

Malachi 2: 10-16

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Good morning! We have been engaging in a study of the Old Testament book of Malachi these past several weeks and today we are looking at chapter 2: 10-16.

10 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? 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.12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!

13 And this second thing you do. You cover the Lord's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. 14 But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. 15 Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. 16 "For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."
Verse 16 is a very difficult passage to translate from the Hebrew and could also legitimately say, "For the Lord, the God of Israel, says that he hates divorce and him who covers his garments in violence."

So far in this oracle or burden that Malachi has brought to the people it has been the priests who have been charged with gross negligence in their worship of God and their leadership of God's people. They have been charged with despising the Lord's name by the receiving from the people to offer to the Lord polluted offerings. Lambs, blind and broken legged sheep were being brought to the altar and offered to God as sacrifices. Clearly, the people were not giving God their best and the priests were not concerned about the low quality of the offerings.

The priests were also charged with causing many to stumble by their instruction. As messengers of the Lord of Hosts they were responsible to shepherd the people and teach them sound doctrine and right theology. But because they had turned aside from the way, many had fallen away from the true worship of God and they were guilty of corrupting the

covenant of Levi. Their worship of God had become so polluted and was raising such a stench toward heaven that as we heard last week, God had promised to spread the dung of the sacrificed animals on the faces of the priests. The worship of God by the sons of Jacob had become nothing more than empty religious exercises.

In today's text Malachi shifts his attention from the priests to all of the people, including himself. We can see that in the 10th verse, **10 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?** It appears as we read this entire passage that the worship at the temple was not the only place where the people had lost true devotion to God. This apathy toward God had infiltrated their homes and families as well. In fact, this is the area of life where it probably began. True worship and devotion of God begins in the heart and in the home and it necessarily must affect every area of your life. When devotion to God is relegated to once or twice a week or month or year, and the rest of one's life is spent in a way that is hostile or indifferent to the things of God, then that worship is false and displeasing to the Lord. This is particularly true when we're talking about marriage and divorce, an area of life where the Israelites had experienced extreme failure. Their faithlessness here amounted to a profaning of the covenant of their fathers and the sanctuary of the Lord. By profaning he means that they failed to acknowledge as holy the covenant and the sanctuary and the Lord.

In what ways had they been faithless and what abomination had they committed? There were primarily three things. First, the men were marrying unbelieving women who worshiped idols, secondly, they were divorcing their Hebrew wives presumably so they could marry these foreign women, and thirdly, they were weeping and groaning at the altar when they realized that God was not pleased with their worship.

What is the covenant?

In order for us to understand the weight of this charge against the people of God, we must begin with by knowing what this covenant is that Malachi is speaking of. He refers to it as the covenant of our fathers. It is likely a reference to the covenant that God made with Abraham as well as with Moses. Abraham, a descendant of Shem, son of Noah, was called by God in Gen. 12 to leave his country and to go to an unknown land. God promised him, **2 And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.** Later, in chapter 15 God makes a covenant with Abraham and promises to him that his offspring will be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Then in chapter 17, God, in establishing circumcision as a sign of that covenant for Abraham and for all of his descendants and makes him this promise, **4 "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of**

nations. ⁵ No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. ⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God.” (Gen 17: 4-8)

Later, when the Israelites were encamped in the wilderness at the foot of Mt. Sinai, God called to Moses from the mountain and renewed this covenant with his people; “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: ⁴ You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵ Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶ and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel” (Ex. 19: 3b-6).

So this is the covenant that God had made with his people; the covenant that was ratified by circumcision on every male child as a sign and a seal of that covenant. As part of that covenant, God had given very specific instructions not to marry foreigners who served other gods. ³ You shall not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, ⁴ for they would turn away your sons from following me, to serve other gods (Deut. 7: 3-4a).

I don't think that it's a coincidence that every time a Hebrew male sinned sexually that he was reminded of the terms of the covenant by the marks he bore on his own body.

A little earlier than Malachi, Nehemiah had sounded the same warning concerning intermarriage; ²³ In those days also I saw the Jews who had married women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab. ²⁴ And half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah, but only the language of each people. ²⁵ And I confronted them and cursed them and beat some of them and pulled out their hair. And I made them take an oath in the name of God, saying, “You shall not give your daughters to their sons, or take their daughters for your sons or for yourselves. ²⁶ Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin. ²⁷ Shall we then listen to you and do all this great evil and act treacherously against our God by marrying foreign women?”

Why is marriage so important?

Malachi refers to creation in verse 10 to remind us that marriage is not a cultural construct for us to bend, shape, or twist into whatever we think it should look like. Rather, it was created by God already in the Garden of Eden as a divine institution between one man and one woman. The aloneness of Adam was the only thing in the garden that God deemed as being not good. So to repair this he created Eve out of Adam's rib and she became his wife. With Eve, Adam was now complete. Even though sin entered into the garden because of their disobedience, God allowed them to fulfill his earlier mandate to be fruitful and multiply, and children were born and the land filled up.

Throughout the pages of the OT we see more clearly how God views marriage when he compares his relationship with Israel as a marriage just as even now the church is often called the bride of Christ. Many times God refers to Israel and or Judah as having committed adultery by worshipping foreign Gods, such as in Jer. 3: 6-10: **6 The Lord said to me in the days of King Josiah: "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore? 7 And I thought, 'After she has done all this she will return to me,' but she did not return, and her treacherous sister Judah saw it. 8 She saw that for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. 9 Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree. 10 Yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah did not return to me with her whole heart, but in pretense, declares the Lord."**

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So the pretend relationship that Judah is carrying out with God continues and that is why Malachi issues such a dire warning to them: **12 May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts!**

The purpose of marriage

You see, the purpose of marriage is about something far greater than just our own personal happiness or fulfillment. Paul speaks to the Ephesians about how when a man and a woman leave their respective parents and cleave to one another it is a profound mystery which refers to Christ and his church (5:12). As part of this mystery we see in verse 14 that the Lord is a witness at every Christian wedding and in v. 15 we see that he apportions his spirit in the union of every Christian couple. The reality is this that wedding vows are not only made by one to another but to God as well. To the extent that we fulfill our marriage covenant we accurately represent Christ and his love and faithfulness to the church. When a man is unfaithful to the wife of his youth, he preaches lies about Jesus. Furthermore, as Malachi makes clear, marriage is about producing Godly offspring. There are enough challenges in this life raising children to carry the torch of the gospel for future generations without one parent trying to do it alone or with an unbelieving spouse. When a person goes

out and intentionally seeks out a spouse who doesn't love Jesus, doesn't trust Jesus, and doesn't believe Jesus, he or she is profaning the covenant and inviting the discipline of God.

Weeping at the altar

Now these men were going to the altar and bringing their offerings only to have them rejected by God. Their response was to weep and groan. But their sorrow was not coming from a contrite heart but rather from a heart that hurt because God was not showing them favor in their hypocrisy. Their sorrow was akin to that of Cain when God did not receive his offering and whose sorrow turned to anger at his brother Abel and he killed him. Contrast that with the sorrow of David, who wept over his sins of adultery and murder; **Have mercy on me, O God,**

**according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.**

**²Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin!**

**³For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.**

**⁴Against you, you only, have I sinned
and done what is evil in your sight, (Psalm 51: 1-4)**

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God did not receive their offerings because they came to him as hypocrites, pretending that everything was great at home. Meanwhile they were abusing their wives, divorcing their wives and marrying foreign women. In the NT Peter tells us that **⁷Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (1 Pet 3:7).**

Clearly God cares about the relationships at home especially between husband and wife.

Why does God hate divorce?

It's clear that God hates divorce. For anyone who's been through a divorce or has had close friends or family go through a divorce, you understand why. Perhaps your parents divorced while you were yet a child, or perhaps when you became an adult. It doesn't matter. It hurts. Yet we see divorce happen frequently in our culture today, even among Christians. We live in a world where it's easier to annul a marriage covenant than a 12 month lease agreement on an apartment, and when it comes to lives affected the marriage covenant should be much harder to annul. God's desire is that we honor our marital covenant and the vows that we spoke on our wedding day. As the priests during Malachi's day had a lax

attitude toward divorce and remarriage back then, so do many pastors in the church today and it truly is a sad state of affairs. God hates divorce for a number of reasons. First, because it breaks faith, it violates truths standard. Second, God hates divorce because it is harmful. It is harmful to the couple involved, usually leaving scars that will never fully heal. It is harmful to friends and family and to society in general. But most of all, it is harmful to the children involved. Finally and most importantly, God hates divorce because he created marriage to be a picture of Christ and the church, lived out by the committed faithfulness of the husband and wife to one another, the love and sacrifice of a husband to his wife and the respect and submission of a wife to her husband. And so divorce illustrates apostasy or falling away from Christ which in the end is damnation.

Guard yourselves

As we get toward the end of this passage, notice that in v.15 Malachi charges the people of God to “**guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth**”, and in v. 16 “**So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless.**” Anytime something is mentioned twice in a row like this, it is meant to be a point of special importance, so we dare not overlook this command. It had been 50 – 100 years or so since the temple had been rebuilt in Jerusalem and the people of God were growing weary as they had expected certain prophecies by earlier prophets to have been fulfilled already. Possibly they felt that God was distant and no longer concerned about them. In any case the apathy with which they worshipped God did not come upon them overnight. As with all great failings it must have happened over time as they begin to allow sin to slowly creep its way into their lives. They were not guarding themselves against sin and faithlessness. That is why Malachi exhorts them twice so that we too might get the message that we not allow sin to get a foothold into our lives. I’m reminded again of the words to the song “Slow Fade” by Casting Crowns,

It's a slow fade when you give yourself away
It's a slow fade when black and white have turned to gray
Thoughts invade, choices are made, a price will be paid
When you give yourself away
People never crumble in a day
Daddies never crumble in a day
Families never crumble in a day, It's a slow fade, It's a slow fade.

Concluding remarks

This brings us now to all of us here at Damascus Road Church. We are no longer under the old covenant that those before Christ were under. We have a new and better covenant that was established when Christ came. For us who can look backward in time at the cross of

Christ, we have a better view and understanding for the purpose of marriage than those who lived before Christ came.

There are many marriages represented here this morning. There are also a fair number of single people and some who are divorced. Some of you have been married for 20, 30, 40, or more years. Surely you would testify that it hasn't all been easy. To make it this far you have had to overcome challenges and struggles that surely have tested the depth of your commitment to one another. Certainly you would agree with me that it has been nothing but the grace of Christ in your lives that has allowed you to persevere this far together.

There are also those here whose marriages are really struggling. You are wondering how you're going to make it. It is worth the toil. Remember the covenant you made with each other and with God on your wedding day. The pastors here are committed to helping in any way that we can. I want to encourage you to speak to me or any of the other pastors here. We will do whatever we know to help you and if we can't we will point you toward resources that will.

To those who are single and desiring a spouse, remember that God's will for you to find a Christian spouse hasn't changed. God reveals through Paul in 2 Cor. 6:14-16a, **14 Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? 15 What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God...**

It is good counsel for you that when you are considering someone to marry that you would expect this to be your one and only spouse so long as you both shall live. What if when you were buying a car you knew this would be the only car you could ever purchase? What if you had to make it last for the rest of your life? Would that change how you made your decision? Of course it would. You probably wouldn't just make your decision based on looks and curves alone would you. You might even do some research on the engine and the running gear. Maybe also you would get to know something about the manufacturer of the car and their overall reliability record. And once having purchased the car you would take good care of it and not abuse it, taking care to maintain it regularly and make repairs when needed, sparing no expense.

Now to those who are divorced it is important for you to understand that it is not always a sin to be divorced. You may be the victim of an adulterous spouse who chose to profane his or her marital covenant by sleeping with someone else. Or perhaps your spouse deserted you when times got tough. According to the bible, it is not a sin to seek out a divorce in these situations. It may not always be the best thing to do, but it is not a sin.

Perhaps you are struggling right now with the knowledge that you are divorced because of your sin; that you are the cause for the dissolution of your marriage. Now there may be some steps that you know you need to take to make things right. Maybe you are not sure what if anything you should do. Again, let me encourage you that I along with the other pastors am available to walk with you through whatever path lies before you. First and foremost I do not want you to carry this burden any longer. I do not want you to feel condemned. If you are in Christ, if you belong to him, remember this that Christ took your sins, even your sin of divorce, with him on the cross and he paid for them there. There is not a sin that you have committed that he did not pay for. Bring your burden to him, lay it at the foot of the cross and allow the blood which he so freely shed for you to cleanse your heart and your soul completely.

Brothers and sisters, there is not one of us here that does not need to be cleansed of our sins daily. Whether we are single, divorced, newly married, or married for many years we still carry with us this body of sin which wars against the spirit. So come to him today for the forgiveness of all of your sins and the love he so freely offers. It's free but it wasn't cheap. It cost the Son of God his life. If you are not a Christian, do not let this moment pass you by. Listen to call of the Savior, **²⁸ Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹ Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light"** (Matt. 11: 28-30).

Prayer