

The Importance Of Being Faithful // Malachi 2:10-16

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[0:00] It's chapter 961 of the Bible in front of you.! It's Malachi. It's chapter 2. I'll be reading from verses 10 to 16.!

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.

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.

You ask why? It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

[1:27] 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, 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. Thanks, David.

And brilliant to see you all. Well, at the start of the week, I wasn't feeling so great. I could sense I was coming down with something. And when I mentioned this to my wife, Alice, she went off and then returned gleefully with this little bottle that she'd brought back from Paris, Chartreuse Elixir Vegetal, a sort of medieval-looking concoction, supposedly with medicinal properties.

And it will do you good, she said, as she poured out a little teaspoon of the murky green liquid. It will do you good. I had my doubts, but being a good patient, I swallowed it down and it tasted exactly like you'd expect a horrible portion like that invented by medieval monks to taste.

[3:05] Bitter. Very bitter indeed, but apparently good for me. And here I am today. Well, I mention that because this passage is a little bit like that.

Hard to swallow, but good for us. Really good for us. Hard to swallow, but genuinely good for us to take in.

So let's pray as we come to the Lord's word to us. Father, as we think together about your word to us this evening, words that are challenging, words that are not easy, perhaps for some of us to hear.

Lord, would you help us to imbibe deeply from your words. Would you help us to drink it in and be transformed by it in the power of your Holy Spirit.

Lord, would you minister grace into our hearts where there's heart or pain, would you be a salve to us?

[4:19] Where there's the need for repentance in this area of our lives, would your spirit prompt us to that? Would you give us the gift of repentance?

And so, Lord God, we pray that whoever we are, you'd speak very directly, very poignantly into our lives.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let me start by telling you something about me. When it comes to sex and relationships, I haven't always trusted God.

I was raised in a Christian home, reading the Bible, trusting in the God of the Bible. But when it came to relationships, I didn't trust them.

I kept that area for myself. Deep down somewhere, I didn't believe that God had my best interests at heart when it came to who I might date or marry.

[5:25] And one summer evening, when I was still at school, I went to a house party with friends. I met a girl. We liked each other. We clicked. She liked me. I liked her. She wasn't a Christian.

I told myself that didn't really matter. And we dated throughout our final year at school and into our first year at uni. It fizzled out in that first year.

But by then, I'd stopped going to church altogether. And it would be another 13 or 14 years before the Lord brought me back to himself. I'd gone my own way, unfaithful to God, following my own desires.

I'm sure I'm not the only one in this room with failures or regrets in this area. For some of us, this will be a place of real pain.

For others, guilt or shame. And the people in Malachi's day, especially the men, had gone seriously wrong in sex and relationships too.

[6:32] And God drives the point home with one key word that keeps coming up in this passage. I wonder, did you notice it? Unfaithful.

We'll have a quick scan back over the passage. You can count how many times it's used. It comes up five times.

Three accusations. Verse 10, unfaithful to one another. Verse 11, unfaithful to God. Verse 14, unfaithful to their wives.

And then at the end of the passage, there's two commands. So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful. The men of Malachi's day were betraying their wives.

Their eyes were wandering. Their hearts were drifting. Casual divorce, treated as if it didn't really matter. And I realize that in a room full of people like this, even mentioning those things might touch on some very raw nerves for some of you in one way or another.

[7:43] Some of you here know all too well the wounds of unfaithfulness, people failing you. You carry the scars. Others perhaps have watched it in their parents or close friends.

You've seen lives unraveling in ways that words can barely describe. And one of my good friends, one of my good friends was abandoned after years of secret unfaithfulness.

And when she eventually found out and confronted her husband, he walked out on her, on their children, for someone younger. Her whole world collapsed in that moment.

So as we come to this passage, please hear this gently. Malachi is not giving the Bible's full teaching on marriage or divorce.

Scripture has more to say on this subject than we can possibly begin to cover tonight. And if this passage raises questions or stirs emotions, then please come and talk to one of us after this service.

- [8 : 56] We'd love to listen to you and pray with you. We want to be the kind of church that walks through that kind of difficult stuff, through deep heart together.
- But be encouraged by this. God does not avoid our deepest wounds. God doesn't avoid our deepest wounds.
- He speaks into them with challenge, yes, but also with an abundance of grace and with a love that refuses to give up on his people.
- He wants to draw us back to heal what is broken and lead us into newness of life. So with that in mind, let us hear what God is saying to us tonight.
- Firstly, we're going to think about the faithful God who calls us back. Malachi wants God's people to see the truth about themselves and he begins by contrasting their unfaithfulness with God's character.
- [10 : 01] So look at verse 10. Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why then are we unfaithful to one another?
- That word one appears twice in relation to God and twice again in verse 15. And for the original listeners, they'd immediately hear the echo of Israel's great confession in Deuteronomy.
- Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. Malachi's point, God is one.
- United, faithful, consistent. But his people are acting like the total opposite. And then Malachi gives us three names for God, three windows into who God is.
- Each one meant to draw us back to trust him, especially when it comes to sex and relationships. First name, God is our Father.
- [11 : 03] Do we not all have one Father? Malachi's reminding them you belong to him, your Father. He's not a distant rule giver, he's their Father.
- He's rescued them, he's loved them, he's cared about them, he's made them his own. And if you belong to Jesus, you're part of that same family too. God holds you close.
- He gathers you into the protective fold of his arms as a loving, heavenly Father. That's the picture, a loving Father. He doesn't merely tolerate you, he loves you.
- He's deeply committed to you. It's not just that he's a distant rule giver, he wants your best. He cares about you, he knows you intimately, which is why unfaithfulness, by the way, is so painful.
- It's not just that you're betraying someone over there, bad enough as that is. It's wounding a brother or a sister, fracturing the unity of the family that God treasures.
- [12 : 11] So when God speaks about this area of life, it comes from a father's heart, a father who wants his children to flourish. Second name, God is our creator.
- Did not one God create us? And here, I think Malachi pulls us back to first principles. If God created us, he knows us.
- He knows how we're wired, what harms us, what's good for us. He knows our longings, our desires, our vulnerabilities. And because God himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is eternally loving and eternally relational, and we're made in his image, he made us relational too.
- We're designed for relationship. Which I think means there's real wisdom in simply acknowledging that the one who made us, who knows us, and loves us as our creator and father might actually know best for how we are to flourish.
- Let me give you a picture. This week before Roots on Wednesday, we couldn't get the projector screen working. Now, it's a complex system. There's lots of cables, lots of buttons, nothing at work.

[13:30] Robbie tried, Az tried, nothing. But then in walks Ali Downs. Now, he didn't build the thing as far as I know though, I wouldn't put it past him, but he certainly understands it inside out.

And within minutes, boom, the projector screen's back working again. Why? Because the person who understands the design is the best person to tell you how the thing works.

And it's the same with us. God understands us because the designer understands the design. Now, Glyn Harrison is a psychiatrist, a Christian psychiatrist, who's written a book about sex from a Christian perspective.

I came across this quote from him earlier this week as I was preparing for this evening. I found it really helpful. He writes, the gospel calls us to learn to be God's creatures all over again.

The gospel calls us to learn to be God's creatures all over again because this is his reality, not ours.

[14:40] And we will flourish when we work in harmony with our creator's reality. Exactly Malachi's point. And there's real wisdom in that.

God made you, God knows you, God loves you, so trust him. Trust him in your relationships. Lastly, God is the Lord Almighty.

Now this is Malachi's favorite title, the Lord Almighty, the Lord of hosts, your translation might have it. He's used it ten times already and again in verses 12 and 16. Why? Because the God they're being unfaithful to is not only their father and their creator, he's the Lord Almighty who will one day judge all people, the one whom we will have to give an account to one day.

He's the Lord Almighty. In other words, his words matter, his commands aren't optional, his voice carries authority.

And we need that reminder because our culture shouts loudly on this topic. We're saturated in our society with sexual images and innuendo and all sorts of pressure.

[15:56] Advertisers know it, marketers use it, social media thrives on it. And as one social commentator, not a Christian as far as I know, put it, a visitor from another planet might assume that humans never stop thinking about sex.

The cultural mantra is simple. Do whatever you want. Anything goes. Do whatever you want as long as no one gets hurt. But people do get hurt.

Deeply. The sexual revolution promised freedom but it's left a trail of scars. Confusion, heartbreak, broken families, broken identities. So Malachi presses us to remember who is speaking.

Your father who loves you, your creator who knows how you work, the Lord Almighty, the one we'll give an account to. That's who God is. That's our motivation for faithfulness.

So let's move on and look at the unfaithfulness in Malachi's day. When God looks at his people in Malachi's day, he sees a community that's falling apart at the seams.

[17:12] Marriages and relationships, a complete train wreck. Malachi holds up a mirror and what's reflected back is clear.

They are, in God's words, unfaithful. Now this unfaithfulness shows up in two directions, horizontally with one another and vertically in their relationship with God.

So let's start with the horizontal. These are the relationships that everyone can see. Now Malachi doesn't soften it. Verse 14, end of verse 14, you've been unfaithful to the wife of your youth, your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

This is betrayal. And if you've ever been cheated on or if you've ever experienced anything like that, you've been let down in that way, you'll know the sheer devastation that you feel inside.

You'll know the devastation that follows the time it takes to recover from that. verse 16 shows it worsening. It's an easy divorce culture that's kind of seeped into Israel.

[18:26] So betrayal is followed by abandonment as the men in this generation normalize and legitimize trading in their wives for newer models from the surrounding nations.

Whether it was physical attraction or more likely economic advantage, who knows. But they see girls over there, they say, I want a bit of that, and off they go.

Just think of who gets left behind. The wives. Almost certainly in that culture, the abandoned wives forced to move back into their parents' homes.

And a bunch of shame that accompanies that. A whole lot of disruption as our life is upended. No real prospect for the future.

Children growing up fatherless in Israel. And this unfaithfulness doesn't stay private. Its ripple effect impacts households and friendship circles, even communities and whole churches.

[19:39] Horizontally, the fracture lines of unfaithfulness touch society at large. But these are all mere symptoms of a deeper issue.

So where does it start? Well, it starts vertically, because unfaithfulness to one another flows out of unfaithfulness to God.

you can think of it like a deep rooted disease. You can pop painkillers to cover the symptoms, but that's not curing the cancer beneath.

These men didn't wake up one morning and suddenly decide to wreck their marriages. Now this started long before the divorce papers are brought.

it started when they gradually gave up being faithful to God. Remember chapter one, I have loved you, says the Lord.

[20:48] But somewhere along the line that love stopped being enough. They stopped being satisfied with God. They stopped being obedient certainly to him. Verse 10 says they profaned the covenant.

They broke the special relationship that God had brought them into. And God's instruction throughout the Old Testament is crystal clear. Don't marry foreign wives.

In verse 11 it's described as a detestable thing. It's important to be really clear about this command.

This isn't xenophobia. It isn't a race issue. It isn't an ethnic issue. So what is it?

It's a worship issue. God is realistic. He knows the human heart. He knows that love bends loyalties.

[21:48] Bind yourself to someone who doesn't share your faith and sooner or later you'll be pulled that way too. In Deuteronomy! 7. It spells it out for us. They will turn you away from following me to serve other gods.

So it's a worship issue. A heart issue. Yet these same men who've ditched their wives still pitch up at the temple. Verse 13. Tears streaming down their faces.

Let's not kid ourselves. These aren't tears of repentance. They're tears of self-pity. They've even got the brass neck. Verse 14. They've got the brass neck to ask why.

Why aren't you listening God? Well isn't it striking just how blinding, just how deceptive sin is. But the Lord Almighty sees straight through their crocodile tears.

So it's no surprise. Malachi looks this generation in the eye and says guard yourselves. Be on your guard and do not be unfaithful.

[23:01] Notice it's not just don't be unfaithful. It's be on your guard. Your translation might say guard yourselves in your spirit.

The other night I was settling our daughter as usual and Alice was reading our seven-year-old the story of David and Bathsheba. Always a lively one for bedtime.

But halfway through he suddenly stopped her. Wait mummy, he said. You said he looked at her and then she became pregnant.

Alice replied cautiously, yes. He frowns.

So wait a minute. Is that how babies are made? By looking at someone. There was a little pause as Alice hesitated and gathered herself.

[24:00] Then with admirable creativity she said with a straight face, he looked at her very intently. Well my son wasn't buying it.

That's not how babies are made. So Alice says, ask your daddy. So he turns to me and I say, son, you need to be very careful who you look at.

Well we laugh. Of course we laugh. But actually that's not far off what Malachi is saying here. What we look at shapes us. It shapes what we desire and what we desire shapes our lives.

It's about our state of our hearts where our worship inclines. Everything else flows downstream from there. And you know when you frame it like that it's no surprise that the New Testament repeats the same warning.

Do not marry someone who isn't a believer. Do not yoke yourself to an unbeliever. it. And again I recognize that this is another tender area and I want to acknowledge that for some of you here there may be all sorts of pain or regret or complexity.

[25:18] And again we'd love to chat and pray with you after the service if you'd find that helpful. We want to be that kind of church. church. But the principle remains who you bind your heart to shapes who you become.

Well I shared earlier how the Lord brought me back to himself after many years after 14 years away. By then I was in a relationship with another girl who wasn't a believer.

She was respectful. She was showing an interest in my newly rediscovered faith. She even came along to an alpha course. But in the end she decided it was not for her and we broke up.

And you know that was painful at the time but spiritually it was deeply liberating. It was a huge relief.

The tug of war was gone. I was free to follow Jesus without being pulled the other way. And so here's the question. Right at the heart of this.

[26:29] Do you love the Lord? Do you love him? Do you trust the Lord? Do you trust his blueprint for sex and marriage?

Are you convinced that this is for your best? Do you trust him with your relationship status? for those of you who are single and longing for marriage?

I get it. It can be hard. But can I encourage you don't pursue romance among people who aren't following Jesus.

Don't date missionally. Don't bank your entire future in the hope that you can pull them in. The direction of travel is almost invariably the other way around.

And you do hear stories, I heard a story even this afternoon, but usually the direction of travel is the other way around. If the deepest loyalty of your life is to the Lord Jesus, joining yourself to someone who doesn't share that loyalty inevitably tugs you away.

- [27 : 44] So what does it look like? What does it look like when someone actually starts at that point, when they put God first in their relationships and guard their hearts? Well, here's an example from the 19th century that I think shows it beautifully.

Robert Flockhart was a soldier in India who later became a street preacher in Edinburgh. And when he returned home to Scotland, he realized that he wanted a wife.

But not just any wife. He prayed earnestly that God would give him a woman who feared the Lord. And he prayed very specifically.

If he asked the wrong woman, she would say no. And if he asked the right woman, she would say yes. Well, he asked three women.

And all three said no. God loves a trier, as they say. But unperturbed, he asked a fourth. And she said yes.

- [28 : 49] And you know, only after they got married, did she tell him what she had been praying. That if God wanted her to marry, he would give her a praying husband or none at all.

She believed that God had answered her prayer and sent that husband to her all the way from the East Indies.

And together they rejoiced that God had guided and matched their hearts. Well, do you see the point? Flockhart didn't start with attraction or personal preference.

He began with worship. Worship. He began with prayer. He sought someone who shared his faith, his priorities, his deep love for God. He guarded his heart.

And God directed his steps. That's what Malachi is calling God's people back to. Don't be unfaithful. Start with your heart.

- [29 : 50] It's a worship issue. It's a heart issue. And so it's worth us just asking ourselves, where are you weakest?

When are you most vulnerable? When are you most susceptible to temptation in this area? Is it after you've been on a night out with some friends?

Perhaps after a few drinks? Or is it when you're at home alone in front of your screen? Worth us asking ourselves where we're most vulnerable?

Jesus says if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out. Let's be serious about sin.

Let's deal with what's dragging us down. Unfaithfulness doesn't begin with the act. It starts with a glance.

- [30 : 55] It starts with a quiet yes that should have been a no. God says guard yourselves. Don't be unfaithful.

So Malachi calls us as God's people to faithfulness. But we know in our own experience that we fall short.

We're far from perfect. So in closing, where does all this leave us? Well friends, we want to fix our eyes on Jesus.

The faithful one. You see the truth is, each and every one of us here has stumbled in this area in one way or another.

No matter our age, no matter our relationship status, none of us is spotless. Which means there's only one place to go.

- [31 : 56] Not inward into shame. Not backwards into regrets. We come to Jesus. We come to the cross of Christ.

Jesus Christ. The son who was faithful to his father in every way. The bridegroom who faithfully loved his bride, the church, perfectly.

The one who gave himself up for her. Who went to the cross to pay for our sin. To cleanse us. To make us his. To present us one day, friends.

Spotless and without blemish. On the cross, Jesus bore it all. Our sexual sin. Our bitter regrets.

Our hidden compromises. Our secret failures. All the ways we've been unfaithful.

[32 : 54] And all the ways others have been unfaithful to us. He took the guilt. He took our wounds. He took the shame and the pain. Jesus made it his own. He died for you. The real you. The you no one else sees. The you that you sometimes can't bear to look at. And he did it with his eyes wide open.

So whether you're here carrying guilt for your own failures. Or deep pain because someone else failed you. Lift your eyes to Jesus.

Because where you and I are unfaithful. He remains faithful. In him there is abundant grace. To wash you clean.

[33 : 57] Fresh mercy for today. New mercies again tomorrow. Return to him. Rest in him. Trust in Jesus.

Trust in Jesus. The faithful one. Let's pray. Heavenly Father.

Heavenly Father. We thank you so much for Jesus. We thank you that he was faithful where nobody else was.

That he obeyed you. All his days. In his life. In his ministry. At Gethsemane.

As he pondered. The pain and suffering that he'd endured on the cross for us. We thank you. We thank you. We thank you.

[34 : 54] We thank you. We thank you. Lord Jesus. That we do not need to carry about the burden of guilt or shame.

Because you bore it on the cross. We thank you. We thank you. We thank you. We thank you. We thank you. That we have hope. Of being presented before you as your bride, the church.

Spotless and blameless. We pray that you'd pour out your grace this evening. Lord, if there's any among us who have wandered from you.

If there's any here who are tempted in that direction. Lord, would you draw them back. Would your spirit bring them back into the loving embrace of the father's arms.

And Lord, help us to live in light of this grace. To guard our hearts. To be careful. In areas where we know that we're weak.

[36 : 14] Would you bless the marriages at St. Silas. Would you help us to cherish more our spouses day by day.

And would you protect them and guard them. And grant us all integrity and patience. As we seek to follow after our Lord and Savior.

In whose name we pray. Amen. Amen. Thank you.