

MAKING LOVE LAST, MALACHI 2:10-16

A Love that Won't Let Go #3

◆**Intro:** If you knew something that shattered dreams, generated overwhelming stress, would induce people into panic attacks and even cause heart palpitations; if you knew of one thing that prompted nausea, and raised blood pressure, and suppressed the immune system, and fostered chronic fatigue; if you knew of something that reduced a families standard of living, shortened a persons life span and brought unspeakable trauma to children...–what would you do about that something? The one, single thing that does everything I've mentioned so far is breaking of faith, in particular the kind we experience in divorce.

◆Here's some more of what it does in women: it saps about 85% of their energy just trying to keep an emotionally even keel during the day; it cuts their average standard of living by two thirds; is makes them angrier people, more aggressive and violent with their children; it produces anxiety, worry and depression for as long as a decade afterward. Here's what it does to men: they are two times more likely to have heart problems as non-divorced men; three times more likely to commit suicide; seven times more likely to catch pneumonia; and ten times more likely to die, and that's in any age bracket. Here's what it does to kids: they have the short term affects of anger, depression, guilt, and stress; they become under-achievers in school; as for long term affects, one twenty-five year study traced 131 children and found that over half still had emotional/psychological problems that were rooted in the divorce they experienced 25 years earlier.

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Those of us who mentor with Kid's Hope at Woodland School can tell you that many of the struggling students have broken homes. This helps us see what Malachi meant in verse 15 when he tells us that God made a husband and wife one so that their offspring would be godly.

◆[Note: if this doesn't seem like it's going to be a very "feel good" message, please hold on. And I'm not coming to bang anybody over the head because you've gone through divorce or are in one now. I've experienced it in my own extended family and I'm personally familiar with the devastating pain. What I do want to do is go after the honor and beauty of marital faithfulness. It is something that needs to be imbedded deep in the foundations of our worldview and culture long before the winds of change and disagreement begin to blow. If we are not convinced of the beauty of bedrock love for a lifetime between a man and a woman beforehand, it will likely not be an argument of much weight in a crisis. Lets see what God says through Malachi.

◆[read text]

◆The central verse is of course that last one: don't break faith. The phrase appears four times in seven verses. The word is translated "act treacherously", or "betray" or "violate". So why does God hate divorce/breaking faith? Flip it around: why does God love faithfulness among people?

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◆1. My marital faithfulness is in imitation of God's faithfulness toward me.

◆A. Basically God has ordained marriage to mirror him and his passion. What is he like? Well God is love. What is real, honest love like? It is faithful, sacrificial, long-suffering. It gives and then gives more. God loves like this. He doesn't change his mind because the object of his love did the wrong thing, or won't shape up quickly enough. His passion isn't altered by mood swings, the economy, geographical location, job changes, boredom, irritating habits, or even general incompatibility. When God says he loves, you can place your bets on it. You can build your house on it. Check Malachi a minute...

◆"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" the LORD says. "Yet I have loved Jacob," Malachi 1:2, NIV.

◆"I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." Malachi 3:6, NIV.

◆B. You might say that God is the marrying type. He scanned all the pretty faces of the earth and picked one family as his own: Abraham's. This family became a whole nation which God called his "treasured possession."

◆"*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" Exodus 19:5, 6, NIV. (notice the

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image of priesthood; people who link God and men. We're going to see this again.)

◆ This imagery continues throughout the Bible. In John 3 Jesus is called the Bridegroom. In Ephesians the Church is called his bride. Heaven is depicted as a wedding feast in Isaiah, Matthew, and Revelations. You see, God is all about faithfulness, and lasting love. Lasting love is the true reality; the ways things really work. You want what's best? Be faithful, no matter what they do on TV, or say on The View, or write in Psychology Today. Work at your marriage no matter how much it cost, or how difficult it is. Marital faithfulness is being like God is. We are fools to think we'll find a better way on our own.

◆ **C.** This is why God repeatedly forbid the Israelites from marrying outside their faith. When a couple shares a religious foundation, they have an extraordinary power and resource that can actually alter their own characters and make them more like God. So God says to Israel "No *religious* intermarriage." We are not talking about *racial* intermarriage. We're talking about religious intermarriage: someone who does not follow the true God, in terms of our text, "the daughter of a foreign god." (v11) What's the big deal? Your religion, or how you view reality, or your understanding of human existence, or who God is to you – this is the bedrock of who you are as a person. It is building block one of relationship, which is building block one of any successful culture.

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◆2. My marital faithfulness helps the world meet God.

◆A. The Israelite men in Malachi's day were divorcing their wives and marrying girls who didn't believe in God, who did believe in other gods! A serious part of marital faithfulness is marrying someone who shares your faith. Every time in history that God called his people back to himself, he gives strong injunctions against *religious* intermarriage. It happens in Exodus 34 at Mt. Sinai at the establishment of the Hebrew Nation. It happens in Deuteronomy 7 on the boarder of the Promised Land before they enter to conquer it. It happens in Joshua 23 *after* they have conquered Canaan. It happens in Nehemiah 10 after the Jews return to the Promised Land from exile in Babylon. It happens in the last prophet (Malachi) before the coming of God's Son to the Earth. On every one of these occasions God warns them about their marriages. Maybe you recall from Numbers 22 that when King Balak wanted to get the Israelites cursed by the prophet Balaam, Balaam slyly advised Balak to get the Israelite men to intermarry because that would destroy their people from the inside!

◆Why does God keep beating on the faithful marriage drum? Because the believing community is the temple where God meets the world. If the believing community is mixed up, the world's understanding of God and his ways will be mixed up. Look.

◆v11 "*Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves.*"

What is that sanctuary? It's not the temple in Jerusalem

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that the returned exiles were rebuilding. It's the people! It's them! Paul talks the same way.

◆ *"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple." 1 Corinthians 3:16,17, NIV.*

◆ In this text "you" is plural, ie. "you the church". Again, the believing community is the temple where God meets the world. By opening their marriages to mates of another religion, they were destroying God's community/sanctuary. Spiritually mixed marriages violate the integrity of God's temple, or God's community. Notice the "temple" language in the following NT passage.

◆ *"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live (lit. "house") with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, NIV.*

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◆ Why is this so significant for marriage? Because marriage is the foundation of society. Marriage represents our deepest need for community. It is the first step toward a society. It is the first committed relationship in which one man joins one woman and says, *"No matter what, for all of life, until one of us dies, I've got your back. You can count on me, I will go where you go, live where you live, learn to like what you like if I have to. I will think about you instead of just me. We will learn to see eye to eye, you and I. We will be a lasting unit, as though we are one person! We can even make more people together who will always know who they can count on because they will be part of us!"* That's the beauty of marriage. Marriage is where family begins. Family is where faithfulness begins. Faithfulness means hope. Faithfulness is like God. And our lives are about pointing to the true God.

◆ Now, Christians are all about engaging relationally with the world around us. After all, we are to be God's kingdom of priests, his temple in the world. King Solomon, one of the wisest men that ever lived was lost his integrity because he mixed romance and other religions.

◆ *"As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been." 1 Kings 11:4, NIV.*

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◆ But to those of you followers of Jesus who are not married yet, let me challenge you that while you engage relationally with the world, never engage romantically with the world. Reserve your deepest loyalties and affections for God and his people. Do not mix romance and another religion.

◆ *A Promise Kept* is a story of Robertson McQuilkin, former missionary and seminary president who gave up his post because his wife Muriel had Alzheimers disease. He decided to dedicate himself full time for as long as the Lord deemed, to take care of his wife. He wrote about traveling with his wife:

◆ "Once our flight was delayed in Atlanta and we had to wait a couple of hours. Now that's a challenge. Every few minutes we'd take a fast-paced walk down the terminal in an earnest search of what? Muriel had always been a speed walker. I had to jog to keep up with her. An attractive woman executive type sat across from us, working diligently on her computer. Once when we returned from our excursion she said something without looking up from her papers. Since no one else was nearby I assumed she had spoken to me or at least mumbled in protest of our constant activity. "Pardon" I asked. "Oh" she said, "I was just asking myself, "Will I ever find a man to love me like that?""

◆ McQuilkin's love for his wife mirrored the covenant-keeping love of God. Want to know what he said to the woman?

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◆“Oh yes, you can find a man like that. You can find a man like that because I've found a man like that. The only reason I love my wife the way you see me loving her is because the man Jesus first loved me. The only resources I have to draw upon to love my wife the way I do are the resources he gives me. Mirrored in my relationship here with my wife you can see the faithful love of God for me.”

Conclusion:

◆Mike Mason in his book *The Mystery of Marriage* says that it's not love that keeps marriages together. It's vows. His point is that we are naturally unfaithful people who naturally break promises. If we were naturally faithful people, he argues, we wouldn't need to make lofty promises or vows for others to hold us to. Vows you see, are decisions. Peter DeVries once said that given a little money, education, social standing, any man with any style at all can make a mess of his love life.

◆In closing then make some decisions to keep the faith in your marriage.

◆1) if you're working on your spouse to shape up or treat you better, you will probably not experience any progress.
Work on yourself.

◆“*For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it.*” Luke 9:24, NIV.

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◆2) Try regularly asking your mate what would make him or her feel loved by you. If asked, be specific so your spouse has somewhere to start. Ex: Say something nice about me. Come out and meet me when I pull in the drive. Ask my opinion and after I give it, don't give me yours for at least an hour.

◆*"Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love." 1 John 4:7,8, NIV.*