

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 2:10-12- Don't Marry Pagans

This morning we begin to look at the issue of marriage in Malachi. One of the reasons God was bringing massive judgement on the nation of Israel in Malachi's time was because the marriage covenant was being defiled in various ways. And I think it's good for us to slow down and really consider what's going on here and how it relates to our view of marriage.

I'll get to it in a bit, but the big picture here is that Christians cannot marry pagans. And by pagan, I mean someone who is not a Christian. It is an absolute affront to God for any believer in any age to even consider marrying an unbeliever. That was true for the Jews, it is true for Christians.

As an introduction I think it's necessary for us to think about marriage positively. Before you can understand what's wrong, you have to understand what the design is.

Let me give you 4 designs of marriage. This is not all marriage is but it is a base line for our understanding of what God did when he instituted marriage.

1. Marriage is a picture of Jesus and the Church. When you take vows you are actually swearing an oath to live out a drama, a play, of Christ and the Church.

The husband plays the role of Jesus, who leads and provides and protects and loves his wife. And the wife plays the role of the church who obeys and respects her husband as his helper. And the goal of our marriage is to play our part as best as we absolutely can.

Have you ever watched a movie or show where the main actors are not equally talented? One actor is amazing and the other is...meh. And it just makes for an odd movie. Well, **Eph. 5:22-31** says that marriage - from the very beginning - was always a representation of the reality of Christ and his bride, the church. And we're called to play our roles with excellence.

2. Marriage was designed to bring God's creation into order. When God created the world 6,000 years ago, he charged Adam and Eve to take dominion over it. Over all the animals, all the bugs, all the food, all the land. When we get married, part of what God wants us to do is bring order to his creation in our little corner of the world.

So in your marriage you should have goals of how you bring order to your home, how you bring order to your city or region, and how you bring order to your family. And this is really on the husbands to decide and the wives to help accomplish.

God does not want chaos in his world. And he certainly doesn't want chaos in our lives. And I know life feels chaotic at times. We've got kids and appointments and life going on. And sometimes it just feels like we're treading water. But actually we're taking part in the grand design of God to bring order to the world.

What God has designed us to do is the same thing he did in creation: he took a creation that he made out of nothing and began to form it and work it and mold it and bring it into order. And we are to do the same thing with the creation he's assigned to us. That's an uphill battle for all of us which is why he commands us to do it. It may take decades, but that's our direction.

Side Note: Everywhere **true** Christianity has expanded, what has been left in its wake is order and civilization and education and medicine and grace. Without exception. Where there is no gospel, there's savagery, cannibalism, witchcraft, and chaos.

Marriage is a picture of Jesus and the Church, marriage is to bring creation into order.

3. Marriage is for sex. We are designed and commanded to take physical enjoyment in our spouse. And we are to give ourselves freely to our spouse.

Paul makes sex the primary reason for getting married in **1 Cor. 7**. He says if you can live your whole life and not have a desire for sex, not burn with passion, then you have a very unique and special gift from the Spirit. In that case, don't get married.

The other 99.9% of the population has a God-given desire for physical, sexual pleasure. That's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. God is the one who made our bodies with nerve endings where they are and pleasure receptors. He could have decided not to. But in his grace he gave us sex to enjoy in the covenant of marriage.

It's kind of funny, when I tell young guys "Hey go find yourself a godly woman so you can get married and have sex" it's almost like "we shouldn't want to get married just for the sex." Actually that's the argument Paul makes in **1 Cor. 7**.

Sadly, Christians don't often talk about the goodness of sexual intimacy in marriage. We are called to enjoy our spouse physically, and to let our spouse enjoy us physically.

4. God designed marriage for babies. I know that seems uncouth to say in our culture. Feminism is so rampant you can't say that anymore. If you young ladies say "All I want to do is get married and start having a family" you know you're going to offend someone. "What about college?" "What about a career?" "What about traveling the world?"

None of which are biblical. And, by the way, even unbelievers are realizing we're in a massive crisis because we're not having enough babies. Everyone is scrambling to figure out how we're going to make it a couple generations from now because our population is collapsing.

But God says twice in Genesis to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. That command still stands.

Psalms 127: Behold (listen up), children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb a reward. Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are the children of one's youth. Blessed is the man who fills his quiver with them.

I don't think we're necessarily called to have as absolutely many kids as possible. There are providential hindrances, medical situations, so on. But the posture of Christians is that kids are blessings and we should seek to have them. Each child you have is a blessing.

It's like winning the lottery. And this blessing is like an arrow we go and shoot at the face of the devil as we triumph over evil in the world.

And that arrow creates more arrows, who create more arrows. And - to push the metaphor - it doesn't take too long before we're raining down massive godly artillery on the heads of our enemies. Especially since they're not having any babies.

This is in the OT and NT. Paul says younger widows are to marry, bear children, manage their households and give the enemy no occasion for slander. **1 Tim 5:14** If that's true of widows, it's true of all married couples.

Babies are good. And to be clear, it's not just having babies for babies' sake. God wants godly offspring. As you and your spouse mature in Christ and grow in the faith, you are called to pass that faith on to your children.

Read 15

God wants godly offspring. He wants you and your wife to raise your children in the fear and admonition of the Lord. We'll see that more next time.

So that's the big vision: Your marriage is a picture of Christ and the church, you are to bring creation into order, you are to have sex, and you are to raise godly children.

Now, in order to do all that well, you can only marry a believer in the Lord Jesus. And the same was true in the OT. The Jews were commanded to only marry other Jews. To use Malachi's language, marry a daughter of Yahweh, not a daughter of a foreign god.

In the OT the Jews were forbidden from marrying pagans. **Turn to Deuteronomy 7:1-6.** This is God commanding Israel to destroy the nations in the Promised Land. And in the middle of that God makes it clear: do not marry them. **Read 1-6**

God could not be more clear: do not marry pagans. Why? It's a spiritual reason. They will turn your heart away. There's no intermarriage between the people of God and pagans.

Look at Exo. 34:11-16. Same thing. Make no covenants in general - do not be unequally yoked - and do not marry them. **Read**

That's strong language isn't it? Can I tell you something, we need strong language in this area. A lot of times we soft pedal things, we use more kind and gentle language. God doesn't use that language because he knows we need to hear these hard words.

And what was true for Israel is true for us: we do not make covenants with unbelievers. You can go get a mortgage or rent out an apartment or whatever. But don't go into business with a pagan. Don't make yourself contractually obligated to someone who does not worship the triune God through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Why? God is clear: if someone follows Yahweh, and they pursue a pagan for marriage or in any covenant, they will whore after the other gods. It's not spiritually neutral. It's always a downward spiral of idolatry.

First of all, it's idolatry because you're disobeying God's command in the first place. God says don't do it. You say "Nah, it's fine." That in itself is idolatry. It's rejecting God's commands in your life.

And second, it's idolatry because eventually you will want to please your friend or spouse and you'll compromise. I've seen this a million times. They marry a Mormon and they don't like the LDS church, but they can't rock the boat so they go to the Ward and they raise up their kids in the LDS church to keep the peace and the kids become idolators, too.

Or they marry a Catholic." Hey, at least they're reading the same Bible." No; they're committed to a different gospel, a gospel of works.

Or a Muslim or someone who is just tolerant of Christianity. Maybe they're not committed to something else, and they're open minded to Christianity. They try to console themselves that this person is "really asking good questions and they're really investigating." No; they're a pagan. They're in rebellion to God. If they don't submit to God then they are in rebellion to him. They're not bringing glory to the Triune God through adoration of Jesus.

And listen - you can just mark it down - if a professing Christian pursues them, they will whore after that god, whatever it is.

This is why Nehemiah was so grieved when the Jews came back from captivity and the people were marrying pagans. That's what took them into captivity in the first place!

No, we are only to marry believers. **1 Cor. 7:41:** speaking of widows: she is free to remarry whoever she wants, only in the Lord.

Widows are free to remarry because the covenant with their previous spouse is gone. The only stipulation is "in the Lord." The person they marry has to be a believer.

There's no missionary dating, you guys. Maybe he's really cute, she's really funny. But if they're not in the Lord they are pagans and you are commanded to stay away. They will take your heart away just like Solomon's heart was led away by foreign women.

And I've heard stories where people did this anyway. They married an unbeliever and that person came to faith in Jesus. Well, okay. But they were in rebellion to God. And all that shows is God's amazing, fantastic mercy and grace that the professing Christian wasn't sucked in to idolatry. But doesn't excuse it. And it's so rare that that happens, God says their hearts will be taken away.

Turn back to Mal. 2. So the big picture here is don't marry pagans. Let me show you that in 4 quick points. Then I want to just talk candidly.

1. Marry inside the family of God. Read 10

So this is Malachi speaking. And these are rhetorical questions: Have we all not one Father? The answer is yes. Israel did have one Father. And we as Christians have one Father.

And didn't the one God create us? Yes. Again, we can say that too.

Then he asks the question: if we all have one Father and one Creator, why are we faithless to him? Why are we violating the covenant?

And what he's saying is "If we're all part of this family of faith, this family that was created by the Creator God, why are we being faithless by marrying people outside the family?"

This is really an interesting thing he's saying. He's saying that when a follower of God marries outside of the family of God, they are betraying the family. **Read 10**

"Why are we being faithless to one another?" There's a shattering of trust and violation with the people of the covenant. Yes it's a sin against God, but the community of God is violated too. Which is why we can never support unequal marriages.

Look around here: this is your family. Those who are in Christ are your family through covenant. Yes, you have kids and parents and cousins who are family too who might not be believers and of course we have an obligation to them.

But when it comes to marriage, the way we show honor to God who brought us into the family and who created us is to marry into the family of faith. The people of God only marry the people of God. Or to be really clear: Christians only marry Christians.

In fact the earliest Christians were called incestuous. Did you know that? Because they married people they called their brother or their sister. They weren't physically related, but they were spiritually related.

To marry someone outside the family is to profane the covenant. What does it mean to profane? It means to make it unholy.

Imagine your favorite coffee cup or water bottle. And imagine you left it on the ground outside and you looked out and a dog was doing his business on your cup. It's defiled. It's profaned. You could go put it in the dishwasher but every time you take a drink that cup is tainted, isn't it?

That's what happens when we marry pagans. The marriage is binding but it is profaned and a constant snare. The way we uphold the holiness of marriage is to marry inside the people of God.

2. Your marriage reflects your covenant with God. Read 11

This is where Malachi connects the dots. Really, up until this point all we know is that there has been faithlessness and the covenant is profaned. Here Malachi makes it clear how that happened: Judah had married the daughter of a foreign god. The people married idol worshippers.

And I think the NIV makes the point the best: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves, (how?) by marrying the daughter of a foreign god. They intermarried.

Who you marry reflects what you think of worshipping God.

The way Judah was desecrating or profaning the Temple was intermarriage. How does marriage desecrate the Temple? What do you do at the Temple? You worship. What are you doing when you intermarry? You're rebelling. So you can't worship and rebel at the same time. It doesn't work. **Turn to 2 Cor 6:14-18**

This is the passage on not being yoked with unbelievers. A yoke was a wood beam that hooked 2 animals together to pull in the same direction. And you wanted the same type of animal so that they would pull at the same power. You didn't want to hitch a donkey to a plow horse. Why? The plow horse would do all the work and the donkey might actually slow it down.

Actually in the law the Jews were forbidden from yoking 2 unequal animals. **Deut 22:10:** you shall not plow with an ox and a donkey together. Why? Why does that matter? I think it's cruelty to the animals. And I think it's a foreshadowing of this principle. **Read 14-18**

This is a command. Do not do this. Believers are light, unbelievers are darkness. Believers are in Christ, unbelievers are in Belial. Who's that? Satan. And here's the connection to Malachi: Believers are a Temple of who? God. Unbelievers are a temple of idols. Who we get married to is fundamentally an issue of worship.

That's why Paul quotes the OT and says, get away from unclean people. Separate from them. God is our Father, God is not their father. So we cannot say we are worshipping God and marrying unbelievers. It's just not possible. **Back to Mal. 2:11**

So Marry Inside the Family of God, Marriage Reflects your Covenant with God.

3) Marriage to pagans is an abomination. Read 11

This is hard language, you guys. But we need to hear it. And I know some of you know people who claim to be Christian that have married unbelievers. And we just have to call a spade a spade: it's an abomination. An abomination is a wicked, evil thing in the sight of God. It's utter wickedness.

It's faithless. It's a denial of our faith. Because what is happening is the two become one. Physically, but also spiritually. And the willful physical/spiritual union of a believer to an unbeliever is a violation of the Temple of God. You as God's Temple are becoming one with someone who is unclean.

Now, it's okay if two unbelievers get married. That's fine. Marriage is an institution for believers and unbelievers. I'd go to a wedding between 2 unbelievers. And I'd go to a wedding between 2 believers.

I would never, ever go to a wedding between a believer and an unbeliever. And you shouldn't either. Because attending a wedding is an approval of the union. It's applauding the union. The witnesses - the crowd - at wedding are all there to give their full support.

This is also why we should never go to a so-called "gay wedding." Because just being there is an act of support. That's why people are so offended when we don't go: "Don't you support me?" No. I love you, and care for you, which is why I'm telling you the truth and not supporting your idolatry. We can't.

Also, I know sometimes 2 unbelievers get married and later one comes to Christ. That's great. Don't divorce. And stay faithful to your spouse and maybe God will save them too. But that's different than intentionally marrying an unbeliever when you're a Christian.

4) God condemns marriage to pagans. Read 12

This is scary. If you want a family that is blessed, if you want God to bless your offspring, you have to marry a believer.

Now, obviously there's issues of predestination and election in this discussion. But you guys, parents affect their children. They just do. And often children gravitate to the spiritually lowest parent.

So if one parent is an unbeliever, the kids gravitate toward the unbeliever. Not always, but many times.

And if one parent is way more mature, the kids often gravitate to the less mature. Why? Because unregenerate kids gravitate away from the Lord. You need both Christian parents in yoke, plowing hard toward the Lord Jesus.

Don't marry pagans.

Now, I want to say a few words to you who are not married.

First, you need to stay far far away from unbelievers In the dating world - or courting or whatever you want to call it. Don't even think about it for all the reasons I just mentioned.

Second, don't date people who are just pretending to be Christian. And you know what I mean. There's a lot of unbelievers who will put up a front of interest or godliness and you know it's not true. If you're honest you know it's a sham. You know it's not real. But you try to convince them or yourself or others that it is.

You want it to be real because you like them and love them. But you have to push them, there's no true fruit of repentance but in your heart - when you're honest - you doubt they are saved. Don't do it. Don't go for it.

Third, hopefully this goes without saying, if you're in that relationship with an unbeliever (dating or engaged), break it off now. And apologize and ask for forgiveness and move on. Do not feel as though it's your job to evangelize them. Your emotions are compromised and they know the gospel at this point or they should. If God is going to save them, he doesn't need your help.

Finally, I will say getting a spouse is often hard work. I'd love for arranged marriages to be back. I've got some sons, you've got some daughters, we'll swap some goats and call it good. But that's not a thing so it's hard.

So young men, you need to prep yourself for marriage and act like men. That means you need to be moving toward a job that provides money, enough to support your family. A home that provides shelter and godliness that provides sanctification.

And then go get a girl. Stop playing video games, stop being awkward and weird and quirky; go get fit, go read some books and be interesting and interested and go ask a girl out. If she says no, either figure out how to win her over with charm and humor or dust yourself off and find another girl. If you're not ready, get ready. If you are ready, get moving.

And once she says yes, you should be laser focused in dating: figure out if she's marriage material. Is she a real believer? Do you have the same goals with kids and home and life and theology?

I don't want to put a timeline on it but that shouldn't take much longer than 6-9 months. If you don't really have an idea if she's right in 6 months, you need to either start asking some much harder questions or reevaluate the situation or get another job so you can afford a family. But don't just mess around.

Ladies, I know it can be hard because it doesn't feel like you're in the driver seat. And I get it. You want a man who will lead and initiate the relationship and who's godly and responsible out of the box. They don't make many of those straight from the factory.

And as I've said before, ladies, you might have to be a little more forward than you'd like to be. You might need to be the one asking guys out. As the famous philosopher and head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers used to say: "No risk it, no biscuit."

I know plenty of happy marriages where the woman initiated the relationship: including my own marriage. Sometimes what it takes for a man to step up to the role God has given him is a woman making the opportunity known.

And in the mean time, focus on Christ, focus on learning godly skills in homemaking and how to be a blessing to your future family.

And my prayer in all of this is that the Lord is pleased with marriages between brothers and sisters in the faith that reflect the goodness of the covenant between Jesus and the Church.

Pray