

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 2:13-14 - Don't Get Divorced - Part 1

Last time we were in Malachi we saw that a big reason for God's judgment on the Jews was because they were dishonoring the covenant of marriage. Specifically, they were marrying pagans. They were marrying unbelievers which God says not to do.

This morning we see the second thing they were doing to dishonor marriage: they were divorcing. There was rampant divorce in Israel and this was a grievous thing to God. Divorce is bad. It's sinful.

And I don't want to spend really any time talking about possible reasons for divorce or difficult situations, because I think that misses the whole point of the passage. I think we need to hear the passage for what the passage just says.

And while I think we'd all admit that divorce is a bad thing I think it's also fair to say that as far as sins go it's sort of ignored these days by society and largely by the Church as well. I mean, even just in casual conversation how often do we hear about the horrors of divorce? How often have we heard of people strenuously objecting to divorce because it's wrong? Almost never.

And I think the reason for that is because we live in a society where there is so much sexual perversion and craziness that it overshadows what I think is the more common evil of divorce. Divorce is way more common than the other issues, but they get all the press.

We've got homosexuality advertised everywhere. Our culture dedicates a whole month to celebrating sexual degeneracy. By the way, did you know that in WA State it was illegal to even be homosexual until the late 1970s? It was a felony punished by prison or fines.

We're might years from that now with the Obergefell decision which legalized so-called same-sex marriage and has radically changed the cultural landscape. Just like Roe, one day it will be overturned, but in the meantime it will wreak devastation among tens of millions of lives.

There's the issue with transgender nonsense. As though people can pick their gender based on how they feel or don't feel. They can use the bathrooms they want and pretend to be the opposite sex and everyone pats them on the back for being so brave.

There's the single mom crisis, the abortion crisis, the porn crisis, the soft porn crisis, egalitarianism where people think men and women have no role distinctions at all. And so many more that all get a bunch of attention. And they should - these are bad things.

But the thing gets lost in the midst of all of that is the horrendous problem of the sin of divorce. I don't think we usually grieve divorce the way we should. It doesn't even really bother us anymore. We treat it almost as just a fact of life, something that is bound to happen sometimes and what are you going to do?

You've probably heard many of these statistics, but just indulge me here so I can set the stage as to how bad this really is. This is just America.

- There are 86 divorces every hour in the US, compared to 230 marriages.
- Marriage and divorce rates are decreasing in the US - one of the reasons for this is people are simply living together rather than getting divorced. So there is no record of their union, nor any record of the breakup.
- Some 41% of marriages end in divorce. 60% of second marriages end in divorce. 73% of third marriages fail.
- The average length of a first marriage before divorce is only 8 years.
- Gray divorce is on the rise - this is divorce of couples who have been married for decades but eventually divorce as they age.

In Texas, you have to cite one of 7 reasons for the divorce. The top reasons are: Lack of communication, money issues, adultery, "growing apart," lack of sexual intimacy, fighting, drugs.

By the way, if you Google divorce statistics the results that come up at the top are law offices who can help you get a divorce. I think they cite these statistics to make you feel like this is just normal. Nothing strange is happening when you go to divorce your wife. It's sad.

And for all the conservative love for Ronald Reagan, one of the worst things he did as governor of California was to approve the very first no-fault divorce law in the US paving the way for other states to adopt similar laws. If you look at a graph of divorces in the US there was a massive spike at the end of WWII and a spike when Reagan approved no fault divorce.

Prior to no fault, a spouse had to prove to the court that there was extreme behavior that warranted divorce. You couldn't just cite irreconcilable differences, you actually had to show proof that the marriage was beyond repair. You had to show the court how bad things were and that they necessitated a divorce.

No fault removed any of that burden. Now a person can get a divorce and not cite any reasons for it and it will be granted. In fact, the spouse who commits adultery and does drugs and beats the kids could be the one who files for divorce and if the innocent spouse doesn't agree to the divorce because they want to stay married, they could be absolutely destroyed by the court.

Legally speaking, it's almost impossible to actually fight for your marriage without getting punished by the court. It's a lose-lose situation. So there are some unique elements within American law that makes divorce unavoidable if you are being served. And the court has almost no interest in seeing spouses work out their marriage.

Now, I say all that and at the same time I acknowledge marriage is tough. Even with Christians.

1 Cor. 10:13: No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man.

If your marriage is hard I can just promise you that you're not alone. We've had extremely hard seasons of marriage.

Where every time you open your mouth - even to apologize - it comes out wrong and it's an argument. Money problems, family problems, intimacy problems, medical problems, leadership problems, submission problems, sleep problems, the list goes on. These are all common things.

Husbands are sinners, wives are sinners. Sometimes I sin, sometimes she sins and sometimes we both sin. And we're still called to endure with joy.

And the goal is not to just not get divorced. The goal is to joyfully love our spouses for the glory of God as a picture of the gospel. The goal is that each decade of marriage is better than the last.

So the big picture here is don't get divorced - and that will be the main focus because that is what God is denouncing. But more than that it's strive all the more to joyfully love your spouse and fulfill the role God has given you, especially when it's hard.

So the big picture is: Don't get divorced. Why? Malachi gives us 10 reasons here. We'll only get through 4 this morning, but there are basically 10 that we'll cover over the next couple of weeks.

The first 2 points are connected but I think it's worth addressing them separately.

1. Divorce nullifies worship. Read 13

Now, remember the big sin that Malachi is addressing here is that the Jews are divorcing. And it must have been at an unprecedented rate because this is one of the few times the issue is even brought up in the OT. For it to be brought up like this must have meant this was unprecedented.

And now here they are weeping and groaning at the altar. And the connection here is that they're weeping and groaning because God isn't listening to them anymore. He doesn't look on their worship with favor.

And to be clear, they're not weeping and groaning because of the divorces. That would actually be appropriate. They're weeping and groaning because God has cut them off. God's not regarding their worship anymore and judgment is coming. **Read 13**

So I want to drill down on these 2 points even though they're connected. So the first is that divorce nullifies worship. What does that mean?

God no longer regards their offering - their worship - or accepts it with favor.

If a person is in hard hearted sin, then God isn't going to listen to them. And he's certainly not going to take delight in their worship. We saw in **Malachi 1** that the priests were allowing mangled animals to be offered on the altar and God said he just wanted someone to close the gates. Just put out the fire, and the last person out turn out the lights. I don't want your worship any more.

That's exactly what he's saying here about those who divorce. Their sinfulness in divorce means God isn't listening. He doesn't regard their worship as genuine. And this is a super important principle we need to understand, you guys. If we're in hard hearted sin, God's not going to listen to us.

Look at Psalm 66:16-20 for a minute. This might seem like a radical thing, but it's pretty well established throughout Scripture. **Read**

This is a simple principle. If we are cherishing sin in our hearts, God will not listen. He rejects the prayer and withholds love. How can God do that?

It's like if you tell your kids to clean their room and do their homework and they refuse to do it, are really going to listen to them if they ask you to watch a movie? No. Get out of here with that nonsense. Go do what I told you to do and then we can talk.

God is the same way.

Prov. 28:9: If anyone turns a deaf ear to the Law, even his prayers are detestable.

If you reject what God says, God rejects what you say.

Isaiah 59:2: Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.

Sin has devastating effects on our relationship with God. Does this mean we forfeit our salvation? Of course not. But listen to the 1689 London Confession 17:3 on if Christians continue in sin:

"We may...through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the prevalency of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins, and for a time continue therein, whereby they incur God's displeasure and grieve his Holy Spirit, come to have their graces and comforts impaired, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded, hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves, yet shall they renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end."

You guys, heard hearted sin will mess you up. God will spank us for sin.

And although persistent sin could be an indication someone is not saved, this is an issue of discipline within the family of God. Isaiah says your sins have separated your from your God. There's a breach in fellowship.

So to bring it back to Malachi's point: if you're going headlong into sin - and a sin as profoundly egregious as divorce - God isn't going to listen a thing you say. And all your worship is nothing.

You can raise your hands, you can cry, you can read your Bible, but if you are refusing to obey the Lord he's not going to regard your offering or accept anything from you with favor.

I've had people tell me they were getting a divorce and they're praying for wisdom. You don't need wisdom. You need to obey. Here's the wisdom: Don't do it. "I'm just praying for God's will." I know God's will: Don't do it because it nullifies your worship.

2. Turns praise to sorrow. Read 13

The altar is the place of sacrifice. In the OT it was the bronze altar where the fire consumed the offerings at the Tabernacle and later the temple. It was where you went to offer sacrifices for sin, or give a peace offering or make vows. And so the altar became synonymous with worship because the sacrifice was so tied with worship and praise.

Going to the Temple to worship the Lord was a good thing. You brought your sacrifice to please the Lord. To beg his forgiveness and of course all of that was a picture looking forward to the true sacrifice of the Lord Jesus.

But rather than praise and joy, the Lord's altar is covered with tears and weeping and groaning. Because of divorce, God is no longer listening and regarding the people. And because he's no longer doing that, praise and joy is gone and what's left is sadness and weeping.

God is no longer blessing them. Something I think we need to realize is that God doesn't compartmentalize our lives. As though we can have something wicked going on over here, and he's fine with other stuff over here. God looks at us holistically.

I think we can all agree that in itself marriage is good. Hopefully, we can agree on that. God made it, God designed it to reflect the gospel, and he called it very good.

And the act of uniting two people in matrimony is good. Usually Christian weddings are some of the most fun occasions - filled with dancing and celebrating.

And I will just tell you as a pastor who has performed weddings, it's especially amazing. I have the bride and groom repeat words that create vows and at the end two individuals who were once separate, become one in the Lord. And it's cause for praise and rejoicing.

What divorce does is just the opposite: it transforms praise into weeping. It creates groaning because God is not pleased.

As Jesus said: What God has joined together, let no man separate. The bringing together is from God and causes joy. The tearing apart is defying God and causes weeping. It's impossible to tear two people apart and there not be weeping or tears or groaning.

When you're welding metal together, the weld is usually stronger than metal pieces are. But have you ever seen a weld fail? It's devastating. Usually whatever was welded is ripped apart. The weld itself is destroyed. And whatever the function was, it compromised. If a weld fails on a car, the whole car can be destroyed. If a weld fails on a pipeline, whatever it's carrying can be explode.

It's not like you just unweld things and it's all okay; like it all goes back to how it was before. No, damage is done.

The same is true with marriage. Divorce is ripping a weld apart. There's groaning and tears and lives left in the wake.

Side: Before I go on, because I know this is heavy, I know some of you have been divorced. I know that. For Christians, divorce is one of the sins that is mercifully covered by the blood of Jesus. If you're in Christ you're forgiven and divorce doesn't define who you are, Jesus defines who you are.

But I think you would agree with me about how bad divorce is. The agony and heartache and relational catastrophe.

This is why Paul says don't get divorced in **1 Cor. 7**. He says it twice. And then he says if you are divorced then stay single. Or be reconciled to your spouse. The Christian position is always pro marriage. It's always reconciliation and healing and unity and love.

Or put another way: since marriage is a picture of Christ and the Church, you can divorce your spouse when Jesus divorces his bride.

If you're struggling in marriage, come ask for help. There was a time almost 20 years ago that my wife and I were struggling. We didn't even know to come talk to our pastor. Finally we went to a counselor who said she was Christian. She gave us some tips and insights and it helped for a while. But there was no addressing sin or expectations or working through heart issues. So it got better then it got a lot worse.

We had to make some radical changes. It took years of hard work for both of us. And I am not exaggerating when I tell you thousands of hours talking through issues. But I wouldn't trade our marriage now for anything in the world.

If you're struggling please come talk. Usually what happens is people come 6 months or 12 months or 12 years too late. And by the time they come their hearts are hard and their spouse's heart is hard it it's a rough go. So if that's you, please come and talk.

Divorce is not an option; repentance and reconciliation and humility it. So divorce nullifies worship. It turns praise to sorrow.

3. It destroys companionship. **Read 14**

So remember that throughout Malachi there's this back and forth conversation. It's like God is having a conversation with some random Israelite. "I don't accept your worship anymore." "Why not, God?" "Because you've been faithless to the wife of your youth, your companion."

This one verse is actually packed. First of all God says he was witness between you and the wife of your youth. Witness to what? Witness to when you became one. Witness to your marriage vows.

God was there when you made a promise. Usually when I do a wedding I include a few things in my sermon. One of the things I talk about are the witnesses. There are 4 witnesses in a wedding. God, the husband, the wife, the crowd. And the witnesses all act as legal parties to a covenant. That means we were there, we saw what happened, we witnessed the promises you made, and we will hold you to the promises you made.

You guys, part of striving for a godly, amazing marriage is that you promised you would do that. You gave your word. And specifically you gave your word to God: you vowed a vow before the Almighty.

"We're poor" - doesn't matter God was there when you vowed that money didn't matter.

"She's got medical problems" - you vowed sickness and health to God.

"We've been in a slump for years" - unslump it. You vowed for better or for worse. You vowed to love and cherish - to rejoice.

And the point of witnesses is to hold people to the vow they made. As time goes on and we often forget what the covenant was. There's some objective truths, but memories fade and we often forget.

You know who doesn't forget what we vowed to do when we were married? God. God says "You know 30 years ago when you were young, and pretty, and idealistic and couldn't imagine a difficult time in life? I was there when you made vows." **Read 14**

I was there when you and your wife were young. And you swore a bond of faithfulness.

"I take you...
To have and to hold,
from this day forward,
for better or for worse,
for richer or poorer,
in sickness or in health,
to love and to cherish,
'till death do us part.
And to you I promise my faithfulness."

If you're married you covenanted something like that. And even if you didn't that's exactly what the Bible commands of you. And God was witness. He was right there when you swore before God and these witnesses.

And God says you were faithfulness to your companion. This is the only time this exact word - companion - is used in the OT. It means a joining, a bonding of two people.

God says she was your girl, your chick, your woman, your bonded companion. That same woman who made your heart race and made you feel like you could take on 10 men. You were faithless to your companion.

That's what divorce does - it destroys a companionship that is only found in marriage. A companionship we had at the first.

Interestingly God often tells married people to remember our spouse from younger years. From years where things were easier or better.

Prov. 5 warns men against the adulteress. You remember that? And were told to rejoice in the wife of our what? Our youth. And then he goes on to describe exactly which body parts we are to rejoice in. And he's very specific. Do you why?

Because as time goes on we change. Bodies change. Waistlines grow or shrink. Things sag or stretch. We get wrinkles and grey hair and spots.

You know what doesn't ever change? The covenant you made to your companion in your youth.

Whatever you need to do to rekindle that companionship, you guys, you need to do it. You need to fight to be faithful. You need to fight to cherish and rejoice. "I've tried a million times" well I guess you're on next set of million tries.

Can you imagine Jesus saying to the Father about his bride: "Father, I tried to save 'em. I tried a bunch of times but I just can't do it any more. I give up." Can you imagine that? Listen Jesus never calls us to do something he wouldn't do. He laid down his entire life for us, and if we need to lay down our entire lives for our companion so be it.

Divorce kills that companionship.

4. It destroys covenant. Read 14

This might not seem like the worst part of divorce, but I think it actually is. Divorce destroys a covenant between a man, a woman and God.

Covenants are massive deal to God. The entire Bible is held together by a series of covenants. Covenants between the Father and the Son, covenants between God and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. The reason God doesn't just drown us all in another flood and wipe us out again like he did in the days of Noah? A covenant he made.

We inherit eternal promises of blessing as Abraham's children because we are part of a covenant that was enacted with the body and blood of Jesus. And our marriages in and of themselves are a reflection of the covenant between Jesus and the church.

What is a covenant? The Hebrew word is berit - it's a formal agreement between parties giving obligations and responsibilities bound by God. Interestingly, God is the one who created covenants. They reflect his character to always do what he says he'll do. They reflect his character to give and provide and hold to his own word.

So when we enter into a covenant we are entering into something that is very sacred, very God-like because God is the backstop of all covenants. He is the one before whom we take the vow.

Covenant is stronger than a contract. We enter contracts all the time. Your mortgage is a contract, your cell phone is a contract, your rent is a contract, your garbage collection is a contract.

Rarely do we actually enter something as serious as a covenant. When you became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ you entered into a covenant; the New Covenant. And usually the only other covenant we enter into is marriage. This is how serious it is.

What divorce does is to undo a covenant that was ratified and witnessed by God. As Jesus says, it seeks to separate what God has joined.

What do we do with all of this? I think we need to remember afresh the gravity of what we've vowed before the Lord. Or if you're not married yet, know what you'll be getting into.

Marriage is good, it's amazing. It's a cause for joy and worship and celebration. It's actually the way in which God wants us to be sanctified in the most thorough way.

He wants you to have companionship inside of a covenant that reflects his own love and saving purposes. For your good, and for his eternal glory.

Pray