

We have now heard two of the things that God has spoken against his people in the book of Malachi. The first two, of course, were spoken against the priests. But our reading for this evening is spoken against the people. Because it wasn't just the priests who were the problem. The people too were not taking God very seriously. So what exactly was their problem? What is God speaking against them about? Their faithlessness. They were being faithless towards the Lord, and they were being faithless towards one another. And so God is speaking against this faithlessness in our reading for this evening.

And we see the examples of this faithlessness right here in the text. Verse 10, for example, says: "Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?" So they were faithless, in other words, first of all towards the Lord. They were profaning his covenant. They weren't listening to what he had to say, listening to what he had said to their fathers so long ago. They didn't really care what God had to say. And we see that especially in the issue regarding marriage. Because it says in verse 11: "Judah has been faithless, and 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." So in another words, what was happening at that time in Israel in the days of Malachi was that the men of Israel were taking for themselves all kinds of foreign wives, something which God specifically told them not to do. Because as we hear in Deuteronomy chapter 7, verse 3, it says: "You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons." But Israel was doing it anyway. They didn't care what God had to say. They were going to do things their own way.

But it wasn't the fact that they were foreign that was the problem. There were all kinds of foreign women who came in and became part of Israel just fine. You think of Rahab, for example, who lived in Jericho in the time of Joshua. She became part of Israel. In fact, she was one of the ancestors of David and of the Lord Jesus Christ himself. You think of Ruth, who was part of Moab. She became part of Israel and became one of the ancestors of David and eventually also of Jesus. So it's not that having foreign women come in was the problem. The problem was that these foreign women were bringing with them their foreign gods. In fact, as Deuteronomy goes on to say, "You shall not intermarry with them, for they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods." That's why Malachi calls them the "daughter of a foreign god." These women were coming in and not giving up their religion. They were holding on to their old beliefs and still becoming a part of Israel. And as a result, they were leading their husbands astray. And in fact, as we hear in Nehemiah chapter 13, it was also causing problems for the children. The children didn't know what to believe. Their parents believed different things, and Nehemiah found out that some of the children didn't even know who the Lord their God was after all. So it was causing all kinds of issues. Because when you have these kinds of religiously mixed marriages, Christians, it can cause all kinds of problems.

But I do want to say in passing that this is something that applies also to us today. It's not something that God intended a long time ago that has nothing to do with us. We still want to be careful when it comes to these kinds of issues. Because God wants us to be united as husband and wife in everything, including what we believe, including how we worship the Lord. Because when we don't have that, when there is no unity in something like that, that can create doubt. That can create confusion. Somebody might say, "They'll change, right? They'll come around."

But that doesn't always happen. And when that doesn't happen, that can lead us to start becoming indifferent towards the things of God. And especially with regard to the children, too. If Mom's going to one place, Dad's going somewhere else, they're left with all kinds of questions. Which one is right? Which way is right? And maybe that can lead them to indifference to the Lord. And so Christians, I think what we can learn from this, especially for us today and for those of us who are already married, is to seek that unity, to be united with each other also in the way that we worship the Lord. Because husband and wife are called to be united in that way. And for those of us who aren't married, I think the Lord is reminding us to be very serious about who we marry, to have questions of religion be part of that decision. That's why whenever I have young couples come to me to talk about getting married, we always talk about religion. Because it is important to the Lord. We need to be united as husband and wife so that we can be united in everything.

But the other problem that was going on in Israel, Christians, was perhaps a more serious one. They were not only being faithless towards God. They were being faithless towards one another. And that was happening specifically by these men who were taking foreign wives divorcing their first wife. Apparently it was the thing to do in Israel of time: get rid of your first wife, get rid of your Israelite wife, and take a foreign wife for yourself. It's one thing to get married in this way, but it's obviously a far worse thing to divorce someone just so that you can get immediately remarried. This is why God says, "I'm not going to pay attention to your offerings. I'm not going to listen to your prayers. Because you have been faithless to the wife of your youth. You have been faithless, Israel, to those you should have been faithful towards." And so God is calling Israel, then, to come back. To be faithful not only to him, but also to one another.

And Christians, I think we too can face this same danger. This danger of faithlessness, of not wanting to listen to what God says. And that can happen a couple of ways, of course. It could happen with excuses, making excuses for my behavior, for the things that I'm doing. "That was then. This is now. It doesn't really matter anymore." Or maybe we'll say, "My situation is so different. It's so unique. God will understand what I'm doing, even if I'm not really listening to what he has to say." By making excuses in that way, Christians, we can fall into a faithlessness towards God.

But I think the way that this happens the most often is how we deal with one another. Because when we are not paying attention to each other, that can lead us to wander away from God. Because consider what 1 John has to tell us. 1 John chapter 3, starting at verse 16: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?" How does God's love abide in us, Christians, if we ignore the needs of those around us? If we are faithless towards our brother, how can we be faithful towards God? Because God has given us two great commandments of the law: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." "And the second," Jesus says, "is like it: you shall love your neighbor as yourself." To not love your neighbor, to close your heart against your brother means that you're not listening to God. And if we are faithless to each other, it is because we are being faithless towards the Lord.

But Christians, God calls for us to love one another. Love one another because he first loved us. Love one another because he has given us Jesus Christ when we didn't love him. Love one

another because Jesus has died for us to forgive us our sins. Love one another because Jesus has risen so that we would be one body in him. Love one another because God is love and because we belong to him. And love one another and be faithful to one another because we all have one Father, our God who has created us, our Lord and Savior. So Christians, let us love one another and care for one another, to be faithful to one another, because God was faithful towards us. Let us love each other for his sake, because Jesus loves us.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, you have called us to yourself in your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray that you would lead us always to care for one another and to love each other as you have first loved us, because your Son has been given to us to make us his body. In his most holy name we pray. Amen.