

Malachi: Broken Promises

Malachi 2:10-16

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on February 4, 2024.

What Happens When We Ignore the Truth of God's Word

Last week, we considered what happens when God's truth is ignored. The end result is that people stumble. When the power of God's truth fades in our lives, when we try to navigate by our own experience, we lose the clarity to avoid moral traps and we get too weak to stand up when life and this world would drag us down.

Too often, we starve ourselves of God's word. And when we deprive ourselves of that spiritual food, we will fill up some place else. We will turn to some other source, some other, lesser spiritual protein, if you will. When we begin to starve ourselves in this way, our hearts become weak and soon, all the lines begin to blur a little bit. Compromise creeps in. Things that we once stood resolutely against, suddenly become possibilities.

This broken world will never stop luring us, calling to us, begging us to compromise and stumble. When we ignore God's word, it becomes easier and easier to break all vows and promises, or covenants, with God and God's people. Malachi is dealing with that in our text today. I invite you to second chapter of Malachi as we read verses ten through sixteen. (read text)

Broken Promises

Malachi 2:10-16 continues from the previous section the covenantal idea, Here we see the concept of faithfulness to the covenant illustrated through the covenant of marriage. God condemns the people on two counts: unfaithfulness and crocodile tears when God reprimands them for it.

The people have been unfaithful to the Lord and the covenant, the promise they made to Him. This unfaithfulness has spread throughout many aspects of their lives. Malachi challenges the people – including himself – through three questions.

The first question concerns a common kinship – “one Father.” The people are united both ethnically as Hebrews but also religiously or spiritually. This is a basic and elemental unity. It runs to the very core of their identity.

The second question is connected to the first. It concerns God's creative work. Earlier in Malachi, God's Fatherhood is connected to his creative activity, creation. It is here again with these first two questions. All humanity finds unity in the Creator God. Israel's unity, Israel's very existence only comes from a single source, God. God is our Father. God is our Creator.

Let's park here for a second. Let's expand upon what this question is getting to. Deep down, God's creative activity in our lives is the source of our blessings. Which means when we walk away from those blessings, when we decide to break faithfulness in those areas, we are walking in disobedience.

For example: God gave me my wife. Is marriage always easy? Nope. Is marriage always smooth sailing? Hardly. Will there be moments in marriage where we would rather just do things our way, do what we want to do, break faithfulness? Yes. Does that mean that we are allowed to break faithfulness with our spouse because of what we would prefer? Not at all. God's creative activity placed us in the marriages we are in. Breaking faithfulness over preference is disobedient to the covenant promise we have with Creator God.

God gave me my children. Walking away from them, breaking faithfulness with them, rejecting them, is disobedience to the creating work of God in my life.

A parent's rejection of a child is counter to the biblical understanding of the Creator God. It is breaking faithfulness. God gave us our children. Do our children always choose the way we want them to? Absolutely not. Will our children disappoint us, break our hearts? Yes. Does that justify me rejecting them, breaking faithfulness with them? Absolutely not.

God gave us our children. It is covenantal infidelity to the Lord to reject them. Train them up. Challenge them. Correct them. Let them know about your convictions. But do not break faithfulness with them.

With our spouses or our children, just because we think we have reasons to reject the covenant promise to the Lord, does not mean that we have biblical grounds to break that covenant. God never changes, even when our circumstances do. That does not mean that there are no grounds upon which these things may end.

That does not mean a spouse or child might break faithfulness with you. But as far as you are concerned, the Creator God is your Father. He is unchanging; therefore the covenantal promise is unchanging.

In light of these undeniable truths, the prophet asks a third question: if we are so clearly united, why does Israel undermine this unity through their actions? The people have broken faith and have been unfaithful. These are strong verbs used here. It indicates treachery toward the One who deserve covenantal fidelity.

This is a key theme in this passage. It is covered five times, with the particular application to the bonds of matrimony. There is a breach here and that break is between “one another.” Because of the unfaithfulness, the breaking has become reciprocated. Both sides have chosen to disrupt the relationship. This is a terrifying warning.

Because of Israel’s unfaithfulness to the covenant, they have profaned or desecrated the covenant by breaking its provisions. They have polluted the holy things that are supposed to be dedicated to the Lord.

We see this happen in our own lives when we make things like offerings about ourselves. Our offerings are to be holy sacrifices given to the Lord. But when we connect them to our preferences or our comfort – “I give to that church, so they better do what I want them to do” – we profane something that was intended to be holy. We forgot that we have what we have because Creator God gave it to us. This is a break of the covenantal relationship, profaning the holy things that are to be dedicated to God.

In the case of Malachi, the people have broken the ancestral covenant God made with the people in Exodus. In other words, the people have broken a foundational family bond. God is warning the people that if they show contempt and such little value of the covenant, they are actually telling God that the relationship they have is not worthy of being fostered.

Now, there is a tendency here to step back and think, “Come on, preacher. We don’t do that. We value the relationship.” Okay. I understand. Well, when was the last time we decided to memorize a verse of Scripture? I mean, outside of Vacation Bible School or the kids ministry. I mean, when was the last time we sat down and read the Bible and a verse really resonated with us and we determined to hide it in our hearts through memorization? “Well, I just don’t memorize things.” Ever said that?

So, the relationship we have with our Creator God is not worth fostering to the point of committing two or three sentences to memory? How important is the covenant relationship you have with God?

In vs. 11-12, Judah is designated as “Israel” because Judah is the sole remaining element of God’s chosen people after the exile and the disappearance of the ten northern tribes of Israel. Judah’s acts are atrocious, an abomination, detestable. God has claimed to love Judah, but Judah has committed spiritual adultery, cheating on God with lesser gods. Judah has turned to someone else. Judah changed and showed that covenant love to something other than God. This is the breaking of the first commandment.

The people have blended other belief systems and religions into their lives. They broke that exclusive understanding in the covenant – they stopped believing and acting in the “no other gods” context. They’ve scooped up several other gods and now the Creator God. They’ve broken their vow to worship God and God alone.

This act of worshiping other gods excludes Israel from the covenant, even if Israel continues to go through the motions of providing offerings. Malachi reminds Israel that empty rituals (going through the motions) without a proper devotion – hearts focused on God – is worthless.

Do you see what is happening here? Israel has been worshiping other gods and then continuing to stick to some surface-level religiosity. It is akin to gossiping about people all the time, and then coming to church to sing praises to God. Or continually lying to people about bad habits and then coming to the Lord and pretending to pray in agreement of total allegiance to the Lord.

God is clear. When people willingly and flagrantly disregard God’s word, no amount of formal ritual, habitual, surface-level, broken, half-hearted worship is sufficient in regard to the covenant promise they have made with God.

Because the people are worshiping other gods, God is ignoring their worship and their offerings. Because God is ignoring them, the one making the offering weeps, covering the altar with tears. The people are extremely bothered because of the broken relationship.

Empty ritual is not effective, and God ignores it. And the people cry, wondering “Why doesn’t God hear me?”

God isn’t listening to the people’s worship, nor is God accepting their offerings. Not while they don’t mean it. Not while they are also offering up things to other gods. The people dispute this to. There are a lot of “why me, Lord’s?” in Malachi. That is another reason it can resonate so profoundly with a contemporary audience. They want to know why God thinks that way and has acted that way.

God then accuses the people of both spiritual and actual adultery. He accuses Israel of leaving behind their first love, the “wife of their youth.” Israel has broken faith, not God.

The unity the people had with God has been broken and it was by the actions and choices of the people. God provides this picture of a broken marriage to exemplify the broken covenant with God.

Israel has been lying to God and they have been lying to each other. Trusts were being broken. They were marrying pagans and non-believers. And they were getting divorced. This was happening in their actual, day-to-day lives.

And this day-to-day activity was also happening on a spiritual level with God. They were worshiping other gods. They were worshiping with pagans in pagan temples. They were lying and breaking God’s trust.

Malachi warns his people and us today to stop acting faithlessly. Let’s look at this from the positive. We are to make covenant-making and covenant-keeping the very core and essence and desire and motivation of our hearts. And this covenant-making and covenant-keeping with God becomes the fabric of our lives together in the Body of Christ.

Remember, we have one Father, one Creator, and being faithless to God and each other profanes the covenant. Whenever we lie, when we break faith, we function as though God is not able to take care of us and we have to step up and do that instead.

Our Creator God has made a covenant with us.

This new covenant is a promise that God will forgive sin and restore fellowship with all who turn their hearts toward God. We turn our hearts back to God by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the mediator of the New Covenant God has made with us.

Because God has made this New Covenant possible, we can receive salvation as a free gift. Our part of the covenant is to exercise faith in Christ. We devote our lives to God through faith in Christ. Meaning there are no other Gods, no other Saviors, no other name by which we can be saved.

We are not to turn to anyone or anything else. We are not even to assume control ourselves. We maintain faith and trust in Christ and worship God alone. If we do that, we will share in the inheritance of Christ and enjoy an unbroken covenant relationship with God.

Stop breaking faith with God. Stop devoting your heart and life to something that is not the Creator God. Enter into and then be faithful to the New Covenant that God has made with you through Jesus.