

I have Loved.....You have Despised

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 18th of May 2003. The preacher is Paul Dudley.

His sermon is entitled, I have loved, you have despised. It is based on Malachi chapter 1 verse 1 through to chapter 2 verse 9.

I'm putting it on my shelf, hopefully for one day when I might read it. But it's great buying books. I have a friend in Sydney who was looking in a bookshop and he came across a book by the title of The 100, A Ranking of the Most Influential People in History.

It was by the author of Michael Hart. And he set about trying to work out who are the most 100 influential people in the world since the beginning of time. Well, where do you think Jesus may have come in this list?

I mean, he's a fairly influential character. Where would he rate on this top 100? Michael Hart's top 100. Would he go number one? Two? No, he came third.

[1 : 18] Jesus was the third most, according to Michael Hart, the third most influential person in history. He came behind Sir Isaac Newton and Muhammad.

Yeah, Muhammad. Well, my friend was a little puzzled by this. So he opened up the book to try and work out what the criteria was. Why was Muhammad above Jesus? Michael Hart put there the reason why Muhammad was put above Jesus was because when he looked at the followers of Muhammad, Muslims, they were far more influenced by Muhammad than Christians were by the teaching of Jesus.

What a great indictment on us. That Muslims should be more influenced by Muhammad than we are by Jesus' teachings in our life.

How do you sit with the words of Jesus? Do you take it lightly, his words? Does Jesus' words influence every part of your life?

Do you doubt the promises of God? Do you trust and obey him in everything? Well, it's not just our culture that had a problem with sitting loosely to God's word.

[2 : 37] It's not just our culture that seems to have a problem with this. Some 450 years before Christ, God's people were in terrible danger of having God pour out his wrath upon them.

For they too had the same problem. They sat lightly to God's word. They did not take to heart God's commandments.

Well, as we come to God's word this morning, let me pray for us that as we come to God's word now, that we will be influenced by it and that will impact on every area of our life.

Let me pray. Father, we do indeed thank you for your word. We pray that you will help us to listen to your word carefully and to apply it to our lives, that you may influence every area of our life.

We pray this in your son's name. Amen. Well, it would be good for you to open up page 777 in the Pew Bibles to the book of Malachi.

[3 : 43] For the next four weeks, we're going to be looking through this prophet, one of the last prophets in the Old Testament, some 400 years before Christ. We see there at the beginning in verse 1 that this is an oracle.

The word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. Now, it says there by Malachi, but we're not really sure whether Malachi was the person who wrote this minor prophet.

The actual name Malachi means my messenger. So, it could be that it was actually an anonymous prophet who wrote it down as God's messenger, who came to declare God's words.

I feel a little uncomfortable about this. I think in reality, I think it probably is more likely that the real name of the prophet was Malachi, which did also mean God's messenger, my messenger, simply because otherwise it would be the only Old Testament prophet who wrote anonymously.

It's not characteristic of Hebrew writings. So, therefore, I'm going to assume that the name is Malachi. That was his real name. But if you hold a different opinion, it's not going to make a lot of difference as we work through this.

[4 : 56] So, we see that this is written by Malachi, but it is actually, in fact, the words of God. The word of the Lord to Israel.

These are God's words. God's words to Israel. Here is God speaking clearly and loudly to a situation, to a group of people who are sitting lightly to him and his commands.

What Malachi does throughout this book is try to bring people face to face with what God is saying to them. Try to get them to look at their hearts.

What are the attitudes of their hearts? Try to get them to come face to face with it to see what God has to say to them. The last thing we see there, that it's addressed to Israel.

It's addressed to the nation Israel, to the whole of Israel, but Malachi was actually, in fact, speaking to Judah. One group of the two split.

[6 : 00] The group that has split. After Solomon, we saw the two nations split and both of them end up being in exile.

And after exile, in about 538, Judah returns to Jerusalem to try and rebuild the walls and the temple. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged them in this process that they need to rebuild the temple because when the temple was rebuilt, great blessings would flow out on Israel.

The great time of the Messiah would come. And so they built the temple. It wasn't as grand as the original temple, but they built it.

When Malachi comes onto the scene, it is some 40, 50 years later after the temple has been rebuilt. They are still waiting. They feel disappointed, I imagined.

Can God really be trusted? The temple's been built, but nothing is happening. Can God's word be trusted? And we see from this letter that they start to doubt God and it's seen by their actions.

[7 : 11] Well, let's first have a look at verses 2 through to 5 where Malachi addresses the nation as a whole. The way the book works is that Malachi, or God, speaks a statement.

He makes a statement about the people. What ends up happening is the people then respond. God tells the people what their response of their heart is. And then God answers their response of their heart, their question.

So, for example, look in verse 2. I have loved you, says the Lord, but you say, how have you loved us? God declares his love.

There is the statement. I have loved you. The question, the attitude that is deep inside the people's heart is, how have you loved us?

The people have grown tired waiting, obeying and loving because nothing apparently has happened. The great sea of changes that has swept through history, well, that's all swept over them and it's now happening to the west of them.

[8 : 18] They're left there with just the dullness of life. Obeying God's commands, spending money to pay for the tithes to support the priests, giving prized lambs and calves to be burnt at the altar, learning religious traditions that seemed to be to a God who was distant.

They prayed their prayers that seemed to be unanswered. God was apparently doing nothing at all in Judah's life at this moment. All the promises for the future blessing seemed like hollow mockeries of her service to him.

She wondered whether they were God's chosen people after all. They demanded a current proof of God's divine love for them. They wanted to know that God still loved her.

In the second part of verse 2, God gives his answer to this attitude, this attitude of not loving God. He's not Esau Jacob's brother, says the Lord.

Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau. He starts by looking back to their past. The way that God chose Jacob not Esau to be the chosen race, the one who would pour out his blessing upon, the one who he'd love.

[9 : 42] But Esau, he chose not to. This tribe, Esau, grew to be the tribe of the Edomites and it grew to be quite a large nation.

So we look there in verse 3. I have made his hill, that's the Edomites, Esau, the hill country, a desolation of his heritage, a desert of jackals.

If Edom says, we are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins, the Lord of hosts says, they may build, but I will tear down until they are called the wicked country, the people with whom the Lord is angry forever.

The Edomites, they were decimated by tribes that came through. Israel would have seen this, but they may have claimed that they were going to try and rebuild themselves.

And in the end, God says, I am angry with Edom forever. What a terrible thing to have God's anger upon you forever. What Malachi is saying is, Israel, look out around you.

[10 : 52] Look out to the nations around you. Look what God is doing. Look at the way that God is bringing about terrible destruction on Edom, the one who did not choose. See this and recognise that you are loved, that you are precious in his sight.

Look how wonderfully God is dealing with them. Lift your eyes. Your own eyes shall see this and you shall say, great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel.

Note a few things in this first paragraph. Note these are covenant words. A covenant is an agreement, like a marriage, where two parties come together and they make promises together.

Well, the covenant that God made, he made with the people of Israel, where he chose them to be his precious possession. Well, here we see that God loves them.

This is part of the covenant language. As we work through this book, listen out for the many times that the covenant language comes through, that of cursing and blessing, that of love, that of commitment.

[12 : 10] Listen for it because the book is based on this great covenant that God has with his people. The second thing to note here is the very deep level of sin that is in Israel's heart.

The base level sin is a sin of not believing in God, of not trusting, not waiting for him, not taking God at his word.

They did not know the love of God, the love of a father, that a father has for a child. I love my children. They are so precious to me. They bring tears to my eyes when I think about them, such is the love that I have for my children.

But God has a love for his people that is so deep. God has chosen them not because they have the right answers, not because they're particularly attractive, not because of their, who they are or their strength.

He chooses them because he chooses them. They are his precious possession. Yet time and time again, Israel shuns God's love.

- [13 : 22] They avoid commitment with him. They follow other lovers, possessions and themselves. This is nothing other than the sin of idolatry. Rather than committing themselves to God and the love that he has for them, they follow the desires of their hearts.

Well, this is the first and greatest importance throughout the whole book that we are to note. This is the deep level sin that affects all their other actions. They disbelieve in God's love.

They do not recognise that God loves them. They fail to stay in a committed relationship with him. Well, after addressing the nation as a whole, he then starts to look at particular groups.

We see this in verse 6 through to the end of our reading today in chapter 2 verse 9 where he looks at the priesthood. Those who are meant to be the ones who are set apart for God's service.

Those who are meant to walk with God, to be holy for his service. The ones who had greater responsibilities but also greater accountability. In chapter 1 verses 6 through the 14 we see God's accusation against the priests.

- [14 : 38] Look there in verse 6 and 7. Note how again he starts with a statement and then they give a question and then he answers. But notice how this process is an onrolling process.

They behave like a rebellious child, like someone just keeps on saying how, why? We don't understand. Look there in verse 6. A son honours his father and servants their master.

If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? Says the Lord of hosts to you. He starts by saying a son honours his father, a servant their masters.

He talks to the priests, what do you see me as? Who do you regard me as? Do you regard me as your father or as your master? If I'm your master, where is the respect?

If I'm your father, where is the honour you show me? Instead, O priests, you despise my name. They despise his name.

- [15 : 47] They don't show him any honour or respect at all. But here comes their question. But you say, how have we despised your name? God gives the answer.

By offering polluted food on my altar. Not content with this, they say again in their heart, how have we polluted it? By thinking that the Lord's table may be despised.

He then in verses 8 and 9 gives them the example of how they actually despise the Lord's table.

We see there in verses 8 and 9. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not wrong? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not wrong? Try presenting that to your governor.

Will he be pleased with you or show you favour? It was a part of the law that when you brought your offerings, your sacrifices to the Lord, they were to be a perfect sacrifice.

- [16 : 46] The firstborn, without a blemish, not blind or lame. But here they were bringing blind, lame sacrifices.

Here they were despising God's name. God's name. The Lord says, what if you brought it to a governor? What if you brought it to a ruling party around that area?

Do you think they would be pleased if you brought them a mangy sheep, one that was blind? Do you think that would win his favour? That he would be gracious to you?

Of course not. How much more so the Lord of the universe? What does it say about how you treat him? What does that say about how you think of him? In verse 9, and now implore the favour of God that he may be gracious to us.

That is, the fault is yours. Will he show favour to any of you? Says the Lord of hosts. With irony they say they call on the favour of the Lord, but their fault is theirs.

[17 : 55] will God show any favour to them? We see in verse 10, there God's evaluation of their sacrifices.

Oh, that someone among you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not kindle fire on my altar. In vain. I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hands.

Here is God's evaluation of their sacrifices that they are bringing. It would be better for the temple doors to be shut up, for no sacrifices to be made at all, than for them to carry on the way that they are carrying on.

He has no pleasure in them and their sacrifices. To make his point even clearer, he talks about the nations, he compares them and the way they are at the moment with the nations around them.

Verse 11 is an astounding verse, astonishing. From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

[19 : 16] Compared to you, the nations are offering pure sacrifices. His name is great among the nations. How can this be?

How can God's name be great among the nations? Many have used this verse wrongly, therefore, to say that it doesn't matter who you worship, it doesn't matter whether it's a stone idol or a wooden idol, it doesn't matter whether it's Buddha or anything else, as long as you worship in truth and integrity, well, then you're really worshiping God.

Many use the verse to explain this. I just received an email last night from a friend who was studying in Africa, in a Bible college there, where this very point came up.

They were trying to teach that the African gods were there before the gospel arrived in Africa, that a true saving knowledge could be had in these African gods because when you worship to those African gods, you're only really worshiping to the great God.

my friend could not accept this theology because as we look at the Bible, the general teaching of the Bible contradicts this.

[20 : 31] The contents of Malachi's prophecy contradicts this. Malachi says, setting my name, worship my name, not the name of some other God, but God's name.

Well, that leaves us with a problem then. How is it that God's name is worshipped from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun? How is this possible?

Well, many claims perhaps it's the Jews of dispersion, those Jews that haven't been brought back yet to Jerusalem, that are scattered throughout the world. Perhaps it's them or perhaps it's the Gentiles who have been converted to Judaism, perhaps like in past generations like Ruth or Rahab.

While there is some truth in this, there is a bit of a problem. The problem is that offerings to be pure must not be brought on soil of the heathens or to be placed on polluted altars.

Now, the fullness of this text points forward to the Messianic Age. It points forward to a time when worship would happen all over the world, where there would be a pure sacrifice.

[21 : 44] the converts and the Jews are dispersion. They're certainly the first fruits. That's the beginning of what is about to happen. And Malachi is pointing this out. Something astonishing is about to happen.

No longer will people have to be dependent on sacrifices offered in Jerusalem. God will be worshipped throughout the world. Malachi points this out.

He does this to show how lax and how disgusting their sacrifices are. In verses 12 through to 14, he reiterates this in very clear language.

But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted and the food for it may be despised. What a weariness this is, you say, and you sniff at me, says the Lord of hosts.

You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick and this you bring as your offering. Shall I accept this from your hands, says the Lord? Cursed be the cheat who has a male in the flock and vows to give it and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.

[23 : 02] For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is revered among the nations. their sacrifices were disgusting in God's sight.

They were offering poor substitutes, keeping the better parts for themselves. These disgusting sacrificial practices speak loudly of their attitudes, what was in their heart, the way that they despised God.

So the first thing is it shows their attitude to God, that they do not honour him as a father or their master. They despise him. Their attitude also shows their attitude about themselves.

They do not respect the privilege of their position. And finally, it shows their attitude towards atonement. The whole point of the sacrifices was that the animal would be brought to the altar.

It would be slaughtered there and the blood would be poured out on the altar. This was God's way of bringing forgiveness. They could be sure of God's forgiveness, the gift that God gave.

[24 : 10] But here they were saying they don't need God's forgiveness. It doesn't matter what they bring. They didn't really need God's forgiveness anyhow.

This was their attitude to atonement. Well, in chapter 2 verses 1 through the 9, God declares his judgment on the priests.

Like the warning passages at the end of Deuteronomy where Israel is told to choose life, to trust and obey God as they enter the promised land or they would suffer the curse of God.

The priests are called to repent and do the same. They are called to follow him. And now, O priests, this command is for you.

if you will not listen, if you will not lay it to heart to give glory to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send curse on you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them because of you, because you do not lay it to heart.

[25 : 13] In verse 3, he explains a little clearer what this curse means. I will rebuke your offspring and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and I will put you out of my presence.

What a vivid picture of excrement smeared on their faces. What a terrible picture. But it's not just the dung.

Part of the language here is also, it's all the parts that was unclean of an animal when it was brought to the sacrifice. The entrails, the stomach, the skin of the animal.

These parts were to be taken outside the city and burnt. For me, this is quite a vivid picture. Growing up on a farm, we used to do our own meat for the freezer.

One of the most disgusting parts was when you had to remove the bowels and the internal intestines of a sheep or the cow. And you had to deal so carefully with it because it just smelt so bad.

[26 : 24] Here God says, the curse upon you is the humiliation of having it smeared all over you. What a humiliation for them. But not just a humiliation.

These were the unclean parts of that sacrifice animal. By having it smeared all over them, it made them unfit, unclean themselves, unfit to carry out their duties.

In verses 4 through to 9, God gives the reasons for his judgment. He starts by pointing out what the priests were meant to be like, like the original priests of Levi.

He talks about it in the language of a covenant that he has with Levi. Again, that language of two parties coming together. Although when we look through scripture we don't see when God actually makes this covenant with Levi.

We do see that Moses and Aaron come from the tribe of Levi. And that they did in fact, the tribe of Levi, have God's divine promise of blessing. This promise of divine blessing is as good as God's covenant.

[27 : 37] covenant. And so we see there in verse 4, verse 4 and 5, the two sides of this covenant. God's side of the covenant and the priest's side of the covenant.

Know then that I have sent this command to you that my covenant with Levi may hold, says the Lord of hosts. My covenant with him was a covenant of life and well-being.

There is God's side. He gives life and well-being. The other side, the covenant with Levi, the priest's side, what was their side? Which I gave him.

This called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. In verse 6 there, we see that they also were people who were to know God's law.

They were to have the true instruction in their mouth that there was to be no wrong on their lips. But not only that, they were to live out these actions. They were to walk with God in integrity and uprightness.

[28 : 40] They were to be people to influence many for good, turning many from iniquity. They were to be people who were to guard the knowledge of God, to be people who were personal counsellors, for they were the messengers of the Lord.

This is the way that priests were meant to be. what a far cry the priests of Malachi day were. In verse 8, we see the way that they are.

But you have turned aside from your way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts.

They turned from God's instructions. They have corrupted the covenant of Levi. And in verse 9, God declares his judgment on them.

And so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you have not kept my ways, but have shown partiality in your instruction.

[29 : 51] creation. Here were a group of people who did not know the love of God. Here were a group of people who despised God's name by bringing terrible sacrifices to the altar.

They were a group of people who were also causing many to stumble. As we look at the passage for us today, at the heart of this passage, we see the repugnance of sin.

We see how disgusting and revolting sin is in God's eyes. At the centre of Israel's sin was a failure to know the love of God. They did not take him at his word.

They did not obey him in their actions. They despised his name. They offered cheap sacrifices. They caused many to stumble. God treats sin seriously.

The terrible judgment and curse, the wrath that is hurled down is described here upon the people who commit sin. So serious is sin that God sent his only son into this world to die, to take upon himself the curse, taking upon himself the punishment that we deserve at the cross.

[31 : 24] God's son. What a dear sacrifice that is. God's one and only son. So serious is sin, just one sin, that it costs the life of his son.

sin. It's at the cross that we see the seriousness of sin. But it's also at the cross that we see the supreme example of God's love.

It's at the cross that we see God's affection for us. We see God's commitment to us. We see that we are God's precious possession that he would give his son up for us.

Do you know this love? Or are you like the people of Malachi who when you look deep down inside your hearts you don't know the love of God?

Can I encourage you to look to the cross, continue to read, to see there because that is where you see the supreme example of God's love for us.

[32 : 34] But it's also at the cross is where we see the perfect priest. We've had a description here of the priests who were not perfect, who brought poor sacrifices.

Jesus is the perfect priest, the one who revered God's name, who spoke truth and lived it out. But not only was he the perfect priest, he was the perfect sacrifice himself.

Because of him, we, people from among all nations, from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun, because of him and what he did for us, we can declare the greatness of God's name.

Because of his pure sacrifice, we can be a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people belonging to God. But it means also that we must follow our Lord Jesus.

Romans 12, at the beginning, says there we are to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. This is to be an attitude from our heart.

[33 : 48] We're not to give in the leftovers of our life, not a blemished parts of our life, not the areas that don't really matter, but God demands living sacrifices.

We must not despise his name. For leaders, this means we must be very careful. In Matthew chapter 18, Jesus gives a very stern warning for those who are leaders, not to cause little ones to stumble.

In the midst of chaos for me at the moment, Paul Barker going away on holidays, my wife about to have a baby at any moment, me not finishing this sermon a couple of days ago, I was sitting there at the lunchtime table thinking, this is just chaos.

It's just all crumbling down around me here. I'm trying to make sandwiches for my girls, the sermon's not finished, my wife is about to have a baby, it was just, it was pandemonium.

In the midst of all this chaos, my little two-year-old daughter stands up on the chair and goes, Daddy, Jesus loves me. She's absolutely right.

[35 : 12] Jesus does love me for the Bible tells me so. May we grow in a knowledge of God, may we grow in a knowledge of God's love so that we may offer ourselves as living sacrifices, that we may be influenced in every area of our lives, that we treat God seriously, his promises, his commands, we treat them seriously in every area of our life.

May God's spirit enable us to do this. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.