

Malachi 2:1-17

George Whitefield was the 18th century evangelist and friend of John and Charles Wesley. Like the Wesley's Whitefield was greatly used of God in challenging the men and women of his day to come to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. He worked for a while as a military chaplain aboard a ship travelling to North America. At the very beginning he spelt out his intentions, - he told the crew, the soldiers and the few civilian passengers that he was going to tell them about Jesus Christ. *They weren't a bit interested!* With curses and swears they informed him of their lack of enthusiasm for his efforts. They dubbed him a 'phoney' and they treated him scathingly. He soon became 'fed-up'. Nothing he could say would make them interested. ... And here he was, a young man of 23 years, starting out in the service of his Master, and already it would have been so easy to give up.

What did he do? He began to visit the sick on board the ship, and he shared his provisions. He prayed privately for them, and each morning and evening he continued to lead public prayers on the open deck. He socialised and witnessed for Christ whenever the opportunity presented itself. Gradually, things began to change on the ships. The captains came and stood beside him; an order would be given to muster the men to the daily services. *By the way he lived he was getting through to these people.*

The influence of God's people is tremendously important. It can never be overstated. God places each of His children in a particular place with the whole intention of gaining from them complete and obedient service.

A GREAT PRIVILEGE

- * Out of all the tribes of Israel God had given to one tribe in particular the responsibilities of priesthood and care for His holy places.
- * They were the Levites; in Num. 1:49-53 they were given instructions:
 - * to care for the tabernacle of testimony, and all the vessels and items belonging to it,

- * in the evening, when the Israelites set up camp the Levites would camp around the tabernacle,
- * in fact, if anyone other than the Levites came too close to the tabernacle or touched it they would be put to death,
- * God said, “the Levites shall keep the charge of the tabernacle of testimony.”
- * Indeed, it was the greatest of privileges to be entrusted by God with this most special symbol of His immediate presence among the children of Israel.
- * Isn't it a privilege to be saved?
- * Isn't it a joy to know the Lord Jesus Christ personally?
- * ... to realise that He came to die on the cross for me!
- * He loved me so much that even in eternity His perfect love stretched to even me!
- * The children of Israel were greatly loved by God,
- * ... and the presence of Almighty God accompanied them even in the dryness and the solitariness of the wilderness.
- * Brother/sister in Christ, God never leaves you, - no matter how barren and futile life may seem to become.

But unfortunately this tribe who had a great privilege bartered their privilege and exchanged it for something that was ugly and dirty and repugnant in the eyes of God.

A GREAT PROMISCUITY

v.11

- * As God surveyed the scene His patience was running out.
- * What had happened was this, - v.11, - spiritually speaking, Israel was 'sleeping around'.
- * If you found out that your husband was sleeping with someone else, - or your wife was sleeping with someone else, - how do you think you would feel?
- * How do you think God felt?
- * In Jer. 3 God did something He hates to do,
 - * 7 “And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her

treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also.”

- * God repeated a similar lesson through Hosea and his wife, Gomer.
- * God said, “I hate divorce” (v.16), yet He divorced Israel.
- * What was it that caused God to be so enraged with the people that He had led through so many dark periods? - it was their spiritual promiscuity (v.11), they had “married the daughter of a strange God”.
- * Oh, I know we could look at this statement in the light of apostate forms of ecumenism and religious adultery, but there are also other ways whereby the child of God can practise spiritual promiscuity.
- * But basically and simply, if you or I put anything or anyone in the place of God we have breached our covenant with Him and we are guilty of infidelity and adultery,
- * We can recall a time in our lives when we invited the Lord Jesus Christ to come in and save us from our sin,
- * In a moment, ... in an instant, ... He washed us white as snow,
 - * no more danger of hell,
 - * no more an enemy of God,
- * He has saved us by the precious blood of His Son as He was stretched out on the cross of Calvary.
- * Aye, but we are also aware of forces on each side of us that are ‘hell-bent’ on causing the child of God to turn from from the narrow road.
- * You remember the story of Christian in Pilgrim’s Progress:
 - * On arriving at the cross the burden that was fixed to his back fell off and he rejoiced in the Lord.
 - * A little further down the road he was asked, “What is it that makes you so desirous to go to Mount Zion?”
 - * He replied, “Why, there I hope to see Him alive that did hang on the cross; and there I hope to be rid of all those things that to this day are in me an annoyance to me; there, they say, there is no death; and there I shall dwell with such company as I like best. For, to tell you truth, I love Him, because I was by Him eased of my burden; and I am weary of my inward sickness. I would fain be where I should die no more, and with the company that shall continually cry, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’”
 - * However, on his travels, he turned off the road into By-Path Meadow, - to land that belonged to one Giant Despair,

- * Very soon the Giant learned of their presence and brought Christian as a prisoner to Doubting Castle,
- * In that Castle he was fed on meagre food and he became so depressed,
- * But he came to the place where he repented of turning from the King's Highway,
- * He made the great discovery, "I have a key in my bosom, called Promise, that will, I am persuaded, open any lock in Doubting Castle"
- * *That* was the key to free him!
- * You see, we only have one Lord, one Master, and He shares us with none, - He is jealous for what is His!
- * With Him it is either all or nothing!
- * ... and that was what the priests of Levi failed to remember.
- * They would have known it! ... but they cast it to the one side and chose not to abide by it.
- * How sad, when we see a child of God involving him/herself in activities unbecoming a child of the King,
- * It's very true, ... 'While God accuses, man excuses'
- * These Levites had broken their covenant with God, - the privilege that alone had been theirs they squandered.
- * God was 'tired' of them (v.17).
- * Many a child of God used to walk close to Him, and now they are so far away,
- * At the Judgement Throne of God what offence did He lay at their feet?
 - * v.2, "If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart"
 - * v.8, "ye are departed out of the way"
 - * v.8, "ye have caused many to stumble at the Law"
 - * v.8, "ye have corrupted the covenant of Levi"
 - * v.11, ye "have profaned the holiness of the Lord which he loved"
 - * v.11, ye "have married the daughter of a strange god"
 - * v.17, "ye have wearied the Lord with your words ..."

CONCLUSION

- * It's a serious business being a Christian, and belonging to God,
- * The Levites were trying so hard to keep up with the rest of their world that God no longer had any relevance in their worship.
- * God will not be mocked! v.3, - neither in Malachi's day, or in our day
- * Jeremiah, again, gave to the people sound advice that is also needful to pass on to God's people in our day; it is this:
 - * 6:16 Thus saith the LORD, Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. But they said, We will not walk therein.
- * If you want a good marriage, I'll give you sound advice, -
 - * don't mess around with anyone else's husband or wife,
 - * love your husband/wife,
 - * demonstrate your love for them,
 - * emphasise *that* love through the times when the world is firing its missiles at you,
 - * *don't look at another!*
- * With Christ in your life, don't lust after some weak appearance of religiosity that consists of a meagre form of what you had before,
- * Look into the eyes of the Saviour and you'll recognise the depth of love He has for you,
- * He loved you to the extent that He gave His everything for you, ...
- * Christ died to give you His best; He arose to ensure you of His best; and even now in Glory He is making preparation for His best!
- * You remember the children's chorus:
 - God is good to me
 - God is good to me
 - He holds my hand, He makes me stand
 - God is good to me!

Our praise and our thanks be unto our God today! Amen.