

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, MAY 30, 2021

SERMON: Are we “wearying” God?

TEXT: MALACHI 2:17-3:5

In 1984, I celebrated my “sweet sixteen” birthday in Birmingham, England. I was spending the summer doing evangelistic mission work – handing out tracts, doing open air presentations, and helping with vacation bible schools in England and Scotland. We were predominantly based on two of the largest canal boats that were often used as vacation getaways on the extensive canal system found in the United Kingdom. The group that I went with was called Teen Missions International and were based on the Atlantic coast near Cape Kennedy in a little place called Merrit Island in Florida.

Teen Missions had dozens of teams that went out across the globe. Some were evangelistic teams (like ours) and others were work teams that would go and build dorms and churches, dig ditches, or do what ever the host group needed done. Before the teams went out, we all gathered in a rustic jungle setting in Merrit Island called Boot Camp. For two weeks we lived in conditions that were supposed to reflect the most rugged areas a team would go to (at that time it was in Papua New Guinea). A day at boot camp began (for us) at 6:36 am when we would have to be ready to run a grueling obstacle course and then our day would be filled with chapels, biblical studies, chores, and different types of classes to prepare us for the work that would be done. There was no air conditioning, no junk food, very strict rules, and lots of rain, mud, and bugs. It was no wonder that the Teen Mission motto is still “Get Dirty For God!”

If there is one thing I’ve learned over my years of participating in the church is that often, the most valuable work you will do on behalf of the kingdom of God, is the ministry that gets your hands dirty! When we are unwilling to “get dirty for God” we find ourselves slowly doing nothing for God and everything for ourselves. Are we willing to be inconvenienced and uncomfortable to see God’s kingdom grow?

Today we will look at the fourth argument between God and Israel found in Malachi 2:17-3:5:

¹⁷ You have wearied the LORD with your words.

“How have we wearied him?” you ask.

You have wearied him by saying that all who do evil are good in the LORD’s sight, and he is pleased with them. You have wearied him by asking, “Where is the God of justice?”

The Coming Day of Judgment

³ “Look! I am sending my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. Then the Lord you are seeking will suddenly come to his Temple. The messenger of the covenant, whom you look for so eagerly, is surely coming,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

² “But who will be able to endure it when he comes? Who will be able to stand and face him when he appears? For he will be like a blazing fire that refines metal, or like a strong soap that bleaches clothes. ³ He will sit like a refiner of silver, burning away the dross. He will purify the Levites, refining them like gold and silver, so that they may once again offer acceptable sacrifices to the LORD. ⁴ Then once more the LORD will accept the offerings brought to him by the people of Judah and Jerusalem, as he did in the past.

⁵ “At that time I will put you on trial. I am eager to witness against all sorcerers and adulterers and liars. I will speak against those who cheat employees of their wages, who oppress widows and orphans, or who deprive the foreigners living among you of justice, for these people do not fear me,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

By this point, the incessant arguing of the people with God is getting on God's proverbial "last nerve." This fourth argument begins with God coming to the people and warning them that he has had his fill with their foolish ways. They have become tired him out and they have "wearied the LORD." "Wearied" gives the sense of "physical exhaustion that comes from strenuous labor." Of course God does not get physically tired, but He is impressing on the people that unless they change morally and spiritually, there will be further consequences.

The people not only questions God with the response "How are we wearying you?" but they take it a step further and call into question God's character. "Where is the God of justice?" is Israel's cry. The people are calling into question the fact that their lives are filled with struggle, they believe some God is not living up to end of the bargain, they feel they deserve answers!

So far in Malachi, we have seen how the people's sin and rebellion are taking them down an all-too-familiar path from their history. They have been breaking their covenant with God...and blaming God for the outcome of their attitudes and actions. From the start, God has reminded them of His love, and the people question it. God continues to show them the wrong path by calling them their religious leaders to task for deliberately offering substandard offerings. The broken covenant has greater ramifications as they break not only the covenant with God but also the covenant with their wives. They divorce their wives who are followers of God and have been with them through the good and the bad, only to be replaced by "newer" models who are foreign and don't know or believe in Yahweh. The new wives do not belong to the covenant and end up dragging the husbands (and families) away from God.

Now the spiral continues. Whenever we decide that we know better than God does...expect life to start spiraling in a downward fashion. It isn't something that often happens suddenly...but rather disobedience has a tendency to lull us into a sense that our actions are safe and good until we have fallen so far, it can be hard to get back to God without intervention. I have sadly seen far too many active Christians find a way to become inactive...usually for really good reasons like business with jobs, families, other responsibilities. Before they knew it, they had strayed far from God and it influenced their actions, beliefs and the beliefs and habits of the rest of the family. A simple illustration of this is the parent of a teen entering the work force, who allows the teen to work on Sundays because after all "the tips are better and they want to save for a car!" There is no sense of

taking the teen aside and teaching them about where God falls into this scenario. What about attending church? Do we trust God to provide for our needs if we stay faithful to Him or do we strive to meet our own needs at any cost?

If you want to see a deadly example of this on a grand scale, reacquaint yourself with the book of Joshua and Judges (which should be considered one unity of study). Joshua is all about God guiding the people through victory after victory as they enter and take the promised land. Suddenly you have the book of Judges. The people are in the land and have made it their home. We have the fateful phrase “and the people did what was right in their own eyes.” The people turn from God and God punishes them for their sins. Story after story we see how the people rebel against God and God allows a foreign power to take them over. The people struggle and cry out to God and repent and God raises up a judge to overcome the foreign power. The people serve God for a time and then the cycle starts over again. Sadly, each cycle of rebellion, captivity, repentance, and deliverance gets more and more deadly. Why read Joshua and Judges together? Joshua teaches us how good life is when we live in a covenant relationship with God. Judges is the flip side of the story. It teaches us how badly life is messed up when we break our covenant with God.

The spiral in Malachi is the failure of our love-relationship with God, the damage sin does to our ability to properly worship God, the relational toll rebellion takes on our other human relationships, and now we are taught the toll rebellion against God takes on the most vulnerable in our society.

The irony of the call for the “God of Justice” to appear is that it is the people’s own actions, dictated by a rebellious, sinful, heart, that is the cause of the injustices. The people are not learning from their own history. The way they cheated the widows and orphans was one of the foundational reasons they went into Babylonian exile.

God gives the people the proverbial warning, “don’t make me stop the car and come back there.” God has always advocated for social justice. God always acts from the side of reconciling people to Himself. This what we as Christians are called to do. We are called to love people. Before too many objections are made, loving people, caring for people, helping people does not mean letting someone make whatever choice they like and patting them on the back and telling them

their choice is fine in the sight of God. Jesus never did this. The woman caught in adultery was loved by Jesus and treated as valuable AND was told to go and sin no more! The Samaritan woman “at the well” was treated as valuable by Jesus, but Jesus also acknowledged that she was divorced several times and the man that she was living with was not her husband. Jesus always spoke the TRUTH in love. Our truth must be governed by God as found in scripture.

Our 21st society wants us to believe that there is no truth other than our individual experiences. Our world fails to see the need to integrate God and social justice as one pursuit. I once volunteered with a mission agency that strived to serve those who were overlooked, who struggled, and were often seen as living on the “fringe” of society. At the beginning of my time with them, the philosophy was to form a relationship and earn the right to talk to them about God and spirituality. I have no problem with that philosophy. Sadly, over time, the ministry seemed to move to pure social justice and very little talk of God.

There are many organizations that are purely “social justice.” That is great! The church’s mission must be more than just that. We must integrate the words of life and the desire to meet needs and see justice advance. If we only meet the physical needs of people and ignore the spiritual needs, we are not fulfilling our calling as disciples of Jesus Christ. Jesus himself reminded us:

³⁴ Then, calling the crowd to join his disciples, he said, “If any of you wants to be my follower, you must give up your own way, take up your cross, and follow me. ³⁵ If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake and for the sake of the Good News, you will save it. ³⁶ And what do you benefit if you gain the whole world but lose your own soul? ³⁷ Is anything worth more than your soul? (Mark 8:34-37).

FOR TODAY

How does our lesson from Malachi apply to us today? First we must make sure we are not “wearying” God. Our Christian witness needs to be one that is obedient to the word of God first and foremost. Have we compromised too much to be seen as “acceptable” in the world’s opinion? True Christian faith will always be at odds with the world. This is nothing new and we should not be surprised by the opposition we face.

Second, although we are under a new covenant sealed by Jesus’ blood, the greatest commandment is still the same one Jesus gave when asked (Mt. 22:37-40):

“You must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.’³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment.³⁹ A second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’⁴⁰ The entire law and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.”

How are we living out the greatest commandments? We have been called to a holistic “body/soul” ministry. We have been tasked to be the hands and feet of Jesus until he returns. The primary task is to give the message of Jesus Christ crucified...alive! The reality of the need for repentance and reconciliation to our Creator. The need to give all that we are in the service of Jesus Christ. It is a natural progression that true faith produces works. You cannot be a Christ-follower and ignore the injustice around you. The temptation will be to get so involved in works of social justice that we forget that we are workers in the fields of the kingdom of God.

THE COMING JUDGE

This section of Malachi ends with the promise of a messenger who would come and prepare the way of Lord. The Lord who would come and bring justice. Malachi was the last prophetic voice for 400 years. God went silent. As I study

this passage I can't help but wonder if God went silent as a way of placing Israel in a spiritual "exile." God left the people with hope...the Lord was coming, but God worked in His own way and in His own timing. 400 years later, John the Baptist walks out of the wilderness with a call to repentance for the wait for the Messiah was over!

As we wait for Jesus' return, we must stay vigilant to God's timing and God's plan for His children. It is easy to get impatient. When life doesn't go our way, or we think that the world is spiraling out of control, it is easy to mimic the Israelites and cry out to God with a wrong heart. We have a tendency to blame God for what is going on around us without acknowledging that it is humankind's fault for the state that we are in. Instead of repentance, we rebel and say things like "If God is so mighty and powerful, why doesn't he do this or that...!"

May we take up the cause of Christ with all our hearts. May we feed the soul and the body as we share the words of life with all those who are searching. May we keep our side of the covenant as we wait for the promised return of the King of kings and Lord of lords!

Let's pray...