

Place: Lurgan Baptist 5:2:2012

MALACHI'S MIGHTY MINISTRY

Reading: Malachi 2:10-16

4. HOW TO HAVE A LASTING MARRIAGE

A little girl had learned the story of “*Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*.” She was telling the story to her mother and when she got down to the part where the Prince kissed Snow White and awakened her from her sleep, the little girl said, “*Mother, do you what happened next ?*” The mother said, “*They lived happily ever after.*” The little said, “*Oh no, they got married.*” There is no marriage without its moments of difficulty and dissension. If you get married you will have marriage problems. If you say, “*I’m married but I don’t have any problems,*” you really have problems, because you’re out of touch with reality. Any time two sinners with different backgrounds and ways of thinking come together you’ve got problems. I heard about one husband that was complaining to his wife. He said to her “*Why can’t you cook biscuits like my Mamma does ?*” She answered him, “*Why don’t you bring home the dough like my Daddy does ?*” Some time ago a prominent American evangelical leader made a statement that many believed was long overdue. He told his audience that the biggest threat to the family in the U.S.A. is not homosexuality, its divorce.

Perhaps because the homosexual wing has been shouting so much we have missed this fact. According to the latest polls in the United Kingdom the percentage of Christian marriages that are ending in divorce is around 50% about the same as the national average. Now that also includes second marriages that have failed. *Now what does that tell us ?* Firstly that far too many Christian families are being torn apart by divorce, but it also tells us in the light of Malachi’s mighty ministry there is now little difference between the way the world lives and the conduct of those who profess the name of Christ. Someone has said that fifty years ago “*Parents were apt to have lots of kids, but nowadays kids are apt to have lots of parents.*” My over these past few years the Western World has witnessed an epidemic of divorce. Probably most of us here this morning have family or friends who have gone through divorce. And I have no desire to heap guilt or condemnation on those who have already been traumatized by divorce. We cannot undo the past. We cannot unscramble the egg.

Joseph Stowell, in an article that he wrote called “*The Divorce Dilemma,*” said this, “*We must keep our commitment to strong families and still provide welcome and support to those who have been damaged by divorce, Grace that threatens truth is not grace at all and truth apart from grace requires an impossible goal of perfection.*” Now what is the truth concerning marriage ? It is this. That God hates divorce. Do you see what (2:16) says “*He hateth putting away.*” There is permanence in marriage because marriage as far as God is concerned is an indissoluble covenant. But its not just truth, its grace.

And grace demands that we apply these biblical requirements with a tender compassion. Grace finds people in the church that have been hurt and scarred by divorce, and sustains them, including little children who have been affected by it. Now you might ask, what has all this got to do with Malachi (Ch 2) ? Just this. Twenty five hundred years ago, divorce was a major problem in Judah. Men were divorcing the wives of their youth for newer Canaanite models. And this practice was an abomination in God's sight. (2:11) So God calls Malachi to speak out against it, and in so doing Malachi sets before us "***How to have a Lasting Marriage.***" Notice here, first of all,

(1) HOW MARRIAGE IS DIRECTED

That is, how it is ordered by God. You see, the problem in Malachi's day was twofold. The men were divorcing their Hebrew wives and then they were marrying Heathen wives. Did you notice that the word "*treacherously,*" appears five times in the passage. (2:10, 11, 14, 15, 16) The word means "*to betray a trust, to be unfaithful to a commitment.*" Is this not exactly what was happening in Malachi's day ? Think of,

(a) The Marriage Regulations that were Ignored:

You see, God had given them certain marriage regulations concerning whom they were to marry. Concerning the seven groups of people that occupied Canaan the Lord said, "*Neither shalt thou make marriages with them thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son nor his daughter*

shalt thou take unto thy son." (Deut 7:3 Ex 34:11-16) Do you recall that historically Malachi was ministering during the time of Nehemiah and this is exactly what was happening in Nehemiah's day. Nehemiah says, "*In those days saw I Jews that married that had married wives of Ashdod, of Ammon and of Moab. And I contended with them and cursed them and smote certain of them, and plucked off their hair and made them swear by God saying, 'Ye shall not give your daughters unto their sons not take their daughters unto your sons, or for yourselves.'*" (13:23-26) Do you see what Malachi says ? Look if you will at (2:11) You see, Israel were meant to be a separated people, they were chosen to be holy unto the Lord (Ex 19:6) but they compromised and violated God's law on separation. My it has never been God's plan for believers to marry unbelievers. Do you recall Paul's words ? "*Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers.*" (2 Cor 6:14) I have seen spiritually vibrant young people throw their lives away by marrying unbelievers. When you ask why they are doing this, you hear rationalizations as these.

" I love him and love is what matters most," " He promises to go to church with me and the children." " If I break up with him he won't have anyone to lead him to Christ." " I've prayed about this and feel a peace that it is God's will." Do you hear me loud and clear this ? It is never God's will for a Christian to marry a non-Christian. No exceptions. You should be no more praying about marrying a non-Christian than you should pray about whether it is God's will for you to murder your neighbour.

Do you think that marrying an unbeliever is unwise or perhaps a minor sin ? God calls it an abomination (2:11) And it's never God's will for you to sin. (a) Then think of,

(b) The Marriage Relationships that were Idolatrous:

Do you see what God says in (2:11) Now notice two words. “ *abomination*,” a term reserved for the worst of evils such as immorality, witchcraft or idolatry. The word for “ *married*,” used in this passage is baal, the noun form of which means “ *lord, master, husband*.” Notice the play on words, “ *married baal the daughter of a strange god*.” Baal was the false god worshipped by the Canaanites and the Phoenicians. The Jews had a saying, “ *He that marries a heathen woman is as if he made himself son in law to an idol*.” Now this why God specified who they were to marry. “ *Neither shalt thou make marriages with them For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods*.” (Deut 7:3) Do you recall when Israel were about to go into the Promised Land ? They engaged in acts of sexual immorality with the women of Moab and “ bowed down to their gods.” (Num 25:2) Do you recall Solomon was drawn into the same trap ?

He married many foreign women and they turned his heart after their gods. (1 Kings 11:2 Neh 13:26) Jezebel introduced the idolatry of Phoenicia into Israel with her marriage to Ahab and now the same thing was happening in Malachi's day. Do you know something ? You are asking for trouble if you marry an unbeliever. They are more likely to bring you down, than you are to lift them

up. Are you thinking “ *I would never marry a pagan idolater. Even though he isn't especially religious my fiancé is a decent man. He doesn't set up statutes and bow down before them*,” But my if he does not follow the Lord he follows other gods. It may be the god of self, or money, or status but he is not following the living and true God. Catherine and I had a friend who was a keen believer. Devoted to the Saviour, she was baptized and she belonged to the gospel hall. That was until she met a boy who was “ good,” but godless. I remember challenging her one night about this relationship, and she said, “ *You've nothing to be worried about, this is just platonic, we're just friends*.” Just friends until an engagement ring, then a married ring was slipped upon her finger. Today sadly, she has left her first love, “ *having loved this present world*.” (2 Tim 4:10) Young folk, can I offer some Biblical counsel. If you don't want to marry a non- Christian don't date one. Moreover, if you are currently involved in a romantic relationship with an unbeliever, break it off immediately before you get entangled further. My you have stepped into spiritual quicksand and are heading for a life of pain if you marry an unbeliever who is living for self. (1)

(2) HOW MARRIAGE IS DEFINED

One definition of marriage that I like is this. “ *Marriage is a total commitment and a total sharing of the total person with another person until death*.” My God's intention is that when two people get married they should share everything, their bodies, their possessions, their insights, their ideas, their abilities, their problems, their successes,

their failures etc. You see, in divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying pagan women, these men were committing several sins. To begin it was treachery as they broke their vows to God and to their wives. They were profaning God's covenant and treating it as nothing. Not only had the Lord given specific requirements for marriage in His Law (Ex 34:11-16) but the covenant of marriage was built into creation. For Malachi says, "*Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us?*" (2:10) You see, God was the Father of the Hebrew people not only as their Covenantor, but as their Creator. So what these men did was contrary to what God had written into nature and in His covenant. You see, Malachi stresses the appalling nature of their sin by defining marriage. What is marriage ?

(a) MARRIAGE IS A CREATION:

That means Fulfillment. Look if you will at (2:15) Now Malachi is taking us back here to the first marriage as instituted by God. Could we go back for a moment to the book of Genesis. (2:18-25) Now here's what Malachi says, "*And did he not make one.*"

1. God made One:

He created only companion for Adam. Someone said that when God arranged the first wedding, He and Adam were talking. Adam said, "*Lord I am so lonely, I need to have a companion.*" The Lord said, "*Alright, I'm going to make you a perfect woman. She will be beautiful, intelligent and meet your every need.*" Adam said, "*That*

sounds great. What will it cost me ?" The Lord said, "*An arm and a leg.*" Adam thought for a moment and said, "*That's a kind of steep, what can I get for a rib ?*" Now joking aside God created only one companion for Adam. Could God have created many women ? Yes. Malachi says, "*Yet He had the residue of the spirit.*" In other words God's creative acts in no way diminished His power or ability. He could have made more wives for Adam but in making Eve alone he was making it plain that His design for marriage was for a man to have one wife.

2. God intends the Two to become One:

Do you know what God's all time blueprint for a good marriage is ? "*Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave unto his wife and shall be one flesh.*" (Gen 2:24) The Lord Jesus said, "What therefore God hath joined together let no man put asunder." (Matt 19:6) You see, marriage is a union. Now of course there is a physical union, but it goes beyond that. Man was just a half and he needed the other half, woman so that together they could become one. He was incomplete without woman. So God designed marriage to create a physical, emotional and spiritual union between a husband and wife. Now why do you see why divorce is so hurtful ? It rips one person apart and makes two.

(b) MARRIAGE IS A COVENANT:

That means Commitment. Look at (2:14) The major characteristic of a biblical marriage involved the parties obligating themselves to an unalterable and permanent relationship for life. Now what makes this covenant so serious is this. God is the witness of it. Do you see what (2:14) says ? “ *Because Jehovah was witness between thee and the wife of thy youth.* ” His Hebrew wife was the one with whom he stood before the priest and covenanted to be faithful and true and God looked on as a witness. Do you remember when Diana Princess of Wales was recounting Prince Charles adultery with his future wife, she said these words in a television interview, citing the reason for the failure of her marriage. “ *There were three in our marriage.* ” Do you remember that ? Well, there are three in every true marriage, and the third person is not the mistress, the third person is God. Because God takes this covenant seriously and views it as lifelong.

Marriage in God’s design is based on a covenant, not on feelings of romantic love. The sentiment that so often we hear, “ *I don’t love her or him anymore,* ” is not valid. For God says, “ *learn to love each other as I have commanded you.* ” In Bible times most marriages were arranged by the parents not by those getting married. That did not mean that the couple had nothing to say about it. But it does mean that two people who may not have feelings of romantic love can develop those feelings in the context of a lifelong marriage covenant. The Bible does not say, “ *Marry your lover,* ” but it does say “ *Love the one you’re married to.* ” Do you know what a lasting marriage is built on ? Not on romantic love, its built on commitment. Love in the best and highest sense is not a

feeling but a commitment to a person through thick and thin, the good times and the bad times, in sickness and in health, from good looks to not so good looks. Commitment is the glue that holds the marriage together during the inevitable times of stress. So marriage is (a) (b)

(c) **MARRIAGE IS A COMPANIONSHIP:**

That means Enjoyment. Do you see what Malachi says ? “ *Yet she is thy companion.* ” (2:14) The Hebrew root has the idea of being knit or joined together. Do you recall what the Lord said concerning Adam ? “ *It is not good that the man should be alone.* ” (Gen 2:18) Literally it says, “ *Not good is man’s aloneness.* ” You see, God cared about Adam’s aloneness. Adam’s wife was in the mind of God before she was in the arms of Adam. So one of the reasons for marriage was to solve the problem of loneliness. Companionship therefore is the essence of marriage. In (Proverbs Ch 2:17) the husband is providing companionship for his wife, in Malachi (Ch 2) the wife is providing companionship for her husband. Now if you put the two ideas together you get the meaning of companionship. *A companion is one with whom you are intimately united in thoughts, goals, plans, efforts and in the case of marriage bodies.* Men, is your wife your best friend ? Wives, is your husband your closest companion ? Do you spend time together ? Talk together, laugh together, cry together, share together, and pray together ? My however you do it cultivate companionship with your wife. Now do you see what marriage is ? (a) (b) (c)

(3) **HOW MARRIAGE IS DESTROYED**

For that's what these Jewish men were doing. Dissatisfied with the wife of their youth, they are drawn by lust to the younger more attractive woman and God says, "*I hate divorce.*" (2:16) He hates it because it violates His original plan for marriage and brings untold misery on those involved. You see, the unequal yoke and divorce damages you,

(a) SPIRITUALLY:

Do you see what (2:12) says ? The man who commits such an act will be cut off possibly his family as well. It's the principle of sowing and reaping. If you sow corn you don't reap peaches. For example, if you marry an unbeliever, generally you won't children who are committed to the Lord. Why ? Will, they will see your half hearted commitment seen in your disobedience in marrying an unbeliever. They will see the pleasure oriented materialistic lifestyle of the unbelieving parent and they will conclude, "*Why should I commit myself fully to the Lord ?*" If the believing parent thinks that he can disobey the Lord and then "bring his offering," to take care of things. Malachi says "*Think twice,*" for such offerings will be of no value for God is looking for obedience not sacrifice.

(b) DOMESTICALLY:

Why did God want His people to be faithful to their marriages ? Malachi answers that "*He might seek a godly seed,*" or offspring. My ... God's design for the family has always been one man and one woman who covenant

together for life for that is the best situation for rearing children who follow the Lord. Far too often parents fail to consider the consequences of divorce upon their children. "*Well, I have got to think about myself and what is best for me.*" My you should have thought about that before you had children not after. Do precious children not have the right to come home knowing that Daddy and Mummy are going to be there ? Studies have shown that children who have come from broken homes are more likely to suffer depression, anxiety, and even learning disorders, they tend to be more prone to engaging in drinking and drugs and illicit sexual behaviour. It certainly does not raising a godly seed. Pat Conroy wrote a book entitled, "*Death of a Marriage,*" it was his own personal experience of divorce and he put it like this,

“ There is not metaphors powerful enough to describe the moment when you tell the children about the divorce, to look into the eyes of your children and to tell them that you're mutilating their family, and changing all their tomorrows. Personally he says it felt as though I had doused my entire family with gasoline and struck a match.”

Fellow parents this is it your desire that your children escape the flames of hell ? Is it your burden to see them grow up as committed Christians ? Well, tell me, what are they seeing at home ? Joyce Baldwin says "*Only when parents remain faithful to their marriage vows can the children be given the security which provides the basis for godly living. The family was intended to be the school in which God's way of life was practiced and learned.*"

(c) EMOTIONALLY:

Look if you will at (2:12) Do you see what was happening ? Jewish wives were callously divorced so that their husbands could shack up with younger Canaanite models who felt that an offering or two on the altar would square accounts with God. But the altar was drenched with the tears of abandoned wives and God refused to accept the offerings of their husbands. *Do you know what divorce does ? Damages people emotionally.* You see, when you glue two items together and then pull them apart what happens ? You damage one or both of the items. That's why divorce hurts so much. That's why the death of a spouse hurts so much. Are you experiencing hurt in your marriage ? Before you choose divorce will you think about the greater hurt you'll experience. In 2002 in the U.S.A. the Baptist Press reported on a study, that found no evidence that unhappily married adults who divorced were any happier than unhappily married people who stayed married. *Researchers led by the University of Chicago sociologist Linda Waite also discovered that two thirds of unhappily married spouses who stayed married reported that their marriages were happy five years later.* Do you know what this report rejects ? The notion that divorce is the answer to marital unhappiness. (a)(b)(c)

(d) PHYSICALLY:

Look at (2:16) What does that mean ? Well, in Western society a man puts an engagement ring on a woman's finger to propose marriage, but in ancient Israel he placed a corner of his garment over her. (Ruth 3:9) But if a man

divorces his wife, instead of having a garment that symbolized love, he had a garment that symbolized violence. Rabbi Earl Grollman is a professional divorce lecture and author. He's a Jew and he said this, "*Divorce can be more traumatic than death.*" And those who are believers and are divorced through no fault of their own, can testify to that. He says, "*The big difference is that death has closure, it is over, divorce, divorce, it is never over.*" No wonder God says, "*I hate divorce.*" The problem that was prevalent in Malachi's day is so rife today. What about your home ? What about your hearth ? What about your heart ? You know what God wants from you. He wants you to "*Take heed,*" and get right with Him. God wants you to love your wife, to cherish your husband, to rear you children to love and serve Him. On 19th December 1982 Jill Williams looked at her husband Pat and said, "*I just don't care anymore. I hate this marriage. Its boring me to death. I give up. I don't even know if I loved you anymore. I don't know if I ever loved you.*" Ten years of neglect had resulted in a wife who was emotionally dead. Pat sought to save the marriage but Jill didn't care.

Pat committed himself to winning his wife's love and he went about it in a biblical way. Over a period of time he restored his marriage. Two years to the day after that crisis he found this note from his wife, "*Dear Pat, I love you so much for your response to that darkest hour two years ago, that you would share your name, life, love and yourself with me is truly my dream come true. There aren't enough words to express my love and devotion to you. I am the most blessed of all women. Love Jill.*"

