not I'm going to walk away from you and find somebody else who's more faithful his opening words are I love you despite your faithlessness that is God himself becomes the model for sticking at marriage even if our spouse is faithless that's quite striking I think God's hatred of divorce in verse 16 is both at the level of their faithlessness to him as well as their faithlessness within marriage and his statement at the beginning I love you means that we must work hard if we're married it's worth putting in the effort the energy the devotion the determination the humility the communication to ensure that marriage will last because

[ 22 : 40 ] God hates divorce and he still loves even his faithless people God is a model of faithfulness despite Israel's faithlessness and in effect he's saying that married people do well to imitate his perseverance and determination in their own marriages no matter how difficult that is years ago before I was ordained and I was a student minister training to be ordained I fell asleep on a pastoral visit that is in an afternoon I was visiting an old lady who talked a lot and it was cold outside and warm inside as is the want of many elderly folk and in a fairly dark room I'm not telling you this by the way as a model of pastoral ministry or anything like that to my shame I dozed off she didn't comment and

I sort of hoped that I dozed off for such a short period and it was dark enough and she was talking so much that she probably didn't even notice to this day I have no idea whether she did or not I've come close on other occasions let me tell you but in a sense I could say her words wearied me that is just this sort of one of those power naps you know 15 seconds so I can sort of justify it along those lines but I was wearied by her words and that's exactly what God accuses Israel of doing in the next verse as we sort of come to a verse that stands by itself in some ways you have wearied the Lord with your words it's hard to imagine that with God isn't it as though somehow God is tired and sort of like yawn when we're praying to him but it's not necessarily prayers that are in mind here although in one sense any talking with God is praying you say how have we wearied him and his answer is all who do evil are good in the sight of the

Lord and he delights in them or by you asking where is the God of justice the first is a false accusation the second is a good question but it comes from a people who are blind to the truth and that's why he's wearied the first is a false attribution to God of indifference that is all who do evil are good in the sight of the Lord as though God is morally indifferent to how a person lives their life and that's it seems what some ancient Israelites were in effect saying to God doesn't matter whether you're good or bad God doesn't seem to show any difference in the way he treats you and God's wearied by those words when they falsely attribute to him such indifference and some Israelites are saying where's the God of justice we expect justice here and God's wearied by that we might think well that's a bit odd because God the problem is that ancient

Israel all too clearly saw the speck in others eyes but they didn't look in the mirror and see the plank in their own you see what wearies God is the self righteousness that lies behind those two statements in verse 17 you see ancient Israel thought that they were good and therefore they should be treated well and they should be receiving the blessings of the covenant and prosperity and so on and they thought that somehow God was indifferent to their goodness because they weren't actually doing all that well the real thing is not that they're doing well and that God's indifferent but that they're not doing well they didn't see the plank in their own eye and they're calling out for justice at the end of verse 17 it's all very well if you are faithful to God but they're calling out for justice against their enemies thinking that they somehow will stand before God immune on judgment day because they're so good they're so righteous that is what's wearying God is the self righteousness behind their prayers and their cries in effect they are blaming God for in action in the world little seeing that in fact they are unrighteous and faithless so what's God's response where is the God of justice well God says he's coming see I'm sending my messenger to prepare the way before me the name my messenger is actually the name Malachi so it could be some say Malachi the prophet is actually the messenger who's come and that could actually be how it's meant to be or it could be yet a messenger yet to come but God is saying you're crying out for the God of justice well let me tell you I'm coming see a messenger my messenger Malachi even is there to prepare a way before

[ 28 : 06 ] I come and then the Lord whom you seek that is in their cries of verse 17 will suddenly come to his temple and already in this letter we've realized that Israel's sins are located in the temple with the poor sacrifices and the corrupt priests and the intermarriage of priests and the God of justice is coming to the temple he's not coming to the borders of their land to the Canaanites and Amorites to obliterate them he's coming to the temple his temple and the covenant in whom you delight that is the Lord himself indeed he is coming says the Lord of hosts indeed he is coming preceded by a messenger the God of justice is on the way we might well think well God's just answering their prayers after all how can they actually be wearying him but verse 2 shows the sting who can endure the day of his coming the expected answer is no one who can stand when he appears the expected answer is no one just like

Isaiah the prophet in the temple hundreds of years before when he saw a vision of the Lord fell down prostrate who can stand when he comes and ancient Israel when they were asked those questions may well have been saying we can we can we'll endure on the day the Lord's coming we want the God of justice to obliterate our enemies to vindicate us but no one can see cocky Israel is presuming upon its own self righteousness and that is ultimately futile only those who are faithful can stand on that day and they are not at any level notice how God's holy presence is described in the next part of verse two he's like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap a fire purifies metal so presumably you dig it out of the ground in beacons field in tasmania if it's still open you throw it into the oven and all the grot and dirt and dross will be burned away and you'll end up with a pure gold

ingot when you open the oven a couple of hours later or something like that

I suppose my father was a metallurgist and I've learned nothing of that from him the fuller's soap is actually not literally soap as we know didn't exist then it's fuller's lye it's like a bleach that would separate or bleach out the colour of the impurity from the fabric a cleansing sort of agent in effect God is coming to judge it will be a fierce judgment on that day when the God of justice or judgment the word is the same comes but it's not total obliteration either it is a refining and purifying day for his people when their sins their dross their imperfections their faithlessness will be burned up and they will be left pure and cleansed perfected on that day let me say though it's a fierce image it is not sort of one of those images of soap that you see on

TV where somebody luxuriates in a bath in a plane or something and it's all very nice and pampering fuller's lye or soap and a refiner's fire is hot hard painful work scrubbing and burning away the sin that is it's not something we jump into lightly it will be painful to be purified is the thrust of the image so to speak and verse 3 says that God 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 there's a sense in which that ancient metals like gold and silver were often used for mirrors and apparently I don't know whether this is true if you purify the metal or gold or silver in the cauldron or whatever you do it in in the end when it becomes pure you can see reflections and so maybe it's helpful to even think that here is

God sitting purifying almost until he sees himself in what he purifies well that of course is exactly what they cried out for in verse 17 I'll be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers the adulterers those who swear falsely against those who oppress the hard workers in their wages those who oppress the widow the orphan against those who do not fear me says the Lord of hosts seven representative types of sin are all breaking commandments from the

[ 34 : 06 ] Old Testament covenant law some of them ten commandments others from elsewhere in the Old Testament law ultimately those categories of people show that they do not fear God and therefore they do not belong to him and they'll be burned up in judgment they're part of the dross that will be consumed when the refiner's fire comes there is a solemn warning here not only to ancient Israel but to us do not presume on the coming of the Lord that somehow you'll stand and endure that day what wearies God here of ancient Israel is their self righteousness and if we self righteously cry out for the Lord to come we think that somehow by our goodness our religiosity our religious practices or heritage by our baptism or our church attendance or something like that that we will stand before God on that final day we weary him with our words and beware that day when it comes so look to yourselves and don't be faithless

God says twice in 2.15 and 2.16 the sin of Israel here is the sin of self righteousness and it is such an insidious sin you see self righteousness drives us to think that God is our debtor he owes me something I'm righteous and yet God owes me and that's what Israel's cries in this book of prophecy reflect self righteousness deceives us into thinking that somehow we've been wronged the world might owe us something rather than we are the wrong doers the sin of self righteousness blinds us to a knowledge of God's grace for when we're self righteous we think whatever we receive from God we deserve and we merit but we don't and so we've lost the knowledge of grace and the sin of self righteousness deprives us of fearing the

Lord as the end of verse five suggests if if you're self righteousness you don't fear the Lord you think you've got all it takes the sin of self righteousness compels us in the end to faithlessness and the cries of someone who is self righteous weary God and yet strikingly in the midst of all of this great though was their faithlessness greater still is the faithfulness of God unchanging continuing in love despite their wearying words despite them despising him as we saw last week a God who's rich in mercy extending his grace to forgive and the grace to refine for many of these Israelites belonging to God deserved punishment and when God comes they'll be refined and purified Malachi predicted the coming messenger and the coming Lord and you don't have to look far ahead though he was 450 BC to find the fulfillment in my Bible you only need to turn over about two or three pages and when you come to Matthew chapter three we find there the announcement by someone who says the voice of one crying out in the wilderness prepare the way of the Lord so close in a sense within our Bibles to Malachi prophecy the words of John the Baptist a messenger proclaiming that the Lord is coming prepare the way for him and then read on a few verses in that same chapter of Matthew and you find the words I baptize you with water John the Baptist speaking for repentance we'll see that next week in Malachi 3 but one who's more powerful than I am is

coming after me I'm not worthy to carry his sandals he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire his winnowing fork is in his hand he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire surely no coincidence about the connections of refining and fire that we saw in

Malachi 3 the Baptist is the messenger preparing the way for the Lord Jesus Christ who during his lifetime did suddenly appear in the temple rebuking the self righteousness of the religious leaders the priests the Pharisees the scribes and others but then shockingly dying and being buried and astonishingly rising and ascending to heaven from where he sends his spirit to work in us and change us and purify us but not yet perfectly for Christians still await the final coming of the God of justice when the Lord Jesus Christ himself the same one who was crucified in humility and shame and hung on that cross will come in glorious splendor that every eye will see and every person on earth will know that it is he and all those who've ever lived and will still be living on the day when he returns will be brought before his glorious judgment throne that we know second chances then who can endure that day who can stand before the throne of the judge of the universe the

[ 40 : 06 ] Lord Jesus Christ the God of justice the Lord himself those who are faithful but who will they be those who've trusted in the grace of Jesus death for their sins forgiven will find that unquenchable fire to purify and not destroy so that they'll walk into heaven in the righteousness of Christ not their own perfect like gold that's been purified like dirty garments that have been washed with fuller's soap will have no right to be there other than the extraordinary love of

God I have loved you and I still love you though you are faithless what a remarkable act of purification that will be I cannot fathom what I will be like as a person in heaven so far from perfection am I so corrupt is my heart so evil my thoughts so far falling short my actions love love but praise be to God for his mercy and love not only to forgive but to purify me to make me perfect on that day with faith with humility with repentance and fear but never without those things we pray come

Lord Jesus up