

Malachi 2:10-16

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Preacher: Chris Roberts

[0 : 00] Well just imagine with me it's about 450 BC in the land of Judah and picture a man living there! And he goes to his local prophet Malachi. I'm so disappointed Malachi. Coming back! Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship and my offering? Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?

My offerings Malachi. To be honest I'm feeling pretty dry spiritually. What's the matter Malachi? Well any great pastor would begin to ask questions wouldn't he? How's your Bible reading? How's your prayer life going? Good questions to ask. But did you notice the question that Malachi asks the man how's your marriage? He wants to talk about divine stuff. Malachi wants to talk domestic stuff. How are things with you and the wife? Malachi in this section rebukes the Israelite man. He rebukes the religion of the man because of his relationships. Particularly his marriage or his divorce but it could mean all of his relationships. And God says to us in this section your relationships with one another deeply and profoundly affect your relationship with me. That's the logic of verse 13 and 14 if you look there isn't it? I'm just over the page. The people say why doesn't the Lord accept our offerings? Why is our relationship with him not working? Verse 14 God says the Lord is witness between you and the wife of your youth. God is saying here what goes on in your house, in your living room and in your bedroom deeply affects what is going to happen when you come to my house. Things between me and you. So the important connection to see in our passage this morning is that the guy's religious problems were actually relational problems. His spiritual life or her spiritual life was affected by his social life with others. Now why does that matter so much to God? Why get so worked up about it Malachi? About human relationships? Well first of all these relationships matter he says because we have one father creator God. We have one father creator God. As Israel read out the passage earlier I don't know if you noticed the repeated word in these verses. The key word that is repeated is the word faithlessly. Do you notice that? Chapter 2 verse 10, verse 11, verse 14, verse 15, verse 16.

Faithlessly. The word is a bit stronger really. It can mean more like treachery. It's a very strong word. It speaks of betrayal.

It's a bit stronger. It's a bit stronger. It's a bit stronger. It's a bit stronger. It's a bit stronger. It's a bit stronger.

It was, verse 11, an abomination. Now that is a very strong word. It's the same word that is used for how God feels about child sacrifice.

[3 : 57] It's killing your children for a false god. Or of incest. It's a very strong word. Relational breakdown between them is an abomination to God.

Because it was God who brought them together in the first place, wasn't it? If you look back at verse 10, Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Then why are we faithless to one another?

Malachi asks a rhetorical question, doesn't he? Stupid question. There is an inexpressible bond between them that they have forgotten and they are ignoring and they are going against.

It's that bond between siblings, isn't it? I don't know if you have got a brother or a sister or you've grown up in a family with lots of brothers and sisters. There is that connection, isn't there? Because of a common parent, usually in most cases.

Connection with mum and dad. And so if siblings end up falling out, it really affects the parents. It is really upsetting to see children seriously break up, isn't it?

[5 : 12] Not just to fall out for a bit. But when they are treacherous towards one another. Because their identity, their unity, their oneness in the family is about the identity of the one parent.

To act like you are no brother or sister of mine is to say that he is no father of us. Betraying the one who brought them together.

And so this is why an issue between two Christian people is never just an issue between two Christian people. Social problems in the church and amongst the people of God will often lead to spiritual problems.

It's really interesting how the Bible prioritises those two things. Because you would have thought, wouldn't you, that spiritual things are more important than kind of relational things.

But remember what Jesus says. He says, if therefore you're presenting your offering at the altar, religious activity, and there remember your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar.

[6 : 28] And go your way, first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering. He's saying there, isn't he, that there's something more important than giving an offering.

Something more important than religious activity, or even giving financially, or serving in the church. It is giving socially.

It is giving socially. And getting right with other people. Our church building debt kind of hangs over us, doesn't it?

But it's not the biggest challenge for this church, actually. It's the challenge of our relationships.

Treachery and betrayal and ignoring that connection is an abomination to God.

Because he is our one father and one creator. And it reflects on him. Now, we can apply it generally to relationships in the church. But I think Malachi here, and we can see that he's on to something more specific.

[7 : 33] Because this treachery, in particular, happens in two ways in this passage. Treachery, first of all, happens when we establish wrong relationships.

It happens when we establish wrong relationships. And this is to do primarily in this passage here, with the relationship of marriage. Just drop your eye down to verse 11.

You profane the sanctuary of the Lord. You've married the daughter of a foreign God. God says here, doesn't he, that damage is done to my worship and my sanctuary when you get close to the wrong kinds of people.

When you build relationships with those people, our relationship breaks down. Because marriage is a very, very powerful thing.

Later in verse 14, he speaks about marriage being like a partnership. And the same word is used to describe the cement that sticks bricks together in a building.

[8 : 47] Once you put them together, it's very difficult to pull them apart. It is a covenant relationship. A legally binding relationship.

And that pervasive bond, that legal bond between a man and a woman, is important particularly because of its spiritual significance to the people of God.

Malachi talks about marrying the daughter of a foreign God here, doesn't he? Now, some theologians think that that is just picture language. It's just a parable of their kind of idolatry, of them turning away from God.

It's picture language. But that is to miss the point. It wasn't just that marrying foreign daughters was a picture of idolatry. It was actually the cause of it.

God had said through Moses, hadn't he, in Deuteronomy, You shall not intermarry with foreign women or men, giving your sons to their daughters or taking their daughters for your sons.

[9 : 56] For they would turn away your sons from following me to serve other gods. We've got to be careful there. We see in Deuteronomy that racial intermarriage was forbidden.

For the Old Testament people of God, but not for racial reasons. But for religious reasons. It was because then each nation had their own particular god that they would worship.

And so marriages to men or women outside of Israel was the catalyst for spiritual problems, for idolatry. So the warning was, if you marry that person who is not of me, not of the Lord, then that will have an impact on your worship.

And that's because marriage was not just seen as a romantic commitment then. It was a way of making alliances, getting security, of making political moves.

Marriage was the way that you got what you wanted and what you needed in life. You see what they were doing here was trying to get the things that they thought actually God was no longer going to give them by compromising on this.

[11 : 18] Emma's been watching *Pride and Prejudice*, the BBC version, of course. It's all about pairing the Bennett sisters up with the right men, isn't it?

That is such a crude way of describing it. But that's as far as I can see what it's about. The right men should bring security and peace and prosperity, Mr. Darcy.

They are the things that God had already promised to his people. They think, God isn't giving me these things, so I'll go elsewhere.

I'll go outside of Israel. I'll look for a better suitor. I'll marry into another family, into another nation with another God. So what they were doing maritally was an indication of how they were spiritually. Malachi is showing us here, isn't he, that marriage is a very religious activity. Whether you're religious or not, who you decide to make partnership with will shape the God that you worship and how you worship.

[12 : 34] It's one of the big problems in the land of Israel with the kings, wasn't it? Even the good kings that managed to get rid of the false gods out of the land of Egypt couldn't quite get rid of the high places where the false gods were worshipped.

Who brought those high places in? Well, mostly Solomon, the king's foreign wives. He couldn't quite bring himself to put them away.

And the signs are perhaps there if you look at verse 13. You see the way that they worship. God rebukes them for this crying and weeping and groaning.

It's kind of hypocritical show of religion. But what is damning about that is it looks a lot like pagan religion, pagan worship.

I don't know if you remember in two kings the whole Elijah and the prophets of Baal you know when God sends his fire down and burns up the offering when it's covered in water.

[13 : 40] And the way that the prophets of Baal try and do that is by crying out and calling out and going into hysterics but he did not answer. And they were marrying these women and in turn marrying the spirit of the age of the world around them and adopting their values and adopting their way of worshipping their way of reaching salvation and it's so subtle actually isn't it?

Notice that they're still trying to worship the Lord at his temple but the way they are doing that has shifted.

They come with outward sorrow showing great external demonstrations but that is not how the Lord has asked them to worship him.

Not with emotional blackmail not by bending his arm that was pagan worship to kind of speed the response of the gods. The way they worship has subtly been changed by the world around them and by the connections they've made with it.

they've forgotten grace which the world knows so little about. They'd adopted the we need to impress God mentality of worship and it was so subtle wasn't it?

[15 : 09] We realise here that marriage is a religious act and who you marry bears on who you worship and how you worship and how you begin to think and how you believe.

Don't underestimate the influence that these connections can make that a spouse can have on you. Let me say that if you're considering marriage here this morning at some point and you are on a trajectory of falling in love with somebody who is not a Christian you are on a trajectory of disobeying God and of having your worship of him hampered and of being changed or of even leaving him altogether.

Somebody once said don't marry the spirit of the age or you'll be a widower in the next. If that person's supreme God is something other than the Lord then you'll be heading into a union that betrays him that is treacherous towards him.

Think about your brothers and sisters as well. It is treacherous when a Christian person says I'm living for the Lord and then unite with someone who does not support or live in that covenant that you have with the Lord.

It betrays the church of God doesn't it? It deals treacherously with your brothers and sisters saying one thing and doing another saying I'm committed to you.

[16 : 48] We are one body and one family united in mind and spirit yet I'm going to marry this person and I'm going to go out with them. It's treacherous isn't it?

I know that Malachi is being pretty tough here. maybe some of you at the end of this service are going to think well this area of relationships has been an area that I've really messed up in and it's a real difficulty for me and there are lots of regrets in my life and I feel awful about them and I long for grace and I long for forgiveness.

Let me say to you that actually you are not if you feel like that in the crosshairs this morning. Actually it's the people who sit rather comfortably looking at this behaviour and thinking I'm so glad I'm not like that.

Because as well as making wrong relationships the big problem and actually I think the bigger problem for them is betraying and letting right relationships fester and neglecting them and even breaking them.

Second reason why treachery happens making wrong relationships but secondly when we break right relationships when we break right relationships look at verse 14 again 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.

[18:27] though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. And he speaks of the same issue doesn't he in 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 and so guard yourselves in your spirit do not be faithless.

I think most of us in this room have probably been touched in some way by marriage breakdown. The ripples of it go far and they last a long time don't they?

The Bible teaches that in some cases divorce may be the best thing. There are legitimate cases for that. It's a really sticky issue isn't it?

I want to say that this passage is not all that the Bible teaches on the subject of marriage or on divorce. We've got to judge each case by reasoned application of the whole counsel of God. And there are always there's always restoration and forgiveness when we mess up and we do mess up. But having said that I don't want to soften what Malachi brings to the table because the reasons for divorce for them in this case were just plain wrong.

[19:56] The problem here for these Israelite men is what ruled the marriage was purely the whims of these men. what had happened was that the covenantal relationship, that legally binding relationship, had become a consumer relationship.

And when you're a consumer, the customer is always right. Right? Our society says that love is a spontaneous desire, not a legal oath or promise.

So when the flame flickers out, move on. And in the same way for them, covenants don't mean much now. An obligation to love someone means less than an impulse to love someone.

And they were divorcing their wives as far as we can see for no good reason at all. Good women of the Lord, wives of their youth, verse 14. Maybe their first love, first wives.

And again here, the social issues lead to spiritual issues. Look at verse 15. Did he not make them one with a portion of the spirit in their union?

[21:16] And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. Now these verses are not easy to understand. Verse 15 is not easy to understand, not even if you can get the English right of the original Hebrew.

It's one of the rare places where it's quite difficult to know the precise sense of the Hebrew. But I think we can work out from the context what he's trying to say here. He's saying here that divorce of this kind is an attack on the identity of God as one, as the only God, mainly because of the function of marriage in producing and raising children.

part of the one God's plan to fill the world with glory is uniting a husband and a wife to be one, to fill the world with the seed of his people.

Do you see that? Godly offspring. That was the plan for Adam and Eve, wasn't it? And it means that even in Malachi's day, God uses natural means of families and of having babies and to be a part, to be a means of the increase of his kingdom.

To bring people into the world who keep covenant with him, godly offspring. It doesn't mean that a child born to Christian parents is guaranteed to keep covenant with the Lord, it doesn't mean that, but that's the expectation.

[22:52] And so breaking right relationships in marriage and making wrong ones is a barrier to this. It is a barrier to the child.

It's a really serious problem. When parents are no longer able to raise a child in the Lord's way because there's a conflict of interest, the man has thrown his Christian wife out and married a non-Christian and however sympathetic she might be to his religion, it will be a barrier to the child's godliness.

And it might even contribute to future covenant breaking by the child. This kind of consumer way of looking at relationships puts a stop to God's kingdom.

It would be as bad as standing at the door at 5 to 11 on a Sunday morning and just pushing people out of the door. Children may walk away from the faith of their parents for different reasons, but it doesn't mean that this reason still is not true, of breaking down good relationships and letting them fester and neglecting them.

Someone in the Times newspaper has written recently that if you allow yourself to believe that marriage is the union of two persons for life, in my opinion we need to begin the long process of reconditioning ourselves to let go of the culturally imposed obsession with monogamy.

[24 : 34] That's staying with one spouse. In other words, they're saying aren't they, marriage is a consumer relationship, not a covenantal relationship.

relationship. The whole why bother with a piece of paper thing, you hear that a lot don't you, if we're together as a couple, why bother signing a piece of paper?

Why make it legal? Actually some people say if we make it legal it will make it worse. Bertrand Russell the atheist said relationships are killed by the thought that they are a duty.

But don't we know actually deep down that true love expresses itself in those kind of promises.

When you want to say to a person not just I love you but to quote Whitney Houston, I will always love you.

There will never be a day when I will not love you even if my feelings change from time to time. It's not love if it doesn't say that, is it?

[25 : 43] I love you enough but actually not enough to cut off all of my other options. Not enough to say I never want the relationship to end. Lewis Meade, who's a Christian ethicist, says, my wife has lived with five different men since we got married.

Each of them has been me. And that is the challenge, isn't it, of these relationships, these good relationships. And it's the warning here of maintaining them, to guard yourself in your spirit and not to be faithless, as Malachi says.

Husbands are commanded, love your wives. Don't kind of soften that. It doesn't say, do it when you feel love.

love. It is a command for all of the time. Wives are commanded as well to love their husbands.

Malachi says, don't hate your wife. Don't divorce her.

That goes for the wife too. Marry someone you like, yes, of course. But it's realising that on some days you won't like them, and it might get a little bit rocky.

[27 : 03] But when it's a covenantal relationship built on legal promises and not on consumer choice, actually, you've got to love them. You've got to love them. C.S.

Lewis was on the radio a lot during World War II, and he spoke, one of his main messages was about loving your enemies, which was a really big question, wasn't it, during World War II for many people.

He asked the question, how do you manufacture feelings that aren't there for someone you know you need to love? How do you love someone you don't love?

He shows that actions often control feelings, not the other way around. He said, don't bother wasting time wondering whether you love your neighbour, act as if you did.

When you behave as if you love someone, you will presently come to love him. He says it works the other way round as well, with hate, bearing in mind the history of when this was.

[28 : 12] He said, the Germans perhaps at first ill-treated the Jews because they hated them, but afterwards they hated them much more because they had ill-treated them.

The more cruel you are, he said, the more you will hate, and the more you hate, the more cruel you will become. So true, isn't it? Actions lead to feelings.

Feelings don't lead to action all the time. Love is both a spontaneous thing, and it's actually a duty of care.

So you may not feel tender to those people that you are joined to in the church and in marriage.

You may not feel loving towards them, you may not feel eager to please them, you may not feel affectionate, but you must be those things.

Because marriage is covenantal, not consumer relationship. We understand this, don't we, with children, if you've got children. We would frown more on a parent who gives their child up because they don't like them anymore, than on a husband or wife who does that.

[29 : 28] even when a child gives nothing in return, even when we don't like them on occasion, when they really wind us up, when all the effort is poured in for no return, you still love them actually because you've got to love them.

Later in life they may go off the rails, they may require even more investment in their twenties, giving you nothing in return, but you still love them because you've got to love them. you have a duty of care, you have a responsibility. We understand that with children and it's the same with these covenantal relationships. So what God has joined together, let not man separate. The man leaves Malachi's office. He's got some thinking to do, hasn't he? With the huge realisation that it is impossible to leave your private life at home when you come to God's house. His religious problems were his relational problems and his spiritual life was affected by his social life. Wives and husbands in the Lord, if you're not married, your brothers and your sisters, you are joined together with them in a covenantal relationship under one father and creator who has brought you together by covenant.

[31 : 00] And so folks, you've got to love them. You've got to love them. And as you do that in action, you will find that you will begin to do it in feeling.

Let's pray. Let's pray.