

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller
Northwest Church
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The Tragedy of Broken Community Malachi 2:10-16

Introduction

One of the things that I learn, with every time I come to the Scriptures is that I have not arrived. There is this constant pull in my heart that wants to rebel, that wants to sin, that wants to simply splurge in rebellion. If left unchecked, I know that this is the kind of life I will wind up experiencing.

Sometimes when I feel strongly about something, I tend to overstate or misrepresent myself as your pastor. I feel that I might have done just that this past Sunday. I want you to know that I have a deep desire to be the type of pastor who...

1. Listens to God
2. Honors God in his heart
3. Follows God
4. Speaks for God

...but the truth is I can fall short. God in His grace picks up my mess and uses it for His glory. As we look at Malachi 2:10-16, I think what we will find is that godliness and right living is not just dependent on the individual, but it is also a community project. We need each other.

What we have seen in Malachi is striking. We first saw how God demonstrated his love to Israel by choosing them to be his people, then we saw the corporate failure of Israel in the way they were approaching God in worship, and last week we saw how the priests failed to remain faithful to God as His representatives. This week we will see how they were failing to keep community with each other.

This is what we are, we are a community and when you asked me to come and be your pastor, we entered into a communal covenant. The strength of our community will determine the strength of this church. We were created for not only relationship with God, but to be relational beings within community.

What we see in this passage is that not only were the people breaking covenant with God as His people, not only were the clergy breaking covenant with God as His priests, but the people were breaking covenant with each other as a community of faith.

I want to show a clip from the movie *Hope Floats*. The movie is the tale of a woman struggling to recover from her husband's infidelity. It is an honest look at how painful a breakup usually is.

The Faithlessness of Broken Community (2:10-12)

“Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers? ¹¹ 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 loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god. ¹² May the LORD cut off from the tents of Jacob, any descendant of the man who does this, who brings an offering to the LORD of hosts!”

Did you know that we were designed for community. We were wired to participate in community because our God is a communal God. That’s right, you heard me correctly: God is a communal God. Our God is a Trinity, and He has always enjoyed the fellowship of His Trinity.

When God created man in Genesis 1:26, He said: “Let us create man in our image.” What does it mean to be created in the image of God? It means a lot of things: 1) we were created as eternal beings, 2) we were created with the ability to worship, 3) we were created with the ability to rationalize, but 4) we were created with the longing to not be alone.

God is a community within the fellowship of the Trinity, but at the same time God is One. We were created with the DNA to function in community and yet as a community function as one: the people of God. When it comes to belonging to the people of God, our community is both vertical and horizontal: vertical in our relationship with God and horizontal in our relationships with each other.

Did you know that the 10 commandments can be broken into two parts: 1) Our relationship to God is summed up in the first four, and 2) Our relationship with each other, which is summed up in the last six commandments. This is why when Jesus was asked what the greatest commandment was, he could answer:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your hearts, and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as your self. On these two commandments depend all the law and the Prophets”. (Matthew 22:37-40)

This is why Malachi 2:10 begins the way that it does: *“Have we not all one Father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?”* Israel was not only failing in their vertical relationship with God, but in their horizontal relationships with other members of their community as the people of God.

Israel, as the people of God were called to promote the unity of their identity as God’s people. Marriage is not the only institution designed to reflect the character and nature of God, our identity as the people of God and how we relate to one another is designed to reflect who it is we are.

This is why Jesus prayed what he prayed in John 17,

“I am praying for them. I am not praying for the world but for those whom you have given me, for they are yours. ¹⁰ All mine are yours, and yours are mine, and I am

glorified in them. ¹¹ And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one....

I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me." John 17:10-23

Jesus prayed for the oneness of the Church because this was how the people of God were created to function. One of the tragedies of Malachi's day was that they failed to promote their identity because they failed in their relationships with one another.

This faithlessness within the Israel's covenant community was being manifested all the way down to the most sacred levels: marriage. Notice verse 11, "*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 loves, and has married the daughter of a foreign god.*"

What was it about who the men of Israel were marrying that was so wrong? They were marrying the daughters of a foreign god. So no longer were the men interested in women with a hearts for God, they wanted wives who were appealing to the eyes. They could care less about who the women worshiped as long as they were beautiful.

You know what happened to King Solomon don't you? He had an eye for beautiful woman with little concern for who they worshiped, so what happened to him? Turn to 1 Kings 11,

"Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ² from the nations concerning which the LORD had said to the people of Israel, "You shall not enter into marriage with them, neither shall they with you, for surely they will turn away your heart after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. ³ He had 700 wives, princesses, and 300 concubines. And his wives turned away his heart. ⁴ For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father. ⁵ For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. ⁶ So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. ⁷ Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. ⁸ And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. ⁹ And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice ¹⁰ and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. But he did not keep what the LORD commanded." 1 Kings 11:1-10

In fact, Solomon's sin was partly to blame for Ezra needing to build the temple and Nehemiah needing to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem. And history shows us that every time the men of Israel began marrying women outside of their faith, apostasy against God was almost always the result.

God was the one who created marriage and designed it to be enjoyed between a man and a woman for the purpose of illustrating His redemptive purposes. But, marriage also serves to strengthen the covenant community of God's people, and marrying someone who stands outside of God's people undermines the purpose and design of marriage.

So here is some advice, if you want to get married sometime in your life look for a man or a woman who...

1. Listens to God
2. Honors God in his/her heart
3. Desires to follow after God

If you are not married and with a person now who does not exemplify these qualities, don't waste your time, because if you marry a person who does not share the same love for God that you do, you are looking for nothing but trouble and heartache. Those of you who are contemplating marriage, God does not call us into missionary marriages (explain).

If you are married to an unbeliever don't leave them, but be God's ambassador to your spouse in love.

Let's move on to our second and final point... Not only were the people of Malachi's day faithless in their dealings with one another and who they were choosing to marry, but they were faithless in how they treated their spouses.

The Faithlessness of Broken Marriages (2:13-16)

"And this second thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand. ¹⁴But you say, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. ¹⁵Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union? And what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶"For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."

Not only were the people guilty of undermining the covenant community of God by who they were marrying, but they were guilty of breaking covenant with the one to whom they were married.

Notice how Malachi begins, *"You cover the LORD's altar with tears, with weeping and groaning because he no longer regards the offering or accepts it with favor from your hand."* Why is it that God no longer regards the offerings or accepts it with favor from the hands of the men of the

covenant community? Look at verse 14, *“Because the LORD was witness between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant.”*

Men, how you treat your wives will affect your relationship with God. The men of Malachi’s day treated their wives in a way that dishonored the one with whom they entered into covenant union. So, when these men went off to church to worship God, when they covered the LORD’s altar with tears, weeping and groaning, God turned His back.

If you think that this is just an Old Testament thing, turn to 1 Peter 3:7, *“Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.”*

So what does this mean? If you do not cherish your wife in such a way that is honoring and loving; if you are not honoring the covenant union you entered into by not only remaining monogamous physically but also emotionally: God will not hear your prayers no honor them. Spiritually, you will live in a desert until you begin honoring and treasuring you spouse again.

But this was not the only sin these men were guilty of. How are these husbands faithless to their spouses? They were divorcing their wives to marry prettier and younger ones (most likely the daughters of a foreign god).

I think it is obvious why the actions of these men grieved the heart of God so much. When a man and a woman enter into covenant relationship they become one even though they are two. God had to remind his people in Malachi that marriage was not something to be taken lightly or casually, for this is why the prophet states, *“Did he not make them one, with a portion of the Spirit in their union.”*

Marriage is the closest thing you will ever get to experience the type of community that is shared by the Trinity, and is therefore the closest thing you will experience covenant community as God intended it to be.

Have you ever taken the time to meditate on Genesis 2:23-25 and thought about the meaning and deepness of the words? Listen to these words: *“Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”²⁴ Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.”*

Marriage is spiritually and physically binding, it is the joining of two people into one flesh. That is why divorce is so unnatural, and that is why we can grieve like we did with the clip we looked at earlier.

Let’s look at one other aspect of the communal nature of marriage. Look at the second part of verse 15, *“... what was the one God seeking? Godly offspring.”* One of the things God intended out of this community is that other members would grow out of it. In other words, community at its deepest and most sacred level is to be reproducing.

Marriage was not only intended to foster community between a man and a woman, but also to serve as a conduit to produce members of that community. Now granted, just because one is born into a home of Christians, does not mean that child has a place in heaven, but it is more likely that child will respond to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in faith because his/her mom and dad belong to God's covenant community of faith (1 Cor. 7:13-16) than the one who is born into the home of parents who could give a rip about God.

Application

Now, if you married an unbeliever, it is not God's will for you to divorce him/her, for we read in 1 Corinthians 7 that the one married to an unbeliever should remain with the unbeliever because God might use you bring that spouse to faith in Christ.

So what we have seen in this passage is God's passion and design for marriage to be experienced between two members of the larger covenant community of Faith; which is a spiritually and physically binding union meant only to be experienced in a monogamous heterosexual relationship between a man and a woman.

This union serves several purposes: 1) to illustrate God's redemptive plan; 2) to foster the type of community He desires among His people; 3) bring others into that covenant community through child bearing. Marriage specifically illustrates the relationship between Christ and His church.

So how does Malachi conclude in verse 16, "*For the man who hates and divorces, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts.*" Now I know you are looking in your bible and are seeing that what I just read sounds a lot different than verse 16 in your bible.

I do feel that the better translation is the NIV, "*I hate divorce, says the LORD God of Israel.*" This is a tricky verse to translate from the Hebrew. Both the ESV and NIV are legitimate translations of this verse; the point is clear though, God hates divorce because of what it does to the institution that functions to reflect and foster what it means to be the covenant community of God.

The people were breaking covenant with each other to the point that their faithlessness with one another affected the deepest of relationships: marriage. So when they came to God in worship, God turned His back. The community that is experienced and participated in by God's people is vitally important to God and critical to our spiritual development.

Communion

This is why Jesus said, "*If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother and then come and offer your gift.*" (Matt. 23-24)

Divorce is often the result of unrepentant and unforgiving hearts and God says in such cases, I close my eyes and shut my ears to your worship until you get right with the one you entered covenant with.

The same applies to our relationship with God, if we are unrepentant towards God, He will not accept our worship. This is why we read in 1 John 1:9, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*