

Malachi 2:10-3:5

How have we wearied you?

This passage is primarily about the topic of faithfulness. Faithfulness is an often spoken word in Christian circles, but how would you define faithfulness? Where have you seen faithfulness demonstrated, either by Christians or by others in the world?

Read together Malachi 2:17

In response to the people's question 'How have we wearied you?' the prophet gives two examples of the way the people's words (and actions implicitly) are wearing God.

The first example is the people saying 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the Lord, and he is pleased with them'. Blurring the lines of good and evil is the first step toward unfaithfulness to God.

1. We can be tempted to self-justify our behaviour, thoughts or actions as, 'it's not that bad', or 'it's only a small thing'. How does this lead to further unfaithfulness? Where have we seen this happen in our own lives and in our world?
2. There is a temptation to assume that if there is no repercussions of our behaviour, that God is pleased with us. Think through the logic behind this thinking. Do we expect immediate repercussions? What would the world be like if that was the case? What would God be like?

The second example is the people saying 'Where is the God of Justice?'

1. Compare the style of the question 'Where is the God of Justice?' in 2:17 to Psalm 42:9. One of these is directed to God, the other to people. Do you think it's ok to call out to God? Why do you think the temptation is there for us to bring our complaints to one another, and not to God?
2. Why do you think God makes us wait? Perhaps you could consider some of the following verses in your discussion. Isaiah 40:31, Isaiah 30:18, Romans 12:17-21, Hebrews 10: 30-39, Rev 6:10-11.

Read together Malachi 2:10-16

This section of Malachi deals with a lack of faithfulness demonstrated in the people towards God and towards one another. As you look through this in your life group please be aware that for many this is a deeply pastoral issue. Whether it's because of marriage breakdown, unfaithfulness in marriage, an unmet desire to be married and/or to have children, or the death or illness of partners or children. As you discuss this, please seek to listen well to one another, and to lift one another up in prayer. Many of these situations are incredibly complex, so resist the temptation to problem solve, but encourage one another with love and support.

The call to be faithful in this passage is based on the unity God's people have in Him (v10). They are God's covenant people, and called to be faithful but have demonstrated themselves to be unfaithful (v11).

There are five sins that Peter Adam ('The message of Malachi', Bible Speaks Today Series, 2013) identifies as being present in the unfaithfulness of God's people:

- Desecrating the sanctuary (v11)
 - Marrying women who worship Foreign God's (v11)
 - Divorcing their Israelite Wives to marry foreign women (v13-15)
 - Failure to produce Godly offspring, faithful to God (v15)
 - Engaging in violence (v16)
1. As you look at the different claims against the people, made by the prophet, how do you see a lack of faithfulness to God being played out in a lack of faithfulness to others? In our world today, how do we see this same pattern being played out?
 2. Why is the call to faithfulness so important? What difference would understanding God's love and heart for his people make to these people in Malachi? What difference would it make to us today? How do we need to respond today?

Further reading on Divorce & Marriage.

- *If you would like to look further into the topic of Marriage and divorce please look at the following.*
 - *There is no prohibition on marriage those of a difference race, tribe or cultural group. As God's people we must have no role in racism (Col 3:11).*
 - *We are wise to marry a fellow believer in Christ, and Paul encourages those seeking to marry to marry someone 'in the Lord' (1 Cor 7:39).*
 - *There is a warning against marrying someone who would draw you into idolatry (2 Cor 6:14-18, 1 Cor 10:20-22, 1 Cor 5:9-10)*
 - *If someone is already married to an unbeliever there is no need for divorce, that person should remain, seeking to win their spouse for Christ (1 Cor 7:12-13, 15-16)*
 - *Jesus clearly had a priority for faithfulness in marriage. He clearly makes room for divorce in unfaithfulness, and Paul suggests divorce is permissible for those married to an unbeliever (1 Cor 7:10-16).*
 - *Singleness is commended as a gift from God (1 Cor 7:7-7), and a good and beautiful thing (1 Cor 7:8) which holds its own advantages (1 Cor 7:35).*
 - *Violence against a partner is never permitted in God's economy. The call in marriage is for mutual submission (Eph 5:21) and to seek to serve one another (Matthew 20:26-28). Faithfulness in marriage is not staying in the midst of abuse (some may suggest that this is actually enabling abuse to continue). Faithfulness in marriage is calling the abuser to abide by God's standards in marriage.*
1. *Perhaps have a discussion together through the above key points. Which are easier for you to agree with and which ones are more of a struggle?*
 2. *How do you think the world's view on marriage has impact us as God's people and where do we need to seek to realign with God's view of marriage.*

3. *Spend some time praying for protection for those in your group, whether married or single. Pray for faithfulness to God, and faithfulness to one another in the way we live and respond in relationships.*

Read together Malachi 3:1-5

This part of the passage encourages us that unfaithfulness will not continue forever. God will come (v1), he will refine and purify. The priests who were condemned in earlier in chapter 2 will be purified and refined like gold and silver (v3). He will also come to bring justice (v 5).

1. How are you encouraged by the coming of the Lord described here? How are you challenged?
2. How does Hebrews 12:1-2a and 1 Corinthians 15:56-58 encourage you to see Christ's work as a fulfillment to this passage? What remains the challenge for us then?

As you seek to live as a faithful follower of Jesus, Bree suggested two key focuses, with different suggestions and questions:

1. Cultivating a relationship with Jesus
 - a. In the everyday, not as a once off activity.
 - b. Seeking to actively grow and learn as a disciple, perhaps in new ways.
 - c. Seeking to call on God in the everyday
2. Be on the watch for unfaithfulness in our own life.
 - a. How do we spend our money?
 - b. How do we spend our time?
 - c. Who are we relating to?
 - d. What are we investing into?

Which of these is the most challenging to you at the moment? Which is the most encouraging? Take some time to identify a key learning from today and fill in responses to the questions below. Pray through your responses with the group and plan to keep each other accountable this week as you seek to live out your faithfulness to God.

What is God saying to you today?

How are you going to respond in the coming week?