

Intro:

We continue our theme during this lent season, the theme of returning to God and His ways. Today, we focus on an area that affects many if not all of us in the deepest of ways, regardless of where we are in the faith journey. We're talking about love and companionship, or to be more specific, love and marriage.

We've all been affected by this- we were products of love and marriage (albeit some of us were from very broken marriages, if we could even call it that); many of us long for love and perhaps marriage; we get encouraged and broken by love and marriage, and on and on the list goes in terms of how we are affected by this.

God has a lot to say about love and marriage in the Bible- He created the idea. Today we want to think about two aspects of love and marriage, two that are actually very difficult to follow. We will be talking about it from the perspective of being a follower of Jesus; if you are not a follower of Jesus I believe you can still get some good things from this if you can put yourself in the right shoes. From there, we're going to hear from one of our members and their experience with these points, and then we'll close it with some discussion and application.

Let's read Malachi 2:10-16

There are two points for us to ponder this morning. Two points for us whether we're single or married. Two points for the follower of Jesus.

Entering a spiritually mismatched marriage puts our relationship with God, and our general well-being in life- in danger.

Please note: we're talking about entering into a spiritually mismatched marriage. Some of you are in a marriage where there is a spiritual mismatch. This point is not for you at the moment- note we are talking about entering into a marriage, not what you do now that you are in one. We will talk about that later. For now, we're talking about how entering into these marriages- in many ways, this is more for those of us who are single to really think about.

Let's take a look at how God communicated this back then, and think about what would apply today.

Now, remember back then- prophets were around to remind people of God's commands. And God had stated explicitly in the Law Section of the Old Testament that marriage across religious boundaries was prohibited because it would ultimately cause people to fall away from following Him- it would put their relationship with Him in danger. Deut 7:1, 3-4. This of course would be detrimental for them, not just as individuals, but as a nation- God had a covenant with them as a nation to bless them if they followed after Him. But if they didn't, God would allow for harm to come their way. Well, they ended up falling away from God, and God let other people come and destroy their country and take them into exile, because they had turned their back on him. And, just like the words of Deuteronomy, much of their spiraling down involved had involved inter-religious marriages.

Now, Malachi, a prophet for the people after God had brought them back from exile, is aghast. They should know better! If your history has taught you anything, you know that if you enter into these sort of marriages, you will inevitably fall back into a place where you will turn away from me, and the threat of the whole nation turning away from me would be there again, and the consequences would not be pretty.

That's why the passage starts off by talking on a group level: notice how it talks about how the people were acting faithless to each other. The word "faithless" there refers to doing something that would harm each other, that would break faith with each other. How were they harming each other? By disobeying the covenant they had with God (v.10), by bringing shame to God himself (v.11), via these marriages.

In other words, these marriages with people with other gods had consequences- it was putting their relationship with God, their general well-being in life, in danger.

Our Context:

Now, for us today, we are not in this sort of unique covenant relationship with God as Israel was. We cannot assert, say, that if we marry people of other religions that the country we live in will be overcome by another.

But I think the principle still applies: if you plan to follow Jesus- entering a spiritually mismatched marriage can put our relationship with God and Jesus, and our general well-being in life, in danger.

The NT affirms this, although not directly as some would wish. 2 Cor 6:14-7:1 is the classic passage cited. In context, though, the passage is speaking rather generally of being yoked with unbelievers, most likely in relationship to idol worship or association with false teachers. But the general principle is there: getting involved in binding relationships with people of other gods is dangerous to your spirituality and well-being if you plan to be a follower of Jesus.

I will hit on application at the end of our talk, so please jot down your thoughts for that time. In the meantime, I do want to say one thing before moving on: what to do if we find ourselves in a spiritually mismatched relationship already. 1 Cor 7:12-16, 1 Peter 3:1-2 are the passages that explicitly talk about it, and it says stay in there, live like Jesus, and trust that God is at work. That's a whole other message, so I'll stop here. But please take a look at those passages, and we can talk more about it during our open discussion time.

Our first point, then, as we get practical about what it means to return to God in the area of love and companionship: entering spiritually mismatched marriages is dangerous.

The second point speaks more to those of us who are married, but if we're single it is still worth thinking about seriously.

Divorce is wrong in God's sight, and not an option for the follower of Jesus

This is pretty explicit and clear, isn't it? What's interesting is how Malachi discusses it, based on how the people were acting.

- The people were trying to be religious while engaging in divorce, and they were wondering why God wasn't answering their prayers. And God was saying: get real- you cannot pretend to follow me and think you can divorce as you please! (v.13-14)

- And the passage notes some, not all, of the reasons why divorce is bad: it affects posterity (v.15), and it ultimately harms people (v.16).

Now, it's important to note that Jesus is very explicit with this too. Jesus is explicitly against it, as is the rest of the New Testament. There are two explicit exceptions: if one spouse has committed adultery, and if an unbelieving spouse has deserted the other who is a believing spouse (see Matt 5:32, 1 Cor 7). There is debate as to if there are more exceptions- there are none mentioned in the Bible, but some people argue that physical abuse and other horrific acts in marriage qualify (eg. What if your spouses sexually assaults your children?) Theologically, you can figure out more by reading the resources listed below. Practically speaking, I would just say here that separation is useful and needed as a first step. But our point here today is not to talk about the exceptions to divorce, but to emphasize the serious and high standard that divorce is wrong in God's sight.

Now, I realize that this is all easier said than done. Many of us have either seen or experienced the difficulty of living with these ideals- many have failed or will fail in living this out. But God is here in the midst of it- and that is the wonder of the Christian faith. That there is a Holy God, calling us to a high standard, who is at the same time unthinkably gracious and merciful in the midst of our failure to live up to His ideal.

I want to invite up one of our members to share about their experience of love and marriage, just to help us remember the reality of all this. She's taking a lot of guts to do this, so be sure to give her and her husband your full attention. Karen Markley?

Thoughts before we go to application?

Application:

The main one in the passage, mentioned twice: Guard your heart.

- Singles: 1) Work on your heart before you get involved with another. 2) Be careful who you date.

- Marrieds: Keep cleansing your heart daily of any buildup of anger or unforgiveness or unfaithfulness.