

Malachi 2:12-16 Breaking Faith In Marriage; And Divorce.

Last time we looked at verses 10-12 of chapter 2 of the book of Malachi, and we looked at the idea of "breaking faith." The breaking of our word to one another. In Matthew 5:37 Jesus said "let your yes be yes and your no be 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 all people, particularly so when it comes to brothers and sisters in Christ. And most importantly of all, when it comes to those agreements which call God down as it were, as the all-knowing and seeing witness! So those covenants, those agreements, when not only two, but three parties are involved, because as I said, those dealings with one another are a clear indication and testimony to the true nature of our faith. Indication of the way which God is or isn't working in and through our lives!

Malachi 2:11: "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 7:1-6 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 being 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 against 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 such 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."

I said that we find our practical application for those things today in marriage. So we looked at Paul's instruction on marriage, and why believers should not 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 the heart of the believer; being from different worlds, the Christian's devotion would be torn apart between God, and their non-believing 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 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 in God!

So to our text for this morning: Malachi 2:12-16 "Breaking Faith In Marriage; And Divorce"

Verse 12 "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 verse 12: "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 to the Lord Almighty." So these people could bring a truckload of sacrifices to God's altar but 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. No, 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 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; yes, 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 is sincerity of heart in life and worship!

Verse 13: "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." The Prophet Malachi adds this condemnation to the people. Such was the distance which they as a nation had travelled upon that broad road which Jesus speaks about, taking everything with them upon that road to maintain their comfy life with all their cherished sins, that even though they wept and wailed it wasn't in repentance over sin. It was because of the hardships they had faced due to their final realisation that all of that stuff meant nothing to God. Yet still they did not come with changed hearts! They thought more animals and more crocodile tears would do it.

Now although we don't see the words, it as though the message keeps flashing through the book of Malachi: *it's all about the heart. It's all about the heart. It's all about the heart!* Whereas Israel at that time, (both priests and people), was a nation of sacrificing hypocrites. And they were so blinded by this hypocrisy, that even 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 blinded to our own sin. We can easily see the sin and shortcomings in other people`s lives and yet, it`s 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 at us in the mirror. And it's always painful when it happens. Yes it's always painful when the Lord shines His light on our own hypocrisy. And if tears of heartfelt repentance flow, it's a good thing, praise God. There is no shame in the stirrings of the Spirit of God in repentance!

In verse 14, we have the cause of God's displeasure with them. But the great Bible commentator John Calvin points out that it's not as though this was their *only* problem. It`s more to the point that God is saying; 'You even do this evil. What will you not do?' Verse 14 "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 partner, the wife of your marriage covenant." So they were trampling in the dirt those covenants, those agreements, they had in effect called God down to take their marital declaration as their witness.

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 two halves. In doing so, they were declaring that if either person broke that binding agreement, that blood oath, they were calling God (who was their eternal witness to those things), to do to them as it had been done to that animal! And what those priests and people had done was even so much worse than man covenanting to 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 beautiful and glowing. When she is strong and willing and in the prime of her life for having children. And her company and fellowship to you is sweet as a flower in bloom. But then when she has given you her all, even spending herself for you, being all that the covenant which you both swore before God to be, you have then cast her aside even 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 marriages too. Perhaps the marriage is going through a rough patch (which they all do at times as we know) and then the husband or wife begins to share things with another person, things which should be kept for their partners ears alone. And then perhaps the married person looks more and more for the company of that *other* one. And Satan is whispering 'it's OK, no one will know, it's all harmless, and it will even be beneficial to your marriage, as the world says it will spice things up.' But he lies. And the end the result is death. Death of the trust of the married relationship. Death of the family unit. Death of the shattered trust of the children. It really is a tragedy!

Now am I being melodramatic? No, I don't think so. "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 verse 15: "has not the Lord made them one?" 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 separate." So even the Lord himself takes up Malachi's argument that God makes the two become one. Malachi is saying that in Genesis God made the man, the one man, and the one woman. There were not two or five or 10; there was only one woman. And for the woman there was only one man. And as was the pattern laid down for all time: the two halves were made to be one complete person.

Again from Matthew: "has not the Lord made them one in flesh and spirit, they are His." So the whole being belongs to God. Both body and soul: they are his. The two have become one in the presence and witness of God. Verse 15c: "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 your 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 astray, 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 never let you down!

Proverbs 5:15-19: "drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in 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." If anyone knew of the dangers of being led into sexual sin through lust, it was Solomon. 1000 women he either married or took as mistresses. In his first years as King he was the man who God gave wisdom, more than any other man. Even today the saying might still be heard, 'Oh that person has the *wisdom of Solomon*'. And yet soon after he became not the King of wisdom, but the King of adultery and idolatry. 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. She gives no thought to the way of life; her powers are crooked, but she knows it not." How powerful are the King's words: he who not only knew, but actually lived through these very 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 adulterous? 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."

Again Verse 15 of Malachi 2: "do not break faith with the wife (or husband) of your youth." Verse 16: "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*. Divorce is a tragedy every time, And I guess for some, perhaps the tragedy sadly even began when they first got married. Perhaps it was haste and foolishness which led them to the tragedy of divorce. And I'm sure there are many reasons why people's marriages break up, but it is speaking here specifically of adultery and polygamy (or marrying more than one wife).

"I hate divorce", says the Lord God Almighty. "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 our modern evils is violence against women. And particularly so, by their husbands 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 cowards, and the courts are cowards too for not dealing with them as they should. Those judges will have to give an account to God come judgement day for their lack of action.

But what the text is talking about here is the way which these priests and men of Israel have treated their wives, their beloved ones, their cherished ones. (As Adam put it in the garden of Eden when God first brought the woman to him "at last this is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh"; she's the one that I have been looking for, she is what has been missing in my life). The text before us is saying that so despicable was the treatment by God's people of their wives, that even though they had not literally physically abused them, *in God's sight* it was as though they had violated them. As though they had raped them and exposed them to ridicule and contempt to all who knew them! And not only did they show contempt for their wives, (that was deplorable enough) but worse still they had 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? As I said, and as you who are married all know, 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." So that was the greatest expression

of love the world would ever know and it was an action not an emotion. 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 so many marriages today.

Friends, in closing I want to again draw your attention to verse 15c: “so guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.” And so important to 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.” So be careful where you direct your emotions. Be careful where you spend your time. 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 12:9-15: “not only was the teacher wise, but he also 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 Shepard. Be warned, my son, of anything In addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wears 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.”

Yes, “here is the conclusion of the matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” Beloved, between believers marriage is a bond which is anchored and witnessed by God and all of heaven. We must pray for our marriages. Indeed we must pray for all Christian marriages.

Let's pray