

(un)Faithful Marriage

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 November 2024

Preacher: Ben Traynor

[0 : 0 0] I do. I do. Perhaps two of the kind of simplest, most everyday words in the English language, but said by certain people in a certain setting, in a certain place, and the words I do become powerful words, solemn words, words which do something, create something, change people's lives forever. Well, what is that setting? It's just about here, isn't it? It's a wedding. It's a wedding.

Groom to bride, bride to groom, standing somewhere just in front of me here on a wedding day, and the words I do, taken as vows or exchanged from one to the other, are to create something new, something lasting till death do us part. But we know, don't we, as we've already reflected on a little in prayer, and as we've seen in our reading as well, and some of us in this room tonight know, and in all too painful a way, that sometimes before death arrives, the words I do become I do not. This evening, as we turn again to Malachi, God comes to speak to his people through Malachi about marriage and divorce. Well, why? Why is he doing this? Because here in Judah, just over 400 years before the Lord Jesus comes, right here at the end of the Old Testament,

God's people have turned from God. They're ignoring what he says about many things, and one of them here is about marriage. We could say they're trying to sort of redefine marriage, and it's doing them immense harm, sort of material harm and spiritual harm. Now, we're going to see a little bit later what that harm looks like, but I want to say to you right at the start, I want you to note why God is addressing this. I want you to note that God isn't coming to speak to them because, well, God has just kind of an obsession about these things. Sometimes that's level to Christians, isn't it, when we turn to speak about marriage or sex or relationships, these kind of things. Oh, we just go on about it all the time. Well, we're turning to it this evening because it's the next bit of our passage here in Malachi, but God comes to speak to them about it. Why? Chapter 1, verse 1, because he loves them, because he loves them. He loves his people, and he's coming to call them back to himself for his glory, but also very much for their good. And so, dear friends, as we come to this passage this evening, it is both very simple and very complex. It's simple because God speaks so clearly about what the problem is. Did you read it as we went through? The word came up five times.

They are faithless. Just put your eyes down to the passage so we can see that. They're being faithless in marriage. Verse 10, when we were faithless to one another. Verse 11, Judah has been faithless. Go to the middle of verse 14, the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless. Verse 15, so guard yourselves in spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. And verse 16, right there at the end, so guard yourselves in spirit and do not be faithless. Faithlessness or betrayal or treachery, stabbing in the back, that is clearly the theme here. And how is it they're doing that? Well, there's two issues going on here, two issues. The first one, people in Judah amongst God's people are marrying others who don't know and love God. Verse 11 again, 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 loved. And here it is, married the daughter of a foreign God. They're marrying those outside the covenant community.

[4 : 38] They're saying, I do to those they should not be saying it to. That's the first issue. What's the second issue? If you look to verse 13, Malachi helps us. He says, and this is the second thing you do.

And if you just skip down to verse 16, we get it very clearly there. For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence.

So they're saying, I do to people they shouldn't be saying, I do to. And the second issue is they're saying, I don't, I do not, when they shouldn't be saying it either. And so actually the call, the application of the sermon tonight is really simple. It's summed up there right in verse 16.

It's said twice and you see it there right at the end of verse 16. So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. Guard yourselves in spirit and do not be faithless or be faithful.

Be faithful. Be faithful in our marriages. Be faithful to God's word and faithful to God. But this evening's passage is also very complicated, very complex, isn't it? It's complex because singleness, marriage, relationships, divorce touches every one of us here, either in ourselves and in our families as well. And in some ways they are very great and very real and very sore, in some ways that are really difficult. Some of us sitting here this evening, we long to be married, don't we?

[6 : 24] But we aren't. Some of us are married and we're in a season right now, maybe some of us that's really good. Some of us in a season that's really hard. How long will this marriage last? Some of us have been widowed. Or for some of us, marriage is a past reality. And the words I do not have been spoken by us to someone or someone has said them to us. So marriage for some of us will mean joy, goodness, life-giving. But some of us come to a passage like this this evening and the longing, the sorrow, the pain, the heartache, it is all too real. And so as we come to a passage like this this evening, friends, I want to say a few things. First, we can't say, we don't have time to say everything there is to say about marriage or divorce. Malachi doesn't address everything. There are other parts of the Bible that fill out other parts of God's Word to us. So I do want to warmly encourage any one of us this evening, please, if you have any questions or comments or things you need to share after this, please do. Please do speak to Donald, speak to Joe, speak to one of the elders, the person that brought you, please come and speak to me. There's always advice and counsel and help available.

So God gives Malachi, his messenger, this call for people to be faithful and to guard their spirit. And he really does it in two ways. And these are our two points there. And we're going to try and address this in the positive. How are we to be faithful? First, he gives them the why, and then he gives them the how. And those really are our two points. Why are we called to be faithful? Well, our first point, we're called to be faithful in marriage because we belong to God. That's verse 10.

We're called to be faithful because we belong to God. Verse 10, have we not all one father? The answer to God's people is yes. Has not one God created us? Again, the answer is yes.

Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? God calls them, God calls us to obey him in marriage because we're his people, because he's our father, our creator. And for us, in Christ, he's our redeemer. He's made a covenant with us in Christ. And it's the reality that we belong to God that's to shape and guide how we live and how we treat each other. Faithfulness is a family trait that we're meant to take on. One of the joys, but perhaps also something that gives the stomach butterflies or the heart to race a little bit when two people are dating or engaged, is when they come to meet each other's families. I remember when Sarah first came to my home in Edinburgh to meet my parents and my mom produced all kind of plates and crockery and things I'd never seen before in the house, right? Out it all came. But the thing with a visit like that, as you go to meet someone else's family, is it helps you to understand your husband or wife or whoever it is, it helps you to understand them better. It's a little bit like getting new glasses, isn't it?

Oh, I see why you do things that way. Oh, I see why you're like that. You do things that way. You have that sense of humor. You do these certain things. But because you're in that family, that's the way your family does it. Dear friends, if you belong to the Lord Jesus, then God is now your father and we belong to his family. And Judah here, no, they're God's children. Verse 10, we also get at chapter 1, verse 6, that they're God's family. He's made a covenant with them there in verse 10. They're called by God to be his and live his way. And that is true for us. We've seen that in Genesis, haven't we, over these past weeks, just the faithfulness, the relentless, unyielding faithfulness of God. We've sung of it tonight. We've rejoiced in it. God is faithful and he calls us to take on the family likeness.

[11 : 00] But what we have in Malachi here, it is an example of what happens when God's people forget that.

They forget to live out their lives knowing that they belong to God. And so what I want us to do is just look for a moment at kind of the consequences of ignoring God and turning from his word. Because why are Judah in this mess? Why is God having to come and address them this way? Well, we've seen already in these last few weeks, haven't we, there's a number of things, but primarily, again, chapter 1, verse 2, that they've forgotten the love of God. Chapter 1, verse 6, they've despised God's name.

They've wearied God and they've turned from his word. We thought about that a couple of weeks ago. They've turned from his word. We've seen over these last few weeks, haven't we, that Malachi is speaking to a people who are offering lip service religion, lip service religion, that their hearts are colder and more icy towards God than the weather we've had here this past week.

And it's the coldness of their relationships and their love and their worship of God that's causing all of this. Dear friends, lip service religion leads to lip service living. And so I want to encourage us this evening that we must never think that what we do or say on a Sunday has some kind of big dividing wall of what happens from the rest of the week. Oh, I can do what I like Monday to Saturday as long as I have together, get it together on a Sunday. No, that the vertical aspect of our relationship with God is tied and bound right up with the horizontal aspect of our relationship with others.

And because I think we see that from the surprising setting of God's words here, the surprising way that God addresses them about all of these things. Just look down again at verse 11 with me and we'll pause and see what's the surprise. Malachi says, Judah has been faithless and an abomination has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem for Judah has profaned where? Now just pause there. Given it's about marriage, we think the next word would be, oh, he's profaned. They profaned the home. They profaned the bedroom. They profaned the dining room table or the sofa. But no, what's the next word? They profaned the sanctuary of the Lord. It's the place of worship where they meet with God. And go down to verse 13, we see the same thing. The second thing you do, you cover the Lord's, what? His altar with tears and weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. So do you see what's going on? In their marriages has everything to do with their hearts in worship. And so dear friends, never divorce, never separate your thinking about how your relationship with God is and how your relationship with others is. Coldness, distance, disinterest, lip service towards

[14 : 20] God. Downstream is likely to lead to coldness, distance, lip service, disinterest in how we treat others and how we treat our spouses in marriage. And so let me just give you two applications from this, two applications. One is a warning. One is a warning. A warning that external religion does not draw God's favor. Look down at verse 13. Look and think about what these people are doing.

These people are coming to church. They're coming to church to worship and they're weeping and sobbing and crying. Why? Because God no longer hears them. And why does God no longer hear them? Because they've been faithless to the wife of their youth. They've ignored God and they've ignored his teaching about marriage. Dear friends, what we need to note as we come to a passage like this is that these are religious people. That they're coming to church and home groups and if you like they're going to assemblies and synods and meetings and they want God's favor but they have lost it because they've turned from God's word. Here's a people, if we can put it this way, who have redefined marriage and yet still expect God's blessings. And what does God say about that? It's right there in verse 10, that it's an abomination. It's blasphemous to do that. And so it should be a warning to us intentionally and deliberately turn from God's word expressly here as it's designed for marriage.

don't expect God's blessing. No matter how much external religion we might keep going with, we might maintain. No, to turn from God's word intentionally, intentionally is to invite judgment.

Now, dear friends, there's always the invitation to return. Malachi 3 verse 7 kind of shines as a light across this whole book. God says, return to me and I will return to you. The invitation of repentance and coming back to God is always there but we must always be warned against the folly of kind of intentionally, deliberately turning from God's word and thinking external religion is enough.

No, we should be realizing as we come to the end of the Old Testament into Malachi, God wants our hearts. He wants our hearts and our love. He wants all of us. Second application from this then also though is to prioritize then, prioritize then your love for God. Friends, this is true for all of us but let me address those of us who are married.

[17 : 14] The best way to serve and love your spouse and to love your family is to prioritize your love for God and your faithfulness to God. It is to rehearse the gospel to yourself every day. Husbands, since you are to love your wife as Christ loved the church, swim in the deep waters of Christ's love for you every day, every day. The cornerstone for the love for your wife is your love for God and wife's the cornerstone of your love for your husband is your love for God. So dear friends, each and every day bask, but ask in the good news of the gospel and that will help you to love your spouse and your wife or husband. So that's the first thing, that's the why. Second point, second point, we are firstly to live faithfully because we belong to God, to show that family trait. But how are we to do that? Well, Malachi addresses two things here. The overarching point is this, we are called to faithfulness by obeying

God's design for marriage. We're called to faithfulness by obeying God's design for marriage. Now, we're not going to be able to cover all of God's design for marriage here, but there were two things specifically addressed. First, do you not marry an unbeliever? A believer, someone who has marriage in front of them, should not marry an unbeliever for love for Jesus is central. We've seen in verse 14, haven't we, that God's people are marrying the daughter of a foreign God. That is, they're marrying those who are outside the family of faith. In our language, they're marrying non-Christians, and they're not to do that. Well, why is God just being unfair? Are these rules for the sake of rules?

No, he's saying this because he wants God's people to worship him and worship him alone. He's saying it because he wants his people to have pure hearts and worship him and worship him alone.

Do note that this is not a kind of race or a kind of ethnic thing. One of the great Old Testament books and stories is that of Ruth. Ruth is a Moabite, and she marries Boaz, the Israelite. How does that happen?

Is this in conflict with this? No, because she says to Naomi, she says to Boaz in that book that their God will be her God. She confessed God as God. Dear friends, if someone had a severe allergy to dogs, maybe someone here does, or you know someone who's got a severe allergy to dogs, and your friend or family member came and said to you, there's somebody I'm thinking of asking out, but I need to tell, and the person says in return, well, tell me about them. Well, this is all I know about them.

[20 : 09] They're a professional dog walker. They keep six dogs at home. Their room is covered with posters of the Andrex puppy, and they've expressed, actually, in the little conversation we've had, that they would never be able to live without a dog. Would it be good for those two people to marry?

No. Why not? Because it would destroy the person's health. Each morning would be an asthma attack with breakfast, right, as they push Fluffy off the dining room sofa or chairs again, right? It wouldn't be good for them. Dear friends, entering in, choosing to enter into marriage with someone who doesn't love the Lord your God will lead to spiritual harm, spiritual anguish. Marriage isn't just about someone to watch TV with or go on walks with. It's about the common goal of building a home and family that joyfully worships God together. And actually, those decisions of what to watch on TV, or where, or maybe even when to go walking, should we go on a Sunday morning, are actually all downstream and implications of that. It's about keeping our hearts pure and having a companion who helps us together as we seek to follow the Lord Jesus. So, dear friends, I'm going to make some application, and this application is for those whose marriage is before them, that there are other parts in the

New Testament that speak about, well, what happens if two people are unbelievers and they're already married and one person comes to faith? That that is a different question, and that is addressed later on. The thing that's before us now is, what about those of us who marriage could be before us?

What does this have to say to us? It says, if we're not yet married, but we long for marriage, above all, and first of all, look for someone who loves the Lord Jesus, and look for someone who loves the Lord Jesus above all. Now, of course, there's more to it than that, but faith is at the center.

For a Christian to date or marry a non-Christian is to invite compromise to your kitchen table and unfaithfulness to your sofa and into your bed. So, dear friends, and let me speak especially to those who are younger, because I think some of us can always sometimes have the dream, well, I'll be the exception. I'll be the one who manages to stay strong even if I marry a spouse that doesn't know and love the Lord and enter into that. Dear friends, no. Trust the word of the Lord here. Trust the Lord here. Dear friends, those of you that are especially that are younger, I am old enough, believe it or not, to have sat where you have sat, to sat in Christian union meetings or student groups or done all these things. I have sat in all these places, sung songs, gone on committee retreats, done all of these things with people who said they loved the Lord Jesus, but who made the decision to date or marry someone who didn't. And this day some of my friends are nowhere with the Lord because they did this very thing here.

[23 : 21] So, dear friends, put Jesus at the center and do not say I do to someone who first has not given their heart and their life to the Lord Jesus. So, Malachi turns from teaching about I do to teaching about I do not. He calls us to faithfulness to God's design for marriage and not divorcing, where there are no biblical grounds, in not divorcing, where there are no biblical grounds.

Faithfulness in marriage means not tearing apart what God has joined. Did you see how Malachi speaks about God's role in marriage? Verse 14, God is a witness. Those of you that have been at marriages recently or marriages here, you'll hear those words before this congregation and before God. God is a witness in marriage. And verse 15, what else? God binds a married couple together by his spirit.

So, marriage is a covenant, a binding promise, perhaps the most solemn promise that can be made, made from husband to wife, wife to husband, and there is God witnessing and binding a couple together.

Since my childhood, lots of things have changed. I'm not kind of nostalgic, but you know, sometimes you have, I'm not of the age now, you have those moments. But perhaps if I really stop and think about it and think what has really changed since the 90s when I grew up? Yes, the 90s, the 90s, I was born in the 80s, but the 90s when I grew up. But perhaps one of the biggest changes has been around marriage, has been around marriage. And especially recently, I think often perhaps under the surface, the thing that's a rise of, and we're seeing more and more in the West, is the rise of no-fault divorce. No-fault divorce, just kind of, I've had enough of this and I'm off.

And that's what's happening here in Judah. We think it's a new thing, and it may be a new thing coming back around here in Scotland or in the West. But here it is in Judah, no-fault divorce. I've had it and I'm off. But that is not God's way. Divorce is never God's designed end for marriage.

[25 : 42] Verse 15, we are not to be faithless to the wife of our youth. When Jesus is asked about divorce in Matthew 19, he makes that clear. And pointing back to Eden, Jesus affirms that a man was given to a woman, man was given to a woman for life. It is a permanent union for companionship. And verse 15, for companionship and for the raising of children, godly offspring. The picture, the scene is one of mom and dad and kids, worshipping and enjoying God forever. So dear friends, again, those of you for whom marriage might be in the future, never think, oh, well, I'll get married one day and if it all goes wrong, don't worry about it. I know I can just get divorced. Prenuptial agreement in the back pocket.

No, God hates that. If you put your eyes down to verse 16, the Hebrew there is incredibly difficult to translate. The ESV says, for the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the Lord, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts. If you look down to the footnote there, I won't read all the footnote, but you'll see that you can translate part of that, God hates divorce. God hates divorce. He hates it when men use their wives, they kind of trade my wife in for a younger model type of thing, usually plunging them into poverty and real harm.

The man who does that, says the Lord, covers his garment with violence. And so this is a real call, isn't it? To faithfulness, to remember the solemnness of our marriage vows.

But God knows that we live in a fallen world and we see in other parts of the Bible that there is provision for divorce, always as an exception in a fallen world. Adultery and abandonment are the two categories given. And we would put, or I would put physical, emotional kind of abuse under that second category where it's just no longer safe for someone to remain in a marriage. And those are the biblical exceptions that are given. But the norm, the design, how marriage is meant to work is husband and wife together. Sickness and health, richer or poorer, till death do us part. So let me just make some application for us. Firstly, for all of us, dear friends, please pray for marriages. As Donald has already done here, please pray for marriages. As you think of your friends, as you think of others in your life group or in the church, pray for marriages. Pray that God would protect marriages and guard those who are married. Secondly, if you're married here this evening and your marriage is hanging by a thread and you know your marriage is hanging by a thread, please get help. Please get help. Come and speak to one of our ministers, an elder, a friend that you know that can help. Please fight for your marriage.

Please strive for your marriage. For those of us that are married this evening, and we know in our marriage we are in a time of temptation. There's somebody at work that's just getting the pulse going that little bit faster. Dear friends, flee that. Flee that. If there's temptation somewhere, get out of that situation to protect your marriage, to protect it and protect the one to whom you're married.

[29 : 30] And lastly, dear friends, dear friends, if you're here this evening and you know the pain, the utter pain and desolation and heartache of a marriage that came to an end, a relationship that came to an end, but before death, dear friend, please keep taking that to the Lord. The Lord sees you. He knows your pain.

Chapter one, verse one, he loves you and has called you to redeem you. Keep crying out to God and praying for all of that situation. He knows you. He loves you and he is with you. He is with you in the brokenness of whatever it is you have experienced. Dear friends, there's so much more that could be said, but I want us just to finish here with a note of hope. These are challenging words, but let's finish on a note of real hope. Because actually, as was said earlier, as was said earlier, to some extent, all of us are covenant breakers, aren't we? We've all been faithless. Whether in these issues here or in our minds and hearts, we've committed adultery, we've done things or thought things that we shouldn't have done. We have all been faithless.

We've all been faithless, but our hope is in a faithful God, a faithful God who sent Jesus to save faithless people like us. The Lord Jesus who laid down his life for his bride to take her up again in his arms and keep her forever. And so actually, I think the biggest surprise of this passage isn't so much the setting, though it is. And it's not so much that some marriages end in divorce.

Actually, the biggest surprise and the biggest joy of this passage is that God remains faithful to people who are faithless and so often ignore from or turn from his word because he is and he does remain faithful to us always. Dear friends, there is no sin and there is no sexual sin that can put us outside of his family if we come to him in repentance and faith. There is nothing. So whatever your circumstances tonight, whatever you long for in your heart, whatever life has been, come to the Lord Jesus and he stands with his arms wide open and says, come. Think about the Lord Jesus meeting with the woman at the well, married five times onto our sixth relationship who's not even her husband, and he says, come and I'll give you water that you'll never thirst again. Think about the Lord Jesus in Luke chapter 7 with the woman of the night. And she comes and she pours all the nard and the oil over his feet and cleans them and he says, your sins are forgiven. The Lord Jesus beckons all of us, all of us to come and to trust the one who's faithful to us forever. So dear friends this evening, draw near to the Lord Jesus. He is our bridegroom and he will never let his church go and rest in this evening and rejoice in his faithfulness to us both this night and evermore.

Let's pray.