

Divorce

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[0 : 00] Okay folks, keep that passage in Malachi chapter 2 open in front of you. So this is the proverbial cod liver oil tablet passage. Really hard to swallow, but really good for our bodies.

Really good for us to take in the message, the central message of this passage today. So my laptop's in for repair, so there's no PowerPoint today.

So you're going to have to concentrate extra hard. But this is really good for us to take in this passage. So, you up for some song lyrics as we begin? You're getting song lyrics as we begin. I'm free to do what I want any old time. And I'm free to be who I choose any old time. If you're a culture vulture, which many of you are, you will recognise those as the lyrics that the Soup Dragons sang back in 1990.

That was the anthem of my childhood growing up. I'm free to do what I want any old time. If you're a culture dweller though, and that's all of us by definition, you will recognise those lyrics as the drumbeat of our day.

[1 : 12] It's the drumbeat of the Western world where we celebrate individual expression and we elevate our own personal happiness as being the ultimate goal of our lives.

That you and I need to be our true selves, regardless of the people who like skittles in a bowling alley we happen to knock down in the process of trying to get there.

This is the mindset of our world. I'm free to do what I want any old time. I'm free to choose to be who I want any old time. And the thing is, if you search your hearts this morning, and I really searched mine in preparation for this this week.

The truth of it is, like flavouring in your morning coffee, sometimes you can drink this every day and not even realise that it's in your system.

This mindset. Do you see it in your own heart? I'm free to do what I want any old time. You see, that's the mindset that as we look at this generation of God's people, who we'll see in a minute have bought it hook, line and sinker.

[2 : 19] That's the mindset that God is going to challenge in each of our hearts this morning. Particularly in terms of how we understand this whole area of sex and marriage. That's the presenting issue here in this day.

Now your reaction to me saying that is likely to be one of two things. Number one is that you'll switch on. Number two is that you'll switch off. Right? Maybe wondering, why on earth would I care that God has something to say about that?

Why is he meddling in this field? I met a guy in America whose surname was Meddler. I thought it was quite funny. Why is God meddling in this field? Why should I care what he thinks?

You maybe see God like C.S. Lewis did before he became a Christian. He outlines it in his book. Remember reading it as a young Christian, surprised by joy. Right?

And it's a tale of how he came to faith as a kind of atheist, agnostic. How he came to believe in the God of the Bible. Before he believed, he called God, in his own words, the grand interferer.

[3 : 23] Right? Maybe that's how you understand God today. Well, it's been my prayer for you this week that you might detect the scent of the sweet answer that the Bible has for you on that.

Right? As we contemplate how and why Jesus calls his followers to adopt a different mindset from that of the world. Now, we've seen over the last number of weeks, God's stinging words of rebuke to the priests.

Do you remember that? That was kind of chapter two. Well, now God turns to address the people. The people. Now, let me just say two really quick things to try and create a canvas for this sermon so that we can see clearly the picture where we're going to end with this that's right at the center of it.

Right? I want us to see the word of the text. Now, if you've got it there, just have a look. Glance over it. Remember what John was reading. The word of the text is the word faithless.

Now, if you scan your eye over the passage, you'll clock that it comes up five times in this passage. So this is Malachi addressing the people. God's speaking through Malachi, addressing the people.

[4 : 36] And it's almost as if God is saying that that's the word that I'd use to sum up what I see when I look at you, this generation of my people. Faithless.

Faithless. And from the word of the text, I want us to be honest about the pain of the topic. Because the issue here, on the surface, is that easy to force has become a thing amongst God's people. And I recognize that for many of us, even just the mention of that word might be touching some really sensitive and painful nerves right now.

Whether you know that word personally, you know the pain of it, or maybe that you've seen it from a distance, how it's affected your closest friends and family.

In ways that words can't even begin to put that, you can't even begin to put that into words. Isn't it true that Hollywood almost presents it to us as a harmless and almost natural conclusion to a marriage relationship?

[5 : 42] Remember a number of years ago, what was that phrase that was made popular by Chris Martin and Gwyneth Paltrow? To describe their divorce back in 2014. They called it a conscious uncoupling. Do you remember that?

You might get away with that if you've got tons of money in the bank. But I've got friends who work in different areas of this city. And let me say, when it happens, it causes utter chaos.

Utter chaos. Utter pain. Now it's worth saying that even though God hates divorce, we see it clearly in this passage. The Bible has so much more to say on that, that we're going to have time to cover today.

Regarding the times when it is sadly and regrettably permissible. But if you have questions on this, and I take it many of us will, a lot of us will, then please come and speak to one of the elders.

We're here this morning to answer your questions about this topic. And just to chat and to pray and to listen. Because we want to strive to be that kind of church community where we have that spirit of honesty and love for one another.

[6 : 47] And we can walk with one another compassionately through the things that really hurt in life. That's the community we want to be, is it not? That's the community we want to be.

And if nothing else, I want us to be greatly heartened this morning by the fact that the God of the Bible would speak into the most painful and deepest wounds and sorest of wounds with his words. This is why he speaks here. To offer words of challenge and to pour gallons of grace on the people who are behind this text. He loves us.

The God of the Bible is committed to his glory. And he's committed, determined to bring the people, the world over to see his goodness, love and grace.

And he is a good father. Maybe for some of us here this morning, and again, this has been my prayer, that this might even be by God's sheer goodness and grace, the start of that long road that is the healing process.

[7 : 52] And so let's get into the meat of this. And again, here is the structure for today. It's really simple because there's no PowerPoint. Here it is, 3, 2, 1.

Okay? Here's the three. Notice the three names of God that Malachi uses right up top. Give us an indication into who he is and why he's speaking here.

Here's the first one. He's our father. Verse 10. Do you see it? He's our father. God speaking through Malachi reminds them that as a nation, they are his special possession.

Right? He is the father of the like, and they are all his children. So this is him saying, it's not like we happen to have all pitched up and live in the same street. No, God has brought us together.

He saved us as a people. He's bound us and bonded us together. He's our father. So it's a family metaphor that Malachi is using here.

[8 : 53] He's our father. We're his children. And do you see he say, has not one God created us? Now, the Hebrew word there is the Genesis 1 word for God.

This God, says Malachi, remember, he's our creator. Look at your hands. Take a breath. Sing a song. It's him that's given us all the abilities that we have.

He's our creator. He is the one. He is the three in one God who's made us in his image. And because the three in one God has made us in his image, we are deeply relational beings.

That is not an accident. And friends, that is why many of us, all of us really struggled with COVID being inside, not together. Because we're wired. We're wired like this. We are deeply relational beings.

In other words, the grand watchmaker knows how we tick. He's made us in his image. He's the relational God, father, son, spirit, loving each other perfectly.

[9 : 57] Since before eternity began. Therefore, particularly when it comes to human relationships, and I take it this is Malachi's point, and sexuality. And how they will flourish best.

It seems that there is great wisdom in acknowledging that perhaps the God who framed us and knows us and who loves us. Might have something to say for our good into that.

Now, it's Glenn Harrison, Christian doctor and psychologist who's working down in Bristol. In his wonderful little book, A Better Story. God, Sex, and Human Flourishing.

And this is one of the best books I've read on this that somebody has produced really recently. He says this. He says, The gospel calls us to learn to be God's creatures all over again.

Because this is his reality, not ours. And we will flourish when we work in harmony with our creator's reality. And I think that's so helpful. This gospel calls us to learn to be God's creatures all over again.

[11 : 06] If you want to check this out, just come and grab it. It will be on the stage afterwards. But it's a really good book worth checking out. This is what Malachi is saying. He is our God. He's the God. He's the God who made us.

He designed it all. And lastly, thirdly, he is, verse 12, the Lord of hosts. Do you see that? He is the God of angel armies. So this is a serious thing.

Not only when we lean into our own wisdom and neglect deliberately his, but it's a serious thing when we inflict pain, not just on any human being, but particularly when we inflict it in this context on God's children.

And we've got to answer to him at the end of the day for how we've treated others. So do you see the three aspects to God there? He's our father. He loves us.

He knows us. He saved us. He's our God. He's the one who framed us. He knows us. And he's the Lord of angel armies. He's the one who we'll have to give account to. They just frame this whole discussion that this is who God is.

[12 : 13] And really quickly, from the three names of God, see the two problems with this generation. And the first one is most clearly seen at the end of verse 15, where Malachi says, guard yourselves in your spirit, right?

Heart, your inner self. Guard yourselves in your spirit and let none of you be faithless to the wife of your youth. So there's an easy divorce culture developing in Israel.

And there's two angles on this as to why God takes it so seriously. Firstly, there's a horizontal angle. Simply, the detrimental impact that the unfaithfulness has on other people.

As men in this generation, I take it, normalize and legitimize ditching their wives and going after the woman of the nations round about them, thinking to themselves, simply, I take it, I want a bit of that. They are flourishing. They are pretty. Life might go better for me over there. And so they go. Which in this culture, to do that, you are consigning the wife of your youth.

[13 : 30] And just notice the details who God witnessed you to get married. Verse 14, he witnessed you pledge yourself to her. What you're doing is causing her to move back in with her parents.

And you're inflicting a shed load of shame and pain on her, her family and their community. And the thing is, where did that all start?

It started in their spirits. That's why Malachi says, guard your spirits, guard your hearts. It all started in there. All started, in other words, from the vertical angle.

Right? Horizontal, vertical angle. These men being unfaithful to their wives and to their community, why did they do it? Because, first of all, their hearts had given up on being faithful to the Lord. Being satisfied with who he is. In love with who he is. Desiring to be obedient to what he said. Because God's instruction to his people throughout the Old Testament is explicit.

[14 : 33] Don't marry foreign wives. Now, you've got to be really clear here, right? That this instruction is not an ethnic thing. Hear me loud and clear on that.

Neither is it a racial thing. Again, hear me loud and clear on that. But hear me loud and clear on this. What is it? It's a worship thing. It's a worship thing.

Because why did God give them that law? Because he knew the hearts of his people, that if they did, they would wander right into idolatry. They would take up the customs of the nations round about, of the small g gods, and they would run into the direction of rebellion against Yahweh. This is a worship thing. And the second problem, verse 13, is that these same men waltz into God's temple, throw crocodile tears of contrition before him, weeping and groaning, and they're puzzled when God doesn't seem to answer their prayers.

They even have the brass neck to ask in their hearts, verse 14, why does he not? And the answer, I take it, is that God will not be played for a fool.

[15:51] And so it's little wonder that Malachi says to this generation, guard your spirits, guard your hearts, because this is a worship thing. So true in our lives, isn't it, friends?

This is, everything else flows downstream from here. downstream from here. This is a worship thing. And when you frame it like that, that is why, even though we are not Old Testament Israel, it is not unsurprising that a command to only marry a believer is repeated in the New Testament.

Now again, I recognize that that is going to be painful for many of us. And again, we'd love to chat and pray with you if you want to after this. But I remember this, growing up.

If you're single here today, I get that this is tough. It is so good to have non-Christian friends. So good. But let us not go fishing there for romance.

It's just not good for us to do it. And you ask in your hearts, I remember this, thinking, oh, but people are so much fun. It's, I can maybe attract them to Christian friends.

[17:01] It rarely goes well. And God has said, don't do it. This is a worship thing. He knows our hearts. And so here is the question that's right at the heart of this.

Do we love the Lord? Do you love him? Do we trust what he says? Do we trust his blueprint for human relationships and particularly for sex in the context for that where it's going to go the best the way that he's designed it to is a marriage between one man and one woman?

Are you convinced that that is the best? Do we trust Jesus with our relationship status? the fact that we worship a single man who lived the most full and most satisfied human life that ever existed.

I take it that whoever we are today and whatever angle we're coming at this passage from, I take it that should be a great source of comfort to us. Do you see how Jesus Christ is the stone in the shoe of the sexual revolution that the world is trying to tell us?

that you cannot be satisfied unless you give some kind of outlet, you find some kind of partner where you can be sexually fulfilled and Jesus Christ would say that's not true.

[18:22] He's the stone in the shoe to the sexual revolution as the world is trying to sell it to us. Friends, do you trust God's blueprint for your body? You know, we had that discussion recently around the dinner table with our kids about special parts of the body.

He said, isn't that not just a revealing thing about our society, our culture today that we're having to have that conversation with six and seven year olds? I don't think I was 14 until we got that at school.

But it's true, isn't it? But what did we say to them? You don't let just anyone go there. Okay? That's why I take it when sex goes wrong, the pain of it is not like you've just fallen off your bike and skinned your knee in the playground, is it?

The pain of it, it feels like sacred space has been intruded upon. Now, why do we feel like that? I take it because God has designed this purposefully.

That there is great sanctity in sex, that God designed it for more than just mere pleasure. God designed it in order to help us grasp something profoundly bigger and more real and satisfying about who he is and about his love for us.

[19:45] Because that's true, the question is, is Jesus worth more to us than the fleeting pleasures and lusts of this world? Will we trust him when he says, whoever wants to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me?

That whoever would lose his life for my sake in the gospel will gain his life. And part of that denial, I take it, of self is saying no to anything that would cause us to go against King Jesus.

And that takes us to the one, right, no great surprise here, he is the one. Right, three names of God, two problems with this generation, and the one person that we need to run to here.

It's fascinating if you look at it and glance at it if you want in Mark chapter 10. This topic of divorce is put to Jesus. Right, the Pharisees, the religious lawyers of the day, they quiz him on it, they want to know what he thinks about it.

And notice the clues as to the state of their hearts and how this conversation goes down. And I take it that's always a good thing that is worth doing when there's a question asked of Jesus and Jesus asks a question the other way.

[21 : 07] Put yourself in the shoes of the one who's asking the question. Because it's so often when Jesus answers a question with a question that the question reveals the heart of the questioner. Right? That makes sense.

Reveals the heart of the questioner. And otherwise, Jesus asks questions to bring out what's really going on in the heart. That's what happens here, Mark chapter 10. They ask Jesus, Jesus, is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

Now notice that they don't ask is it right for a man to divorce his wife? They don't ask is it wise for, they ask is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?

And again, that's just the first clue as to the state of their hearts and what they're really worried about. And Jesus, in classic Jesus style, answers their question with a question.

He says, what did Moses say? Which is a good question. And they reply, he permitted us to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away. And again, that's the second clue as to the coldness of the question.

[22 : 11] What's going on in their hearts? To send her away? How chilling is that as a response? Again, the conversation could have ended there because the question technically has been answered.

But Jesus wants them to see when it comes to this whole area of sex and marriage that they've totally missed the wood from the trees in the most chilling and in the most heartless of ways. He says, this is true because of the hardness of your hearts.

In other words, the problem isn't marriage. No, the problem is the sinful human heart. He reaffirms that God made them in the beginning male and female.

And he designed marriage so that the two would become one flesh. In other words, there's a design purpose to the way God has put this together. You need to see it and you ain't seeing it, says Jesus to the Pharisees.

Now, a good question to ask at this point is why is Jesus so strong in this? It seems to be a good question. Let me put it another way. Have you ever asked yourself why God gave us sexuality?

[23 : 21] Now, that's a conversation starter when you meet your friends after this. But it's a question I want to know that if you're a Christian here today, the Bible has a wonderfully profound answer to you for that question.

Why has God designed sexuality? I'll get the how, but why has he designed it? If you're here today and you don't believe any of the stuff that I've said, there's a question for you to chew on.

Why is it even... God could easily have made us without that being necessary, right? Why did God design sexuality? Well, I take it it's a question that one that Jesus in the context of Mark is about to show us the answer to because he's about to fulfill.

Remember this, where this comes, Mark chapter 10, Mark chapter 8. If you want to read it through in your own time after this, that's where the penny drops as to who Jesus is. Chapters 1 to 8, almost who he is, what the kids are doing upstairs.

Chapters 8 to 16, this is why he came. Where does this come? Chapter 10, it's the beginning of why he came. He is everything that marriage is pointing to.

[24 : 32] He is the divine bridegroom who's come on a rescue mission to woo and to win his people as his bride to himself.

And he does it because he's going to the cross to win his people for himself, going to the cross to pay for their sin. And whoever we are here today, we've all made mistakes in this field.

All of us have made mistakes in this field, regardless of what your relationship status is here today. And this is why he's the one person that we need to get to. And he's the one person that we need to see.

No, our identity is in him and who he is and what he's done for us. That's where we need to get to because he on the cross took all of our shame and our sin, all of our past regrets, all of our secret and hidden mistakes, all the pain that's wrapped up, not just in this area, but every area.

He goes to the cross to make our problems and our shame and our sin his own. And whoever you are here today, that's where we need to get to because there is forgiveness and there is gallants of grace to be found in Jesus.

[25 : 50] Because where you and I are faithless, he is faithful. Human marriage is a pale and imperfect reflection of and one that points to the relationship that Jesus Christ has with his church.

For those who are married here today, is this not a wonderful reminder, one that we will never be able to measure up to and yet wonderfully is our call to make our marriages about the bigger and ultimate purpose of Jesus and his church.

It's why, husbands, if we're here today, the call to sacrificially serve and give yourself for and have eyes only for our wives is the call on us and it's why wives, God calls you to choose to follow the servant-hearted, loving lead of your husband and to submit to him as the church does to Jesus because we recognize that there's a bigger game in which we're playing.

Right? And I watched it over Christmas time, my aunt, she cried over my uncle when he died but at the end of the pain of half an hour she walked out of the room and they pulled down the blinds and do you know what she said?

I'll see him in glory because there's a bigger game that we're playing in, there's a bigger marriage that we're involved in and whoever you are here today, that wedding photo at the end of time, you will be in it by your faith in Christ when the wedding photo of Jesus and his church happens and the thing is you won't just be a face in the crowd, your face will be caught up in the face of the bride and that's where this is pointed to this whole thing, your face will be in that wedding photo.

[27 : 50] Friends, just as we close, do you see how Jesus calls us to dance to a new tune? The world says I'm free to do what I want any old time and I'm free to be who I choose any old time.

Do you want to know the other song that's been in my head all week from a generation even before this? It's a song by T-Rex and a handful of you will know what that song is. They sang the song, do you remember it, Children of the Revolution?

Remember that song Children of the Revolution? Some of you are nodding, some of you don't have a clue. But this is what you are if you're a Christian here today and you adopt this. You're a child of the revolution.

The eternal sexual revolution that Jesus Christ unveiled 2,000 years ago in a Greco-Roman world that prized power and dominance and saw women and children as inferior, encouraged men not to hold back on unleashing their sexual desires.

You can imagine the revolution that kicked off in this time. And it might just be that the scales are on the other side in our culture today. But make no mistake, it is still as revolutionary then as it is today.

[29 : 04] So the question is, friends, do we love him? Do we love Jesus? Will we take him up at his words that what he says his way is the best? Will we allow him to pour gallons of grace into our wounds in this whole area?

And will we take up our cross, deny self, and follow him? Let me just give you a real concrete example as we finish as to how I saw this play out in my time at Brunnsfield.

I remember a girl here years ago. She was engaged to her soon-to-be husband. And as is the nature of renting in this city, he needed to be out of his flat before they got married.

And you can imagine the issues that that caused. Anyone looking on would see that the easy thing for them to do was just to move in together. It would save on money, tons of money for two or three months before they got married.

All the hassle of trying to find somewhere to put your stuff. Not to mention the inconvenience of rocking up at someone's house and saying, can I just stay over for a little bit of time? Why bother?

[30 : 07] Well, they made the call that to do so, to move in together, would not only be potentially damaging to their witness in front of the watching world, they would make their own conclusions as to what they were doing, but it would just unnecessarily put them in temptation's way.

And so they made the call, no, we're going to live in separate places until we get married. And it cost them, it cost them money, it cost them the inconvenience of having to do it, but they wanted to do it to show the world, actually our lives are caught up in the truer marriage.

And we want to honour him right at the beginning of our married life. But what a powerful statement to the watching world. not just that we honour Jesus, but that we understand the bigger story which God has called us to in him.

The one of which the Apostle Paul, another single man, could see is a profound mystery. And it's a mystery because it points to the profound marriage between Jesus Christ and his church.

Now we're going to move into a time of communion in just a minute, we'll sing one song and then do it. But I hope this just lends itself so naturally to that being a fitting climax to our time together this

morning.

[31 : 24] Because that is exactly what we're celebrating, isn't it? As we take the bread and the wine, we're celebrating the union that we have with our divine husband, with Jesus.

Friends, I recognise that this would have been a painful topic for many of us today and that it really is a genuine offer if you want to chat or to pray. And again, just maybe to anyone sitting around about you to do that.

Again, we just want to foster that culture where we're just praying together is just a natural thing that we do. But I'm going to pray just now. I'm just going to pray particularly that God would be with us as we journey on this morning.

So let us pray. Amen. And so Father, I just pray, Lord, that by your Holy Spirit, Lord, that you would be bringing words right now, I take it, of challenge and perhaps of painful prodding in areas where we need to change.

Oh, but Father, would he also be bringing words of comfort, and words of grace. Father, as you, as we've looked at this morning, speak those words into some of the most painful and sensitive of places.

[32 : 45] So Lord, I pray that wherever we are today, Lord, that we wouldn't leave this place with a spirit of judgment or condemnation upon us. But Lord, we would leave this morning having met with the gracious King, Jesus Christ.

gracious Father, we just commit ourselves into your hands, the hands that hold us, the hands and heart that love us. We just pray these things to you, our good Father, in Jesus name.

Amen.