

PostExilicProphets 22-05-04b

Let's return to Malachi chapter 2, we're looking at the run up to chapter 3, where we're going to end up tonight. And as we discussed during the break, and it was a really good question, the emphasis that we have seen on the difference between a treacherous violation of marriage, which can take many forms. Paul talks about this being unequally yoked together with the faithless.

If someone is or becomes faithless, and someone else is seeking to live a life of faith, there can come a point where that marriage needs to dissolve. If there is outright violence, which God is going to speak of in an upcoming verse, that marriage needs to be dissolved. God provided a means of dissolving marriages for Israel because inevitably there is hardness of heart.

And hardness of heart, an intractable pull in the opposite direction, is grounds for leaving. People have to be careful and be sure they're on solid ground to do so. God hates covenant breaking.

But God himself has abrogated terms of the covenant when the party of the second part egregiously failed to keep up their end. And he allows us to do the same. So what is in view, and everything we talked about in the days of Ezra and Nehemiah and the putting away of foreign wives is illegitimate when it is done against people who are not worshipping false gods.

They're not the daughter of a foreign god. They're like Ruth. They have come from a foreign country.

They're like Rahab. They have come from a sinful and wicked people. They came out to join themselves with Israel, to be married to an Israelite man.

These women did this with their eyes wide open and wanted to have their families and raise their children in Israel where there wasn't the rank Baal and Molech worship and the other horrific practices of the ancient Near East. These women recognized that Israel was something different and Israelite men at least purported to be something different. And so they came to Israel voluntarily and married and had children with these men.

And then for no reason other than the place of their birth, they are being sent away. Well this, everything we observed about that in previous weeks is still absolutely true. But it also bears on what God is saying here when he uses this figure to talk about breaking the covenant with himself.

The covenant of the fathers, the covenant of Abraham, the covenant that created them as a nation. It goes against creation. Jesus himself, when the subject of divorce comes up, says in the beginning he created them male and female and said for this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and cling to his wife and they too shall be one.

The covenant of marriage makes them one. And the word one occurs four or five times in this context as well. So if you came to this with an English Bible and you said boy this is really tough, I'm not real sure what he's saying and some of these verses are very cryptic.

You can count the repetition of these terms and say well I think it's about treachery against unity. Because the word one occurs multiple times and the word treachery occurs multiple times. What is treason? It is betraying and breaching trust, breaching and betraying an oath, a covenant promise.

And that in the spiritual realm separates. You know the old line in a wedding ceremony that says what God has joined together let no man separate. Well there comes a time when God himself will separate it, indicating that it is time for people to separate it as well.

And there are valid occasions of hardness of heart in the case where people are getting smacked around and there's violence under the roof, that's time to leave. And God has already severed that covenant relationship so that those abused people can flee. It is not God's will that people remain to take abuse and to be the victims.

Paul says if you're able to continue living with somebody who doesn't share your enthusiasm, that's great. But if they want to leave, if they're ready to do something different, let them go. Be not unequally yoked together with faithless people.

This is going to be a judgment call in every situation and we will all stand before the judgment and give account. And certainly if we are in a situation where that becomes a decision, we're accountable for the decision. And we want to be sure we are prayerful and do the right thing in that regard.

But here, both literally and spiritually, Judah has entered into illicit marriage with the daughter of a foreign God. And God says, then you come back to me as though there is still the wife of the youth relationship to the covenant. And you don't understand why the other end of the covenant is not being upheld.

You drench the altar with tears, you cry and moan, and God does not regard your offering or receive it with goodwill from your hands. And you say, I don't understand. What is the reason? Because the Lord has been witness between you and the wife of your youth.

And this is, at the very least, a double entendre. You had a wife in your youth who was proper and faithful and you've gone after the daughter of a foreign God. But spiritually speaking, figuratively speaking, the covenant into which God's people entered at Sinai and each generation subsequently affirmed through the sign of the covenant circumcision, through bringing offerings and observing feasts and the regulations and ordinances of the law.

This is the wife of the nation's youth. And you have dealt treacherously. You see that word again, dealing treacherously in verse 10, treacherously in verse 11, committing abomination in Israel and in Jerusalem, profaning that covenant.

So you have dealt with the wife of your youth treacherously. You are breaching the covenant that is in view. She is your companion and your wife by covenant.

Doesn't that covenant in God's eyes and through God's power unite, make them one? And there is a remnant, there is an operation of the spirit, the same spirit that is in Genesis chapter one, the same spirit that is going to enable the Lord Jesus to perform his miracles, the same spirit that inspired the writers of scripture and inspired the tabernacle workmen, the same spirit that enabled Moses to lead Israel and to deliver the law, this remnant of the spirit. Why was Israel united with God? Notice this idea of godly offspring. There's no guarantee that two wonderfully involved and invested believers are going to have children who all love the Lord just because they both do.

And they remain devoted to each other. Godly parents doesn't necessitate or always result in godly offspring. What is God talking about here? That the spirit has united Israel with God so that there will be godly generations, godly chips off of the divine block, godly offspring.

Do you see the spiritual picture that God is painting here? You've gone off and wedded yourself to that which is produced by foreign gods, foreign beliefs, foreign concepts. You're only observing a partial truth. You're still doing some of the things in the law, but it's partial.

Your Levites have a partial truth on their lips and where the truth has been abandoned, you've adopted truths from a foreign source. You're trying to amalgamate. You're trying to do a spiritual bigamy where you remain related to God and you come and cover his altar with tears, but you're bringing him blemished and corrupted sacrifices and you don't understand why he's not going to accept them with goodwill.

Well, is the wife of your youth going to accept you when you've just spent two weeks at the house of another woman that you married in a different town? Is she going to be okay with that? It's treachery. It's breach of covenant. He seeks godly offspring.

Israel is supposed to generation by generation renew itself in the covenant and renew itself as a reflection of God's glory and a light to the Gentiles. Judah should be faithful to the wife of his youth so that his offspring, future generations such as these that have returned from the Babylonian captivity, are dedicated to God. Therefore, take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth.

Don't abandon your initial commitment to God and to his truth and to proper worship, giving God his due so that God doesn't have to say, a son honors his father and a servant his master. If I'm the father, where is my honor? If I'm the master, where is my reverence, says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise my name. And because the priest despises his name and the vertical relationship has been treacherously violated, they are now treating each other treacherously up to and including actually abandoning Jewish wives and marrying idolatrous women from other nations.

And if they have married idolatrous women, that is a true breach. But it makes much more sense to realize that this is a figure for their relationship with God through covenant. So take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously.

What is the application for you and me? There is a lot of material that could be described as the daughter of a foreign god. There's a lot of incorporation of philosophy and social justice and politics, whether it's right-wing politics or left-wing politics. It has no place in worship.

In my view, politics should not be preached from the pulpit. Candidates should not be flogged as good or bad and so on. Our worship should be directed toward God.

It should cultivate the spiritual in our nature that gives us the ability to cope with what is on the outside, to let our light so shine before men that they see us. We're not busy looking at them, they're busy looking at us. They see our good works, they glorify our Father who is in heaven.

We represent the Lord Jesus Christ as His church in this age and we should be ready to give our reason to someone who asks us a reason for our hope. Not a reason for our politics, not a reason for our electoral choices and why do we embrace this policy and not that, unless it is a direct reflection of our spiritual nature and we tie it back to life before God. We want to do what is pleasing in His sight.

We want to support what is pleasing in God's sight. Certainly nothing wrong with being aware and having opinions and expressing those opinions at the ballot box and even in conversation, but not to the point that we are using Christianity as a political tool instead of parsing politics and social issues and the rest of it in the light of who we are. Our identity is in Christ.

We are not a member of some political party who happens to be a Christian and wants to bring that in as an influence. But, let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. Now look at verse 16, for the Lord God of Israel says that he hates divorce.

It's an interesting thing because this is not the term that is used in other passages for divorce, for putting away. This is the word that means to send. And when you see in the Old Testament, it's saying something like Abraham getting ready to sacrifice Isaac and it said he stretched forth his hand and then a voice from heaven says to not stretch forth your hand and take the son's life.

And stretching forth, sending someone forth, it is used of Abraham sending Hagar away. But it's interesting, there's no actual indication that Abraham ever formally married Hagar or that he divorced her. She was basically a concubine and that was a separate kind of relationship in the early days of the Old Testament.

But the sending, it simply means to send forth. It doesn't mean to divorce. And in the Deuteronomy passages that talk about writing a certificate of divorcement, this is not the word.

And if a husband finds a cause of uncleanness that was deceitfully hidden and only comes to

light after he has married her and there is deceit, that is a grounds for divorce. But even that word isn't this word. If he finds out after the marriage that he has been deceived, then he can divorce her for that reason because there is treachery.

Where there is deceit or treachery, where there is breach of trust, divorce is permitted because that is a specific kind of hardness of heart, betrayal, breach, representing things one way and they turned out to be another. But this is not that word. This is a very common word for sending forth.

It is shalach, S-H-A-L-A-C-H. It is used 847 times in the Old Testament. And you know the word divorce only occurs on the fingers of one hand times in the Old Testament.

It is translated in the King James, in the Authorized Version as send 566 times. It is translated as go 73 times, send forth or put forth 54 times, send away 48 times. But sometimes it says I am sending you forth in peace.

So there is not even an element of negative sending away in the same way that it is not necessarily negative to stretch forth your hand to bless someone. It just simply means to send. So this is very interesting because the word is neutral.

When we see the word divorce in English, we say, wow, that is not a good thing. It is an unhappy and negative connotation in almost every direction. This is not that word.

So what is God saying here? For the Lord God of Israel says that He hates sending away. For it covers, see where it says one's garment? This is His garment. And I would suggest that you change this to H-I-S.

The Lord God of Israel says that He hates sending away for it covers His garment with violence says the Lord of hosts. Notice the emphasis that God says this in verse 16. It begins and ends with an emphasis on this is what the Lord says.

The Lord God of Israel says that He hates shalak. He hates to send away for it covers His garment with violence. Now can you think of any occasion where God ended up sending somebody away? How about the Babylonian captivity of recent memory in Malachi's day? As we've seen the post-exilic prophets refer time and again back to, do you not understand that this is why your fathers were sent away? Why the land of promise, the land of covenant was taken away? The promise of milk and honey, the promise of one of you putting to flight a thousand, all of the blessings of fruitfulness and progeny and prosperity were taken away.

God sent them forth out of the land and into captivity. God hates that. God does not want to send away.

You're back to looking at if God were married, God would hate divorce. God would not want to send away the wife of His youth, but we've seen other prophetic passages where God basically says Israel is an unfaithful wife and I have to put her away. I have to send her forth.

So when you look at this, why is this used to emphasize what has just been said? This wife by covenant mentioned in verse 14, if you're going to send somebody away, send away the daughter of a foreign God that you have recently and wrongly wedded yourself to and stop dealing treacherously with the wife of your youth. You were made one with a remnant of the spirit. Why one? Because this was supposed to be a nation in perpetuity, godly offspring, generation after generation.

God says, I will be merciful to a thousand generations of those who are faithful and obedient, but after three generations of those who hate me, I will cut them off. I send them away. I send them out.

They're gone. So take heed to your spirit and let none deal treacherously with the wife of his youth. If you put away this notion of wedding yourself to the daughter of a foreign God, and then you can bring your sacrifices before God and he will accept them with goodwill from their hands and he will regard those offerings.

The opposite of verse 13, the Lord God of Israel that he hates sending away, is he going to have to send Israel away again? Because they're only a few generations out of the Babylonian captivity and they are already beginning to repeat the mistakes for which their fathers were sent away into captivity. The Lord hates that. Why? It covers his garment, God's garment with violence.

You say, Oh, how can God's garments be covered with violence? What did God do to the flood generation? We've been thinking about the flood in recent days. He sent them away off the planet and out of this life in judgment. What is going to happen when the Lord Jesus appears out of Basra with his garments dyed crimson when the blood stains his garments, his garments are going to be covered with violence.

And God says, I hate this, but he does it when it's necessary. He says, don't make me do this. I hate sending you away.

And you should hate sending away the wife of your youth. You should be as committed to this covenant as I am, says the Lord. I don't like breaching my side of the covenant.

I hate that. It covers my garments with violence. And by extension, these who have dealt treacherously with the wife of their youth in the literal sense have covered themselves with violence.

And they ought to hate that. But they don't. They don't give it a thought.

They're ready to trade in the old one for a new model from a foreign God. It covers my garment. It covers his garment with violence, says the Lord of hosts.

Therefore, take heed to your spirit that you do not deal treacherously. He doesn't say, take heed to your wife, does he? Because we're not at first blush. I think there is perhaps a reference

and an allusion to actual marriages, but he says, take heed to your spirit, because this treachery is taking place in spirit.

So then verse 17, you have wearied the Lord with your words, yet you say, and here's the fifth question. Now we saw the fourth question in verse 14. In what have we wearied? In that you say, and this is the fourth claim now, everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord.

Everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord. This is how they can fool themselves into thinking that God will still accept blemished sacrifices and hear their protestations. Back in verse 13, they've convinced themselves that everyone who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them.

He doesn't delight in them. Why? Why does God not delight in these people? Because they do not delight in Him. They have treacherously abandoned the wife of their youth.

They do not delight in their relationship with God, which this wife is put for. And so they don't delight in Him, therefore He does not delight in them. But they say that He does.

They say God does, could, and should. You've got Christians all over the place today talking about the fact that God loves everybody unconditionally. He accepts everybody unconditionally.

He is going to save everybody unconditionally. Well, if they don't accept the Lord Jesus, it's just going to take them a little bit longer. They're going to have to suffer the slings and arrows for a bit longer.

But God unconditionally accepts everybody. We have people today, by the thousands, publishing books, publishing articles, issuing blogs, doing all kinds of commentary, saying this very thing, that God thinks people are good who are practicing evil. He's people who are living in open sin, people who are practicing abominations, identified as such in the Old Testament, that God loves them and accepts them.

They are preaching this and teaching it and condemning anyone who disagrees with them. This is being fulfilled in our ears at this moment. And they're saying, you naysayers and you that disagree with us, you say that God's justice doesn't permit Him to accept unrepentant, evil, and sinful people.

And that's the key. They claim that God loves and accepts unrepentant people, people who want to continue to practice wickedness and evil, and not give it up, not abandon it, not reject it, not repent of it, that God loves them and accepts them anyway. And we would respond, have you not seen the God of justice? Have you not seen the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ in judgment? There's a thing called the judgment seat of Christ.

It's not the love seat of Christ. He's not going to invite everybody up onto the couch with Him to watch TV because it's just the love seat of Christ. It's the judgment seat of Christ.

But they say, where is this God of judgment? I look at Jesus, I don't see judgment, I just see acceptance of prostitutes and tax collectors and sinners. And He didn't tell them to quit being prostitutes. He didn't judge them.

He didn't push them away and tell them, come back when you're not a prostitute. Therefore, there is no God of justice. Well now we're ready for chapter three, behold, I send my messenger.

This is the third reference to God's messenger, the messenger of the Lord. We saw the first two in the first session, in 1.1 and in verse, I gave you that one last time. So here it is now.

I send my messenger, he will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant. The messenger of the covenant. You remember how this book closes.

Elijah is going to come and call the hearts of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers, else I will smite the land with a curse. Covenant. Observe, honor, and reverence the covenant.

Don't deal treacherously with the covenant. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight. You can see the divine sarcasm here.

The Lord whom you seek. What is that a reference to? The question asked in the preceding verse, where is the God of justice? This is a myth. This is a fable.

This is a misunderstanding. You've got the Bible wrong if you're going to talk about a God of judgment and a God of justice. And God says, well, watch.

That's what behold means. Watch. Pay attention.

I send my malak, my messenger. He will prepare the way before me and the Lord whom you seek. What Lord is it that they seek? What is the Lord they're saying? Where is he? It's the God of judgment.

The God of justice is going to come. He will come suddenly. He will come unexpectedly to his temple.

The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight or in which you delight. What has the preceding two-chapter message been all about? You don't delight in the covenant. You don't delight in the wife of your youth.

You have treacherously violated that covenant and gone after the daughter of a foreign God. And the messenger of the covenant, the covenant that you say you delight in, but you don't as witnessed and evidenced by all of these charges in the preceding two chapters. So what would we say about this? Is it possible for Christians in general and us as believers in particular to fool ourselves and seek to fool others into thinking that we value our relationship with God.

We value our time in the word. We value our fellowship with believers of like mind. We spend time appreciating and giving to God what is God's due.

His honor as a son honors a father. His reverence as a servant honors his master. If we do the gut check and say, you know, I really do.

In fact, that's one of the reasons I'm here on a Wednesday night taking time out of my week and maybe some time out of my sleep because I do value those things. I genuinely do appreciate. I delight.

This, by the way, that word delight is the word keppets, keppets. And it means to take genuine pleasure and gratification in and from a thing, to delight in it. As you find in Psalm 1, the man who doesn't spend time with the ungodly and so forth, his delight is in the law of the Lord.

And because that is true, he reflects on it and thinks about it day and night. It's never far from his thoughts, never far from his heart, never far from his conversation. His delight, his keppets is in the law of the Lord.

So this is a real slap in the face because these who claim to have a delight and God says the messenger of the covenant that you have treacherously broken and which you manifestly do not delight in is coming, says the Lord of hosts. And that's why verse 2 continues, who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? He is like a refiner's fire and like launderers soap. He is like lye soap.

He is going to burn away the grease. He is going to burn away the detritus. All of the fluff, all of the straw, all of the hay that has been made in the name of righteousness, Lord, Lord, in your name, the self-deception, the attempt to deceive others into believing that things are righteous and the flogging partial truths, misrepresented scriptures, half-truths, as old as the first lye in the garden, a half-truth.

Did God say you can eat of every tree? Well, that's part of what he said. Partiality in the law. He will sit, verse 3, as a refiner and purifier of silver.

He will purify the sons of Levi and purge them as gold and silver so that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness. What's going to happen in the millennial kingdom? There is going to be valid, fulsome, complete teaching of truth on the part of those who present Torah, present the law and the word of God in the millennial kingdom. They will be without excuse because teaching will be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Notice the lapse and the breach of covenant by Levi is going to be fixed by God. God is going to purge Levi so that the Levites that remain are doing exactly what he has covenanted with them to do. And what about the second covenant that we just saw at the last half of chapter 2? Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem, that offering mentioned in verse 13, covering the altar of the Lord with tears, that offering that he will not regard or receive with goodwill from your hands, that offering will be pleasant to the Lord as in the days of old, as in former years, as in

the days when Israel took the wife of his youth.

You see how consistent and perfect this message is all the way through? It will be as in the days of old, as in the days when he valued and treasured the wife of his youth, loved his wife the way Christ loves the church, faithfully, consistently. And I will come near you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers, those who exploit wage earners, exploit widows, exploit orphans against those who turn away a stranger because they do not fear me.

The reason for turning people away is not that they're idol worshippers, not that there is a prohibition from God, but they do this because they think they can get away with it. They have no fear of God. There's no fear of God in their minds and in their hearts.

And so they do these horrific things because they say, where is this God of justice? There's no God of justice. What I'm doing is perfectly fine. They vindicate themselves and justify themselves in their own hearts and to others of like mind.

And God says they're doing these things because they do not fear me. Well, this is where we're going to pick up next time in verse five. We're going to find out what the modern day version of sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers.

Notice, sorcery, this appeal to witchcraft and to things that are derived from the daughter of a foreign God. That's what this stuff is. Sorcery, first and foremost, was something practiced in pagan religions.

And adultery is abandoning the wife of your youth and marrying into this kind of thing in the spiritual realm. Perjurers, these are liars. These give false testimony for gain, for influence, for a self aggrandizement.

And those who exploit those who are not in a position to defend themselves and they shamelessly exploit them because they don't believe there's a coming judgment. They seriously don't think there's a coming judgment. What's happening today is all there is.

Well, we'll see more about this next time. But by way of application for us, remember the the passage and we reviewed it again on Sunday in Revelation about losing your first love. And the need to recognize the importance of the relationship we enter into when God saves us through Christ, when God relates us to himself through the Lord Jesus.

And we love that. We embrace it. We delight in it.

And to not lose that love. And the Lord Jesus enjoins those believers to recover the love they had at the first. That's why on Sunday we talked about how do you get love? How do you get it? How do you get it back? It has to be founded on faith and faithfulness.

It has to be founded on hope and hopeful expectation in the realm of righteousness. Faith, laying hold of righteousness, hope, counting on the righteousness and faithfulness of God, love

is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And this includes the rightful exercise of love for those who hate us and ability to genuinely pray for those who spitefully use us.

There is legitimate and proper emphasis by the Lord Jesus himself on loving our enemies and doing good to those who hate us. But it can't be done in human strength. It can't be done by refrigerator magnets and aphorisms on deodorizers hanging off of a car mirror.

It is God's power. We have been bought with a price. We belong to God.

We are in covenant relationship with him, respecting that covenant, being defined by that covenant in every area of our life, delighting in the covenant, respecting it, relating ourselves first and foremost to our heavenly father and from and through that to each other in love that fulfills Torah, that fulfills the instruction of the Old Testament and the New. But there is a way to do it. There are other ways that seem right, but the ends thereof are the ways of death, fruitlessness, broken off branches, getting pruned out of the future plan of God because you bear no fruit.

Why? Not connected to the source of life, the source of vitality, the source of love. God is love. We love because he first loved us.

And prioritizing, cultivating that marriage, that covenant that is God's holy, God's righteousness. Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness. All these other things in the earthly realm, in the horizontal realm, will be added unto you.

You will have what you need, whether it is spiritual resources, whether it is physical resources, whatever you need will be provided if we seek first God and his righteousness, the kingdom of God. What is the kingdom of God? Is it bringing about social justice and parity among people on earth? The kingdom of God is recognizing what God talked about in the first chapter of Malachi. If I'm a father, where's my honor? If I'm a master, where's my reverence? I am a great king, he says in verse 14, says the Lord of hosts.

And my name is to be feared. My name should be respected and held in awe among the nations. Well, how are the nations going to do it if God's own people don't do it? We reflect God to the world.

Do we delight in it? Do we honor it? Do we reverence God and go to him for the strength and the power to be what we should be to one another? That is the essential vertical beam in the cross that holds up the horizontal beam that enables us to fulfill the second great commandment to love one another. Well, this is the consistent message in Malachi. It is the final push of Israel's boat from God in the Old Testament day.

The next communication from God they're going to get is John the Baptist, the messenger of the covenant, announcing that the axe is laid at the root of the trees. Isn't it interesting that John the Baptist announcing Jesus doesn't announce the coming of the Lamb of God and taking away sin and loving everyone and bringing peace and harmony? Which coming does John

preach? He knows that Jesus is the Lamb of God, but what does he say in his message? The winnowing fork is in his hand. He's going to gather his wheat into his barn, and he's going to burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

The axe is laid at the root of the trees, bear fruit in keeping with repentance. That's the message of John, my messenger, the messenger of the covenant, reiterating much of the same theme that we find in this book. Anyway, it's very fascinating.

We'll pick this up next time, but let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, what a wonderful treasure we have in your word. It is endless.

It is boundless. It enriches us. It nourishes us.

It restores our souls. It leads us in paths of righteousness. It enables and empowers us for every good work.

We pray that as we reflect on this portion of it, that your Holy Spirit will help us to see the practical ways that we can live in its light, that we can more fully represent the Lord Jesus Christ in our day-to-day lives, in our relationships, in our activities, in what we say, what we think, and what we do until that time when you send the Lord Jesus to collect us to himself and present us before your throne. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.