

Malachi 2:10-16 "Marriage, Divorce, and God"

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- [0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.
- Thanks, y'all. It's a poignant song about the reality of grief. Whether there's a funeral or not, grief is real.
- And it's hard, it's difficult for us to process. I hope that many of you will come Tuesday night and share in that with me, learn together, care for each other.
- But grief connected to a divorce, as that song is describing, is unfortunately one that many in this room know well.
- And hurt from even today. And that can put some of us on our guard quickly. Heightened sensitivities.
- [1 : 07] Defenses up. When we come to a passage like the one we're about to read, where God addresses marriage and divorce very directly. There's some strong words here.
- So I want to begin by reminding you where Malachi started this message to God's people. I have loved you, says the Lord.
- I have loved you. As Ron so helpfully reminded us a couple of weeks ago, God doesn't send his prophet to tell people to clean their lives up.
- And maybe one day God just might somehow love them. That's not the message. Now he sends a reminder of his already present love for them to inspire new devotion and new obedience in his people.
- And we talked about that broadly last week in terms of truly worshiping God in all of life. And that's hard in general. But now Malachi gets specific in particular areas of our lives because your loving Father, your Creator, wants what's best for you.
- [2 : 35] That's why he says these things. That's his heart. He loves you. Remember that. As we read chapter 2 of Malachi, we'll start reading in verse 10.
- What we're about to read is God's holy word. Timeless truth from our eternal creator. The love story from our heavenly Father.
- 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?
- 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.
- 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. Then the second thing you do.
- [3 : 42] 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. 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.

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.

For the man who hates and divorces, 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.

Let's pray together. Father, God, thank you for your word. We believe that we need it even when it's hard.

[4 : 49] So we ask you to speak to us by your spirit that we might know your love, that we might live in relationship with you and for your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Dearly beloved, we are gathered here today in the presence of God and these witnesses to join this man and this woman in holy marriage, which is instituted by God, regulated by his commandments, not our ideas, and blessed by the Lord Jesus.

God established marriage for his glory and the welfare of mankind. God established marriage for his glory and the love of God. You've heard words like that before. I'll stop there. But perhaps during that beginning of the ceremony, we're marveling at the beauty of the bride's dress, right?

We're looking over and wondering if the cute little flower girl is going to make it through or not. And so it's perhaps understandable that the pastor is not the center of attention in that moment.

But those words are vitally important because they set out the very beginning and end of marriage, its origin and its purpose, its goal, both in God himself, right?

[6 : 17] They remind us that God is intensely interested in these human covenants. He designed marriage and he's zealous for its design.

This passage pushes us back to the original intent of God. Don't we have the same father? Didn't the same God create us?

Malachi begins. And then later he'll use words that echo Genesis. Verse 14, your wife is your companion. That's the one you cleave to when you leave father and mother.

It's that language. Your wife by covenant. Verse 15, did he not make them one?

The two becoming one flesh in marriage united by God's spirit. So let's back up and start there for just a minute.

[7 : 21] Why did God create us? And why did God create marriage? Well, God created us to reflect his image in his creation, right?

So that the earth might be full of his glory. That as we get to know him, we then reflect his character everywhere. A relational God.

Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We reflect that he's inherently relational. And within that relational nature, he is utterly faithful. Isn't he?

He's a covenant-making, promise-keeping God. That's who he is. And to go further, as God addresses his covenant people, he redeems them so that they will know and reflect his love.

Love that persists despite our faithlessness. Right? We need to experience that part of his character that we've been celebrating this morning so we can reflect that love.

[8 : 29] A love so great for this world that he sent his only begotten son. A love that came while we were yet sinners. A love that didn't stop even when he had to go to the cross in our place.

I so love Sally Lloyd-Jones' description of God's love as his never-stopping, never-giving-up, unbreaking, always-and-forever love.

Isn't that beautiful? All of us are to reflect God's faithful love in all of our relationships. And then God says, I want to give a particular picture of this love in marriage.

I want the relationship I have with my people to be displayed especially in the covenant of marriage. So that people get a glimpse and even maybe a taste of my incredible covenant love for them.

And so God says, husbands, love your wives. How? As Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.

[9 : 38] Die to yourself. Live for your wife's honor and good. And keep on loving like that no matter what. So everyone can see me. That's the design.

Each of us as individuals. And then every marriage in this room has been created to reflect the glorious character of our God.

Because knowing him is what everyone most needs. We have a creative designer, don't we? We have a particular purpose.

And so does marriage. What happens when we take something designed for a particular purpose and seek to use it to serve our own purpose?

Let's think about that for a minute. Kids, there's a silly Slugs and Bugs song that Randall Goodgame sang when he was here quite recently. Some of you may remember it.

[10 : 40] It's about a tractor and a rocket and a carriage and a backhoe. And it's a really silly song though. Do any of you remember that song?

What makes that song so silly is that it sings about those four different things that move and move us and do different things. And it's silly because it sings about a backhoe going to the moon.

Can you imagine that? A backhoe going to the moon? No way. That would never work. That's silly. A rocket harvesting the wheat.

A carriage digging up dirt. Is that what a carriage is for? A tractor going to the ball. No, those things wouldn't work, would they? We need to use things for the purpose for which they were designed.

Perhaps more seriously, what if I took this glass Coke bottle designed perfectly for holding refreshing beverages?

[11 : 47] For being able to grip just right. It was designed like that very carefully. And I said, you know what I want to do today? I really need to hammer some nails. I do. There's some right over here sticking out.

And I just said, let me just knock some in. You would say, no! Stop! Don't do that. If you use that glass Coke bottle to hammer those nails, you'll harm yourself and perhaps others, right?

You wouldn't want to watch that. We must use things for the purpose they were designed, especially when the designer is God.

God says, Will, your purpose is knowing and reflecting me. God says, marriage. Your purpose is knowing and reflecting my love.

And when we seek to use ourselves or our marriages for other purposes, we do great harm. We're witnessing that devastating reality in our culture right now where Christians and non-Christians alike seem to have forgotten that God designed marriage.

[13 : 02] And instead, we're defining it by what we want. It's regulated by our ideas, isn't it? Not His commandments. Our goals for it. The purposes we have often for our self-fulfillment.

And the harm we're inflicting on ourselves and others is devastating. See, God says there's this link between our vertical relationship with Him and our horizontal relationships with each other, especially our marriages.

That's actually His design. As a result, every marriage problem is at minimum a worship problem.

Other factors may certainly be at work, but involved in every marriage issue horizontally is a worship issue vertically. If you're single and you're consumed by the idea of getting married, constantly anxious about finding the right person who will make you happy and centering your whole life around that notion, that's a worship problem.

If you're married and feeling distant from your spouse because one or both of you must be right all the time, that's a worship problem.

[14 : 28] If you're divorced and you've decided that life is over until you're married again, or you've decided you're never getting married again because it interferes with living for yourself, that's a worship problem.

Well, we know that God's people in Malachi's day had a worship problem, right? They've despised God's name by bringing Him leftovers for sacrifices.

And now it shows up in their relationships with each other too. First, in the way they approach marriage. 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.

What was happening here in Malachi's day is that the eyes and hearts of the Jewish men were wandering. They had noticed the women of the peoples around them in a nation trying to get its feet back under it.

[15 : 45] They'd noticed perhaps the political influence, the financial benefits that they could gain from marriage with one of these women.

And they thought, I can use marriage to get what I want. Who cares that she doesn't follow Yahweh? That she worships Baal or a long list of other gods.

This marriage will benefit me. That's what they were saying. And Yahweh says, this is profaning His temple.

It's a worship problem. It's an abomination. It's a strong word. These men are breaking faith first in their relationship with Him.

Right? I want to be very clear here. This is a spiritual issue God is warning against. Not a racial or ethnic issue.

[16 : 47] God is prohibiting such marriages not because of skin color, but because of heart commitment.

Sadly, and to our shame, many Christians have switched these priorities in their teaching on marriage. But God's word is very clear that the problem is religion, not race.

And the foreign wife. As He has repeatedly told His people about the danger of the nations around them leading their hearts away from the worship of Yahweh.

That's what He's concerned about. That's first the marriage problem. Using it to get what I want. Not what God's designed.

And then in verse 13, He turns to their divorce problem. Flows right out of that. But in order to marry these foreign women, the Jewish men were divorcing their Jewish wives.

[17 : 51] I need something different. She'll get me things you can't. This is what I need to be happy. And they're leaving their wives abandoned.

Their covenant commitments shattered. Verse 13. 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. These are tears. Some of them perhaps from the men themselves. Many of them likely from the wives that they've abandoned and left in that day without social support and provision.

But they don't realize what's happening. You say, why does He not? Why does God not accept my worship? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth.

To whom you've been faithless, though she is your companion. Your wife by covenant. This was the one, right? The gift God gave to you for your life.

[19 : 00] The one committed to walking with you to ease your loneliness. The one God united you to so that you'd worship Him together and teach your children to worship Him.

Notice that in verse 15. Did He not make them one with a portion of the Spirit in their union? What was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. Your worship of God together is to impact the next generation to worship Yahweh.

And this is not saying that's the only purpose of Christian marriage. But it is one of the best ways that we share that story of God's faithfulness and love.

So stop being faithless. To your wives and to me, God says. You're leaving your wife for a foreign woman and me for a foreign God who will influence your heart and your children's hearts.

Divorce is a huge problem. Stop! He says. Verses 15 and 16 are some of the most difficult Hebrew in all the Old Testament.

[20 : 13] They're hard words. They're also really hard to translate. Among other challenges, it's unclear which nouns are the subjects of which verbs.

Okay? So you'll see it written a lot of different ways. Many translations read in verse 16, God hates divorce. This is that passage you've perhaps heard quoted.

It comes from Malachi 2. And you don't see it that way in the ESV if you're using a pew Bible this morning. And I think the ESV has done a really good job of being faithful to the Hebrew.

But I don't want you to read it to soften that statement. That's not what's happening. Listen to what it says. It says divorcing is violence.

It's publicly sinful, shameful in these cases. And God warns against it a second time. This translation takes more words to do it.

[21 : 33] But it is still telling us God hates divorce. The faithlessness that breaks covenant commitment doesn't reflect his character or his love for his people.

And that was the high purpose of your marriage, he's saying to them. For those nations around you, maybe even those women you couldn't keep yourself away from. And those children you've had with the wife of your youth to get a glimpse of Yahweh's never stopping, never giving up, unbreaking, always and forever love.

And your commitment to him and your commitment to your wife. So what about in our day?

How do our worship problems become marriage problems? Let me count the ways, right? Marriage has become to us a way to get what we want.

The purpose being that I will be the most successful and happy version of me that I can imagine. Because certainly that's what God wants. That's the point, right?

[22 : 46] That's why I get married. It's a good thing. By marrying whomever I want. Becoming one with them whenever I want.

And dropping them for any reason I want when they're not doing that for me anymore. God through Malachi has strong warnings for his people in our day too.

Who are using glass Coke bottles to hammer nails. It's not just out there somewhere. It's in here too.

Start with that first part. How we approach marriage itself. According to Pew research a few years ago. Nearly 40% of marriages in America were between people of two different religions.

It doubled in 50 years. Most of those, a Christian with a non-Christian. For reference, a marriage is almost twice as likely to be with someone from the same political party as the same religion.

[23 : 58] You get that? Republicans and Democrats don't marry. But Christians and non-Christians seem to. Have our political allegiances so far surpassed our spiritual allegiances?

Please remember as we apply this to ourselves that the New Testament tells us as God's people. If we are married to an unbeliever who will stay with us.

We should not divorce them. But God says we should seek to avoid being unequally yoked. Again, an issue of the heart.

One way you demonstrate the priority of your relationship with me. God says is committing to a spouse with that same priority in his or her life. And we're often like the men in Malachi's day.

Thinking we know what's best for ourselves. Guard yourself. Malachi says by maintaining the priority of your relationship with God.

[24 : 59] Young people. When you are praying for. Or looking for. Someone to marry. As you grow up. You must remember that God's standards are first.

Not things you hear from everybody else. Not what everybody else is looking for. But what he says you're looking for. And someone to marry. Parents.

His bank account. His skin color. And his family background. Are not deal breakers. But his heart is.

It's that important. God knows what's best for you. Or for your child. Even better than you do. Even better than we know.

What's best for ourselves. And for our children. And when we violate God's design for our lives. For our marriages. We do so to our own peril. When we think we know better than our creator.

[26 : 03] How we should work. And what's best for us. We are worshiping self. Rather than God. In case you don't know. That's a problem. We do it.

When we consider divorce too. Or faithlessness. In our marriages. Even before we get to divorce itself. This passage should challenge Christian marriages.

That have become devoid of Christ. Do you ever read God's word? Or pray together? Do you teach your kids?

The glories of the gospel. And how that impacts a relationship? Do you really spend time together? And investing. And repenting. And forgiving.

And having the gospel show up. And make a difference. And the way you relate to your spouse. That would be the positive call here. Right? For all of us who've fallen complacent.

[27 : 04] In our marriages. Yes. Married to fellow Christians. Wonderful. But living for our own fulfillment. Rather than God's purposes. Some of us haven't looked longingly at a woman from another country.

But we're doing the same at a woman on a computer. God says don't be faithless. Your unfaithfulness is breaking the highest purpose of marriage.

Displaying his faithful love. Listen. He's saying do more than stay married. It's not a box to check. Pour your heart into the wife of your youth.

That's what's best for you. Guard yourselves in your hearts. In a culture of prevalent so-called no-fault divorce.

Let me just say it this way. According to God's word. God views divorce quite differently. This is not a culture that reflects the character or heart of God.

[28 : 09] God. But God would understand how hard this is. How unhappy I am. How unhealthy our marriage is.

Yes, he would. But his word speaks clearly to turn us away from divorce. But the kids shouldn't have to hear us argue all the time.

God doesn't want me in a loveless marriage. Marriage. No. But God's call first. Is to repent.

Not divorce. Yes, there are situations. Where God permits divorce. I can't talk about everything this morning.

But the heart of God's word is what? To run the other way. Right? To run back towards the wife of your youth.

[29 : 08] Whatever it takes. Even if it's costly to you for the sake of God's glory. To picture his forgiving forever covenant love. Guard yourself.

And don't be faithless. For God's glory. And for your good. Is your heart pursuing God's design?

For your marriage? Or your desires? Let me say one last thing as we close.

This is God's word speaking really directly to divorce and remarriage. Without a lot of disclaimers.

And many of you feel the pain of broken relationships. Most of the people who have encouraged me most strongly to speak about the pain and hurt of divorce.

[30 : 09] Are brothers and sisters, friends of mine. Who have walked through the pain of that in their own lives. And been deeply impacted by it. They don't love it.

It hurts in ways that I can't fully understand. Having not been in your shoes. See when we talk about reflecting God in our marriages.

It's about telling that story. Of his never stopping. Never giving up. Unbreaking. Always. And forever love. And sometimes. Bad relationships here start writing a different narrative.

A different story. On your hearts. That tells you that that kind of love. Doesn't exist. And a lot of you have been there.

And you've felt that. Maybe you're the one who left. Maybe you've been the one abandoned. Maybe you were the kid who saw love not last.

[31 : 18] Maybe you know the truth. About what Malachi is saying. About broken covenants. Better than anyone else in here. You need to hear something else too.

God wants to rewrite. That narrative. In your heart. That's his desire today. That you would know that not even your own failures.

Not even the failures of someone else. That have hurt you. Can separate you. From the love of God. In Christ Jesus. That's a true story.

That he wants your heart to hear today. His relationship with you. Through Jesus. Is one he has pledged himself to.

Second Timothy reminds us that. Even if we are faithless. Yet he will remain faithful. That's his very character.

- [32 : 18] Right? His covenant love. His covenant love. Didn't stop. When it called him to lay down his life for you. His covenant love. Won't stop. When your covenant love breaks.
- Amen. Praise the Lord for that. There is love. That never stops. Never gives up. Doesn't break.
- Is always. And forever. That's the kind of love he calls us. To reflect in our marriages. His love not only comes first.
- Before we obey. And motivates us to live for him. But it also persists. When we fail to obey. Never stopping.
- Never giving up. Unbreaking. Always. And forever. Love. Love. The kind of love we're called to. In our marriages. The kind of love he perfectly.
- [33 : 13] And persistently. Shows. To all of his children. Praise the Lord. Amen. Let's pray. Father thank you.
- For love like that. We show it to each other so poorly. Many of us hurt so deeply.
- That it's a hard love for us to believe again. But you sent Jesus for us. That we would not forget.
- That we would actually taste and see. The Lord is good. That his love never fails. That he's faithful. And his mercies are new again this morning.
- In our hurt. In our sin. In our desperation. Father heal us. Speak to our hearts.
- [34 : 19] By your spirit. And through your word. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Amen. For more information. Visit us online.
- At southwood.org For more information.
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