

Malachi 2:12-16 'Breaking Faith In Marriage!'

Last time we looked at the book of Malachi we looked at v10-12 of chapter two. We looked at the idea of Breaking Faith. The breaking of our word to one another. Matthew 5:37 Jesus said "let your yes be yes and your no, no." So be a man or woman of your word, or in other words, mean what you say and say what you mean. Conduct yourself with honesty, sincerity and integrity when dealing with people. And particularly so, when it comes to brothers and sisters in Christ. And most importantly of all, when it comes to those agreements which called God down as it were, as the all-knowing and seeing witness! So those covenants, those agreements where not only two but three parties are involved. As I said, those dealings with one another are a clear indication and testimony, to the true nature of our faith. And the evidence of whether God is or isn't, working in and through our lives!

V11 "Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem. Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, by marrying the daughter of a foreign God." And we saw how 1000 years before in Deuteronomy 7:16 God had warned and instructed His people about getting wives for their sons, and giving their daughters to be married to the sons of the seven nations which they were going to in time, destroy and occupy. The danger was that those marriages would bring about idol worship into Israel's hearts and lands, and this would in turn bring down the nation, because God's wrath would be upon them!

Such was the danger that in Deuteronomy 13:6-11 if you remember, God had commanded that such people who lured Israel into doing those things "must be put to death," even by the hands of their own family members. Deuteronomy 13:9b "Your hand must be the first in putting them to death."

And I said that we still find our practical application for these things today in marriage. So we looked at Paul's instruction on marriage, and why believers should never choose to marry non-believers, from 2 Corinthians 6:14-18, because the dangers were the same. The dividing on a personal level of the loyalties or heart of the believer. Because being from different worlds, the Christian's devotion would be torn apart between God, and their nonbelieving spouse! And I made the point, that it was not because non-Christians were inherently evil humanly speaking, nor that there can't be love, caring, tenderness and happiness in such marriages. It is simply that marriage is hard enough, without having that lifelong tearing apart spiritually, with the person who is closest to us. And simply to assert that because we love them therefore God must choose them, is a recipe for heartache and disaster. And most often leads the believer down the road of spiritual compromise, and can even lead them to the casting aside of their own faith!

So to our text Malachi 2:12-16 'Breaking Faith In Marriage: Divorce!' V12 "As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty." Now last time we didn't touch upon the last part of v12, "even though he brings offerings to the Lord Almighty." So deliberately going against this age old Command of God would have terrible consequences. That person would be "cut off from the tents of Jacob." Literally meaning, being put to death, "even though he brings offerings." So these people could bring a truckload of sacrifices to God's altar and those things would get them nowhere. Because the priests were corrupt, this sin brought particular condemnation from God, and the sinner's hearts were not in it anyway!

So again we see that simply going through the motions will not end up in forgiveness. No, only playing the outward game of Christianity, will not end up with us in heaven. That kind of life will have a very different kind of ending. Matthew 7:22-23 "Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me you evil doers." So unlike the Roman Catholic idea which says if you put enough money into the plate, some so-called priest will pray for you, and through his prayers, you will receive absolution for your sins against God. Unlike that heresy, here it says bring as many offerings as you like, they're not going to help you as long as your attitude and heart remain the same, because hypocritical sacrifices or lip service in the things of God, (as we saw at the start of this series) is not what God is after from us. It's sincerity of heart in life, and worship!

V13 "Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands." Yes the prophet Malachi adds this condemnation to the people. Because such was the distance which they as a nation had travelled upon that "broad road," which Jesus spoke about, even taking everything with them, (so their comfy life with all their cherished sins) that although they wept and wailed it wasn't in repentance over sin, but because of the hardships which they had faced due to their final realisation that all of that stuff meant nothing to God. And yet still they did not come with changed hearts! They *thought more animals and more crocodile tears will surely do it.*

Now friends although we don't see the words, it is though the message keeps flashing through this book: It's about the heart. It's about the heart. Yes it's all about the heart! Whereas Israel at that time, both priests and people, we're a nation of sacrificing hypocrites. And they were so blinded by this hypocrisy, that though they could see the effects of God's displeasure with them, in their blindness, they just could not understand, even when it was pointed out to them!

Brothers and sisters, this is how we too can become. We can be so blind to our own sin. We can easily see the sin and shortcomings in other people's lives and yet, it as though God needs to send a thunderbolt from heaven, or even rip the roof off our house, before we can see the reflection of the person looking back in the mirror at us. And it's always painful when it happens. Yes it's always painful when the Lord shines His light on our own hypocrisy. Yet if tears of heartfelt repentance flow it's a good thing. There is no shame in the stirrings of the Spirit of God Beloved!

Then in v14, we have the cause of God's displeasure with them. The great Bible commentator John Calvin points out, but it's not as though this was their only problem, it's more that God is saying, 'You even do this evil. What will you not do?' V14 "You ask why? It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth. Because you have broken faith with her, though she is your marriage partner, the wife of your marriage covenant." So they were trampling in the dirt those covenants, those agreements, which as I said, they had in effect called God down to be their marital witness, yes there testifier!

But first, let's remember what the original idea of covenant was. It was when two people were to enter into a binding agreement. An animal was slaughtered and divided into two equal halves. And then the two covenantees would walk between those halves and in doing so, they were declaring, that if either person broke that binding agreement, they were calling God, who was their eternal witness to those things, to do to them, as it had been done to that animal. But what those priests and people had done was so much worse than a man's covenant with another man. "The Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth." '*What a vile and disgusting thing you are doing,*' the prophet is saying. '*To marry your wife in the prime and beauty of her youth. When her*

skin and body are young and glowing. When she is strong and well for having children, and her company and fellowship to you is as sweet as a flower in bloom. But then when she has given you her all, (even spending herself for you, living and being all that the covenant which you both swore before God to be) you have then cast her aside as an unwanted and used up old animal. Forgetting all that she has been to you and done for you throughout the years, so you can take for yourselves the whores of idolatry from the nations which surround you!

Does it sound familiar? Surely this is the epidemic which consumes marriages today. The lust of the eyes leading to the sin of the flesh. And it's not just non-Christian but Christian marriage is also. Perhaps the marriage is going through a rough patch, which they all do at times. And then the husband (or wife) begins to share things with another, things which should be kept for their partner alone. And then perhaps the married person looks more and more for the company of that other. And Satan is whispering *'it's OK, no one will know, and it will be even beneficial to your marriage,'* as the world says it will spice things up. But he lies! And the end result is death. Death of the trust of the married relationship. Death of the family unit. Death of the shattered security of the children. It really is a tragedy!

Now am I being melodramatic? No I don't think so. Listen again to the words "It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner the wife of your marriage covenant." Look at the indictment in v15: "Has not the Lord made them one?" We read in Matthew 19:4-6 "Haven't you read", he replied, "That at the beginning the Creator made them male and female, and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man put asunder."

So the Lord Himself takes up the argument in Malachi, that God makes the two become one, in Genesis. He's saying God made the man, one woman. There were not two, or five, or ten, there was only "one." And as was the pattern laid down for all time, the two halves were made to be one complete person. "Has not the Lord made them one, in flesh and spirit they are his." So the whole being belongs to God. Yes "both body and soul they are his." The two have become one in the presence and witness of God. "Therefore what God has joined together let not man put asunder." V15c of Malachi 2 "So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." Yes "guard yourself in your spirit." Keep your heart and mind in the things of God. Keep your spiritual life on track. Keep your mind in the scriptures and your heart in prayer as you do, and you will not go wrong. Because God's Spirit will testify to your spirit as to what is right and what is wrong, and if you are listening, He will not let you go down the wrong path!

In Proverbs 5:15-19 we read "Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflowing the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer, may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love." Friends if anyone knew of the dangers of being led into sexual sin through lust, it was Solomon. A thousand women he either married or took as mistresses. In his first years as king, he was the man who God gave wisdom to more than any other man who has ever lived. Even today, the saying might still be heard, 'O for the wisdom of Solomon'. And yet soon after, he became not the king of wisdom but the king of lust, adultery and idolatry! As he took so many "daughters of foreign gods" as wives, and set up the worship of those things, even in the borders of Israel.

Proverbs 5:1-6 "My son, pay attention to my wisdom, listen well to my words of insight, that you may maintain discretion and your lips may preserve knowledge. For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil, but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double edged sword. Her feet go down to death, her steps lead straight to the grave." Friends how powerful are the King's words who not only knew, but actually lived through those things. And were it not for God's grace and mercy, would have led him down to the gates of hell! Proverbs 5:20-23 "Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? For a man's ways are in full view of the Lord, and he examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him, the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly."

Brothers and sisters, I wonder how many men and women today, at their death could have those words read as a summary of their lives? That "Their lust filled folly had ensnared them." And that fornication and adultery had lead them down to the grave! "Do not break faith with the wife (or husband) of your youth."

And finally v16 "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. "And I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the Lord God Almighty." Now before I deal with this verse, let me say that I am not commenting on anyone's personal experience or circumstances here. Divorce is a tragedy every time. And I guess for some, perhaps the tragedy began when they first got married. Perhaps it was haste and foolishness which led them to the tragedy of divorce. I'm sure there are many reasons why people break up. But it is speaking specifically here of adultery and polygamy, or marrying more than one wife! "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel. "And I hate a man's covering himself with violence, as well as with his garment."

I want us to think about these words "Covering himself with violence." Without doubt today one of the many modern evils is violence against women. And particularly so by their husband or partner. In Australia one woman dies at the hands of their partner every day. And I guess thousands more live under constant threats of violence and abuse. Verbal, physical, emotional and spiritual. And as far as I'm concerned these men should be in prison. They are gutless cowards, and the courts are cowards too, for not dealing with them as they should. And those gutless judges will have to one day give an account to God for the dereliction of their duties. But what the text is saying here, is that the way which these priests and men of Israel have treated their wives, their beloved one, their cherished one, even as Adam put it, "at last this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." She's the one that I've been looking for, she is what has been missing in my life. Yes the text is saying that so despicable was the treatment by God's people of their wives, that even though they may not literally physically have abused them, yet even so, in the sight of God, it was as though they had "violated them." That they had even raped them and exposed them to the ridicule and contempt of all who knew them!

Not only did they show contempt for their wives, that was bad enough, but worse still they showed contempt for God. The witness to their marriage covenant. "What God has joined together let not man put asunder." How much worse when it be the one who swore the oath themselves. You evil men, you "cover yourselves with violence" as easily as you would putting on your old coat. 'Can you not see how vile your actions are?' God is saying to them. 'Have you no shame? Is your conscience so dead? You even marry another while you are still married to your real wife.'

So what instruction, what can we take away from here today to encourage us on? Well as I said, (and as you who are married all now) marriage is hard. It takes work and commitment. Biblical love is not an airy fairy emotional abstract concept. Love is an action not a word or emotion. "For greater love hath no man than this. That he lay down his life for his friends." That was the greatest expression of

love the world has ever known. And it was an action not an emotion or a feeling. Ephesians 5:25 "Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her." Self-sacrificing love, not the self-centred obsession which seems to dominate many marriages today!

Friends in closing, I want again to draw your attention to v15c "So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." And so important in marriage is this "guarding yourself in your spirit," this keeping your spiritual life on track, by keeping your mind in the scriptures, and by keeping your heart open in prayer as you do so, that in the very next verse He says it again. "So guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith." Yes be careful where you direct your emotions. Be careful where you spend the currency of your intimacy. Don't foolishly spend and even give those things away to just anyone. Those things belong to the one for whom they were intended. The one with whom you have made or in the future will make, a covenant before God. So "Guard yourself in your spirit and do not break faith."

Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 "Not only was the teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails, given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard, here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

So at the end of Solomon's life, (and by God's grace he had re stored the king's sanity) the conclusion which he came to was this. Hold God in His right place in your lives, and everything else will make sense. Every relationship will be in its right place. Because a reverence for God, will help us remember who we are. So we will not have contempt for any of His blessed gifts to us. And particularly so of his love for us in Jesus, and that one which he has given us to spend our lives with! Let's Pray!