



Life Ain't What It Should Be!

Sermon - Steve Stanis

28 May 2023

Malachi 2:10-17 Hebrews 13:1-6

Let me tell you a story about our wedding... a time of making a covenant with each other. Sadly, I don't have great recall of the actual ceremony. I said my vows and promptly fainted. This has become the story of our wedding.

Although I don't remember much, it is a story that has been told over the years and I tell you again today. I still value our covenant today. It is through story that we remember. This is the message Malachi brings to the Israelite people in today's passage.

This passage from Malachi 2 deals with who our God is and, therefore, who we are as God's people. Malachi is **reminding** God's people of the stories of their past. God has brought them from nothing to be an established people. As other nations have become corrupt, God has kept and preserved his people. This is the story of the Israelite people, and they must **remember** their story because it is their identity. God is faithful and the people must be **reminded** of this.

Can you hear the weariness? God says, "I have loved you." And the people respond faithlessly. They ask how God has loved them. These people have become so distant from God they have become faithless. They have forgotten who he is and so they have forgotten who they are.

Malachi is not just addressing the Israelite people. He is speaking to the priests, those chosen to guard God's covenant.

The priests have been faithless too. The priests are supposed to model how to live in awe of God's name.

To try to get their attention, Malachi uses the metaphor of marriage to address this problem with both the Israelite people and the Israelite priests. Malachi is using the language of marriage to explain to the people what sort of relationship they have with God. Malachi is pointing out that God is not just instructional but deeply relational. God wants us to think about our relationship with him, not as distant and impersonal, but deeply personal and meaningful.

Remember, says Malachi, **remember** this is your God. Guard in your heart the precious love of God. **Remember** that he is faithful. Malachi is personifying God's people as the husband - not a hero of the story but one who has acted faithlessly. He has left his first, true love, the wife of his youth, to pursue others.

This passage is not about the importance of faithfulness in marriage, as important as this is. Malachi is not focusing on this. Malachi is focussed on a bigger marriage and that is the Covenant between God and his people. He is focused on idolatry, on focusing on a foreign god. Idolatry jeopardises generations of God's people and it needs to stop before God's people are no longer known for worshipping Yahweh.

If Israel is the husband pursuing the daughter of a foreign god, then Malachi wants us to see that the wife of our youth is the one true God. Malachi is calling the Israelites back to their first true love, which is God, Yahweh.

Malachi is not focusing on who the foreign goddess is. It is likely that it is Asherah, as mentioned in 1 Kings, but it really

doesn't matter. God's people have abandoned faith to their God and have taken up the practices of foreign gods. The Israelite people are callous. They have been led astray by their priests, by their leaders. They have sought other gods and embraced their worship practises. The leaders have not pointed the people to God.

Verses 15-16 give us the answer about how to pursue God as our first love. Guard yourself in the Spirit and do not be faithless to the wife of your youth. Guard yourselves from idolatry. Keep yourselves in the Covenant of God. **Remember** your God and **remember** to be faithful.

Proverbs 8:32-34 says:

*Now then, my children, listen to me;
blessed are those who keep my ways.*

Listen to my instruction and be wise; do not disregard it.

*Blessed are those who listen to me,
watching daily at my doors, waiting at my doorway.*

Watching and waiting... Guard your heart! Pursue your first love. **Remember** your God and **remember** to be faithful. The metaphor of marriage is used in Malachi for practising faithfulness of the covenant.

It would be incomplete not to go to the New Testament metaphor of marriage... A priest is required who can right the relationship between God's people and himself. Who is the priest who is God's messenger? Who will lead us away from idolatry to truth? Who is our great High Priest? Who has finished the race we are currently running?

It is Christ. He wants to lead you through whatever wilderness you are currently in and give you the words of truth. He wants to care for your soul.

It is Christ who is the faithful bridegroom, not us. He is committed to us, his people, and his promises. He is patient as he works in us to make us more like him. Jesus perpetually sees us as the wife of his youth, his bride, the Church.

On first reading this passage from Malachi seems a bleak message, but really it is a message of hope. **Remember** your God, the God of your youth, and be faithful.

The timelessness of God's Word means that this message delivered by Malachi to the Israelites at the time, is a timely reminder to us that we must **remember** our story. We must **remember** how God has loved us and been faithful to us so that we too, will not be faithless.

I think the verses in this passage offer hope through instruction. I can see five points of helpful application.

1) To Take or to Give

Firstly, V10:

Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?"

I think this is why we come to church. We need the **reminder** to be faithful, the **reminder** to guard the truth, the **reminder** to keep the Covenant and to love the Lord our God. When we live faithfully as God's people, we find unity. We are living as the people we are created to be. Our identity in Christ is

secure. Malachi says that we profane the Covenant by being faithless toward each other. So the challenge from Malachi is to have a faith that contributes more than it consumes because this is what builds unity.

2) Lie in a bed of Truth

Can you handle the truth??? Verses 11-12:

Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god. As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD remove him from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings an offering to the LORD Almighty.

As believers, we are called to lie in a bed of truth, not leaving it to follow a bed of desire. Our hearts and minds are visible to God. Just like the thin walls of Jacob's tent did not hide deceit and desire, driven by lies, so our offerings to God must be pure sacrifices, offered with lips that acknowledge his name and hearts that are transformed by the Spirit.

Romans 12:1-2:

I appeal to you therefore, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

3) No Compromise

Verse 13:

Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favour on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.

How easy it is to weep for the wrong reasons, even while being religious. These people were not weeping for their lack of integrity, character, or covenantal faithlessness. Their crying was not confession. These are tears of regret, not repentance.

Can these tears flow from our eyes? We grieve over the consequences of poor choices, the circumstances we find ourselves in, rather than tears desiring faithfulness to God's ways.

4) Building Healthy Boundaries

Verses 15-16:

Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

"The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the LORD Almighty.

So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful.

To be on your guard - this means to 'hedge with thorns' or 'protect by attending to'. Be alert to the danger of

conforming to this world. It is so easy to be faithless. Protect and attend to your relationship with your Father, Creator and Covenant keeper. Meditate on his word in your heart. Like Mary, ponder all things, showing trust that he is faithful.

Be alert in our relationships with our families. They are precious and must be protected and attended to diligently. Be faithful to those you love.

Be alert in our relationships in our church, with fellow believers. Unity does not happen by accident; it is deliberate decision. It seems especially significant at this time to call upon some wisdom and guidance that God has called to eternity.

Theologian and author Tim Keller says,

"Tolerance isn't about not having beliefs. It's about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you."

Be alert as we live our lives day to day. We need to protect and attend to the transforming work of the Spirit so that others may see Christ and be drawn to him.

Show up! Be faithful! Look to Jesus and he will be faithful.

5) True Justice

Verse 17 is about God's justice.

You have wearied the LORD with your words. 'How have we wearied him?' you ask. By saying, 'All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them' or 'Where is the God of justice?'

Spiritual ignorance and arrogance are to be avoided. They lead to self-righteousness and a personal sense of entitlement. This attitude divorces us from others. It separates the right from the wrong.

Another insight from Tim Keller who said,

"Contemporary people tend to examine the Bible, looking for things they can't accept; but Christians should reverse that, allowing the Bible to examine us, looking for things God can't accept."

God's justice is patient and kind. He is faithful. As we rest in God's perfect justice and await his second coming, we need to commit to working for justice around us. We need to begin by treating others with grace and humility. We should have such a strong identity as children of Christ that we can let go of fear and open up conversations.

Again, and finally, quoting Tim Keller:

"To be loved but not known is comforting but superficial. To be known and not loved is our greatest fear. But to be fully known and truly loved is, well, a lot like being loved by God. It is what we need more than anything. It liberates us from pretense, humbles us out of our self-righteousness, and fortifies us for any difficulty life can throw at us."

Let's not divorce from one another in our relationships in Christ. Let's seek to keep building his promises in the Vision he has given us fulfilling his Mission - to love and serve in prayerfulness, connecting so we can be transformed as God is always intending.