

Malachi 2:10–16

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[0 : 00] I extend my welcome to you as we walk our way toward Christmas by looking at the book of Malachi, God's final words that would prepare his people for that event.

And if Christmas is about anything, it's about some kind of mysterious union. Think about it. Christmas claims relate to the eternal God, mysteriously, by way of the union of the Spirit, uniting himself to human flesh in the womb of a young woman.

I mean, that is the profound, expansive claim of Christmas. This union, this uniting, which I suppose is why Paul, in reflecting on what he terms a mysterious union, says that God's plan for the world in Christ was to unite, that's his word, to unite all things in him.

And then he goes on to demonstrate this union in three ways. First, to unite all things in heaven and on earth.

In other words, these spheres, which seemingly have little to do with one another, the heavens and the earth united in Christ.

[1 : 53] Or in chapter 2, how in one man he breaks down the wall of hostility and unites in oneness all Jews and Gentiles.

This ethnic reuniting. And then, in chapter 5, he speaks of the mystery of marriage, which is likened to Christ and the church, one flesh.

So, when you think about Christmas, you think about union or reunion. God is doing something in his infant son to unite a very disunited world.

By way of sphere, the war that exists between the heavens and the earth. By way of race, the animosity that continues to roll between peoples of different ethnic backgrounds.

By way of gender. The war between the man and the woman. Which, I suppose then, makes our need to prepare for Christmas all the more relevant.

[3 : 16] Who among us doesn't sense that relationships in general, let alone divine and human relationships, are breaking under the weight of disunity?

Oneness. The whole idea of being one nation, even. Is laboring and showing signs of the strain of the wear and tear of the endeavor.

Who among us hasn't felt, even in a human relationship, a lack of feelings of love towards someone that we once had, or certainly feeling a lack of being loved through ones that we had entrusted ourselves to.

And Christmas is supposedly here to fix all of that. There is, on the horizon of our own souls, in our own city, a lack of oneness.

We live in a divided world. We go to sleep under divided homes. We feel the betrayal of trust.

[4 : 45] And what happens? When you find yourself in a disunified world or relationship, our text today is going to say that three things begin to happen.

First, we begin to manifest disloyalty toward. Second, we become disillusioned with.

And then, finally, we begin to divorce ourselves from. In other words, there's this wrong attachment that moves us away.

There's this frustration that emotionally we withdraw from. And there is this separation that seals us off. In other words, we find a substitute for lost love, a dissatisfaction in our love, and a separation from those we ought to love.

In other words, we begin to join ourselves to someone. We begin to emote our frustration before that one. And over time, divide from that one.

[5 : 57] That's what happens. What does the text indicate then? Well, the text indicates that it's all about this underlying issue of disunity.

Look at the way the narrator asks questions of the congregation in the two verses where the questions are asked. Verse 10. Have we not all one Father?

Has not one God created us? Now, just even the simple addition of the word one there is demonstrating something. He's not simply asking, don't you have a Father in God?

Or don't you know that you have a Creator in God? He's actually saying, have we not all one Father? Have we not one God who has created us? Or look at the way the questions reemerge in verse 15.

Did he not make them one with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking?

[7 : 04] So, in the mind of the preacher, namely Malachi, the questions are forwarded before the congregation with the underlying issue of oneness and unity as what he's grasping for.

And then he has a word, one word to describe the present state. Our translators often put it in this word.

Look back at verse 10. Why then are we faithless? Verse 11. Judah has been faithless. You'll find this five times over.

Verse 14. You have been faithless. Verse 15. Let none of you be faithless. The very closing words of verse 16.

And do not be faithless. It's an interesting translation that when disunity is exhibited, faithlessness emerges.

[8 : 06] In the language of the original readers, the word carries the connotation treacherous. Treacherous.

We do treacherous things to one another when we feel a lack of union toward one another.

I mean, just look at the world we live in. Treachery abounds because unity is absent. Treachery has this idea of violation.

Of not just being unfaithful or faithless, but it has someone who's treacherous. There's an added sense of betrayal.

Let me see if I can put it to you this way. That's what we do when we're disunified. We are disloyal toward the one who's counting on us.

[9 : 08] We are deceptive toward the one who's been trusting in us. And we divorce ourselves from the one who had given themselves to us.

Take a look. These three movements evident in the life of Israel. Verse 11. Here's the disloyalty toward.

Judah has been faithless, and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem. For Judah has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord, which he loves, and he has married the daughter of a foreign god.

The tense of the verbs are passed. In other words, these things have already been done by Judah in light of their sense that God hadn't been loving them well.

You remember their question in the opening verses of Malachi? How have you loved us? And when they did not feel loved by God, they acted treacherously toward God, and it manifested itself by walking away from a covenantal bond with God through the marrying, it says, the daughter of a foreign god.

[10 : 40] Now the question you have to ask is, is this merely a metaphor? This idea of marrying the daughter of a foreign god, is this just a metaphor to describe a broken relationship with God?

Or is it more? Did they actually begin to marry people outside of their own belief system?

I think it's clear from the text that their broken relationship with God was manifesting themselves in the way in which they were intermarrying with others outside of their people.

Now, get this straight. There's a great distinction here that you need to understand, unless you misunderstand. This is not talking about the fact that there should not be ethnic marriages from one people to another.

It's talking about the religious constituency, those who had faith in the promises of Israel. In other words, it's a religiously based ceremony, has nothing to do with whether you marry someone from another ethnicity.

[11 : 52] But what they were doing was they were beginning to intermarry. Now, I don't have time to demonstrate that that is the case here completely, but when you read the books that are in the same time frame as this one, namely books like Ezra or Nehemiah, you begin to see that in the

post-exilic world, in the time of the second temple, this was a very live issue.

Israelites were wedding themselves to non-Israelites. Well, what's wrong with that, we might ask? What's wrong even today with a Christian that would marry a non-Christian? Well, if marriage, this union between a man and a woman, is to reflect God's marrying the church through His Son, the Christ, then marriage, as Paul argues in Ephesians 5, was front-end loaded to prefigure that relationship between Christ and the church.

In other words, according to Paul, the very first wedding in Genesis 1 and 2 was already pregnant with his intention to reveal a relationship between himself and the church through his Son.

So that would mean then that marriage, by definition, was mirroring God's union with us in Christ.

[13:48] So to marry someone from a different faith, well, there were three things that you'd have to sort out in your mind. And so many of you are going to be in times of life when you're thinking about, well, who do I marry and to what end?

This is a worthy, I hope, three minutes for you. Some people might say, don't marry someone who's not a Christian if you claim to be a Christian. Don't marry them because you'll have difficulty in life. Well, I mean, that may be true, but, I mean, believe me, marry someone that believes everything you believe about the Scripture, you're still going to have some difficulty in life. This superficial notion that marriage isn't going to be difficult and therefore to do it with someone from another faith tradition should be set aside, for me, doesn't hold much water.

Some people might say, well, don't marry someone who's a non-Christian because you're going to be moving in different directions. Well, maybe, but maybe not.

It's hard really to know. I mean, people do it every day, don't they? They seem to get along. In fact, we could demonstrate a lot of inter-religious marriages today within the church and without that are on loving grounds.

[15:15] So what might the reason then really be not to marry someone who isn't a believer in Jesus if you are one who is a believer in Jesus? It seems to me, though, that it's difficult to decide to go through with it because the union itself is incapable of demonstrating God's original intention for it.

So if his original design was to reflect a relationship that he has uniquely with the church, then by nature, a Christian's marriage to a non-Christian is incapable of fulfilling what the scriptures say was its ultimate manifestation.

Now that's worth thinking about. That ought to give someone pause. There may be difficulty.

That may be an argument that keeps some. It may move you in different directions. In fact, the scripture actually warns in the Old Testament that that was one of the reasons not to do it because he warns Israelites that they would go after the religions of the non-believing one they were marrying.

In other words, you might think there's no necessary pull in marriage that's going to move us away from one another. But in actual fact, the scriptures indicate that there's something magnetic going on in marriage and you ought to be careful because you don't really know what the pull's going to do in your marriage and you might over time actually be pulled away from your commitments to Christ.

[17:01] But even if those first two reasons aren't worthy of your pause or at least your decision making, the third one seems to me to be irrefutably clear and compelling that if marriage was meant to reflect the union of Jesus and the church, then to marry someone from another faith means that my marriage by nature can't rise to what he wanted it to be doing.

Well, the verbs here are all in the past tense. This had already been done. What he wants God to do in regard to it is quite terrifying.

Verse 12. May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob any descendant of the man who does this. This plea that says, wow, if you're doing that, then maybe you don't actually belong within the body of people who are trying to reflect that.

But notice he asks for the Lord to take action on that. Past tense. Israelites had begun to demean what marriage was meant to be by thinking lightly about marrying outside their faith.

Are we home yet? What about present tense? There's a movement here.

[18:54] This is the second thing. Not only does when we don't feel loved by God, it begins to manifest itself in our attachment to others that don't believe the same things we do about God, but there's this present sense that it doesn't mean that we left off in our relationship with God.

we just emot before God in a very different way. Look at the way verse 12 ends and the way verse 13 sounds. They're still bringing offerings to the Lord of hosts.

And then he says, the second thing you do, this bringing of offerings, you're covering the altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards your offering or accepts it with favor from your hand.

But you say, why does he not? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you've been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. They had been disloyal toward God by reflecting in their own marriages unions that didn't necessarily relate to God, but they were still soldiering on in the presence of God and they were emoting before God.

[20 : 10] I know I've done this, but I mean, the whole emotive nature there is amazing. There's tears, there's weeping, there's groaning, there's coming to God, there's offerings.

In one sense, though, it was a shameless worship in the eyes of God. It was a sense of how are you doing this without actually internalizing what it is you've done?

So I'm having trouble receiving from you today, says God, regardless of how emotionally entwined it all is, because you haven't recognized that what you did is actually offensive.

It's almost like wanting to move on in a relationship, let's move forward without actually dealing with the disunity that had emerged and the bond that had been broken.

And God says, wow, if you're just trying to keep moving on with me, but we've never actually sat and I've heard you describe for me that what you did was really wrong to me, then how would I say let's go?

[21 : 19] this also happens when we're disloyal toward one another that only means in some sense we're very dissatisfied with God.

Those things often go hand to hand, don't they? You find yourself in a really ruptured thing and the angst of it emerges because he's not moving with me.

And on the flip side is it can make you feel really discouraged. Like, what do I do? I can't undo the past. That's the truth of the matter. There are certain things you can't undo.

Where do we go when we can't undo what we've done? We'll come to that in a minute. The third thing, though, that moves then from what they've done in the past, disloyalty toward God by marrying in an interreligious marriage, their dissatisfaction in God, not having left the church yet, but angry about why he's not really favoring them, is followed with this future movement.

The tense of the verbs in 16 move toward this future sense. They're tempted to separate from entirely, to divorce.

[22 : 57] So not just attaching to another woman, but also separating and divorcing yourself from the one of their youth. Verse 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.

There's this future sense then that when we feel unloved and we feel the past ground cannot be made up and we feel God himself is no longer listening, then we just cut it.

Just cut the strings. It's our future consideration. And it must be that this is for grounds that the Bible doesn't actually defend.

It isn't as though the Bible is without just cause for divorce. But here it seems like one just wants to do it for convenience.

Like at the end of the day it's just going to be better for us all. That's what Israel was being warned about.

[24 : 12] What's the remedy? Well in that last one twice over it says so guard yourselves. Verse 15 and 16 or take care.

Think about it. So if you're in a Christian marriage today that's been ruptured and the relationship is really difficult it seems that he's still saying take care guard yourself.

If you have wronged someone and there's no biblical just cause for this there's still time for you to think about what do I do and what do we do or let me put it differently does Christmas have anything for you?

does the birth of Jesus really mean anything? Is it powerful enough to restore reunite re-engage remake?

That's what we claim Christmas can actually do. So he's saying take care don't don't just heedlessly walk through that.

[25 : 25] let me say a few things then. You're looking at a text come Christmas that says Christmas is about unity God with man Christmas is about a mystery the eternal God spiritually uniting himself to the flesh of a woman and through her womb giving us one who unites all things together in him things heaven and on earth people group against people group in so far as even man and woman even so much as between husband and wife so let me just say a couple things by way of closing if you're in if you've done something where you've been faithless to your wife or a wife to her husband if you have wed yourself what was one flesh to now shared it actually has ruptured this representation of what

God intended for you but there's hope there's Christmas I guess I would say confess your sin with words acknowledge I did it and it was wrong and then repent by reestablishing fidelity but so many marriages it's the children that get lost in the wake I think repentance the kids get lost in the wake you know the very last words of Malachi are going to say that when the one comes who then is the forerunner of Christmas he'll turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers there's this this restoration even in the home some of you may need to go to your children and say this

I have done and it was wrong and I know you're in the wake and I can't do anything to change the past but I can tell you I renounce from it I acknowledge it I confess it and I'm looking to the babe in Bethlehem who will die for it cover it I've exposed it may Jesus one day cover it the other thing I would say is don't think that simply emoting emoting before God God is going to get it done you can't offer a sacrifice that gets this done you remember that time in the Old Testament where Moses says the people done the golden calf thing and

Moses says well I'll go up to God and see if I can I'll go atone for this so Moses goes up there as if he's going to be able to get something done for the people that went wayward and God says you can't atone for this which then indicates we're going to need one worthy who can so there's a difference between sorrow remorse and actually looking for someone else to cover your sin it's not what you do!

It's what this table shows so when you partake of the Lord's table you are confessing I have no emotive remorseful ability to make myself presentable to you so not only may Christmas cover my sin may the Lord's supper in his death be the substitute for my sin and the only offering that I bring and then the third one there take care take care step back from the ledge seek some godly counsel figure out how to do it wow what a strange way to get ready for Christmas to look at God's last word I love

[30 : 19] Malachi 1 1 to 5 his first word to us in preparation for Christmas is I have loved you his second word is to the clergy I expected so much more from you and now to the people take care lest your relationships here not represent me well Christmas is coming union is coming mysterious restoration is coming so work toward it dear God forgive us for what we have done dear God I know that all my tears cannot bring that forgiveness dear God help me to walk carefully as I await the arrival of your son God