

**THE CONSEQUENCES OF CRUSHED COVENANTS****Malachi 2**

**Intro:** Tomorrow, October 31, is All Hallows Eve which, in the English, has evolved into the name Halloween. It was not from the beginning a night for ghouls and goblins and cute kids calling “Trick or Treat!” and hoping for Snicker’s Bars. In truth it was traditionally intended to be a day of fasting and preparation before All Hallows’ Day which is better known as All Saints’ Day in the Christian calendar – a feast day that celebrated the great cloud of faithful people who had served the Lord and his Church over the centuries.

It was on All Hallows’ Eve in 1517 that Martin Luther took 95 discussion points which he entitled “**Disputation on the Power and Efficacy of Indulgences**” a title that, over the years, has been shortened to the Ninety-five Theses, and tacked them up on the town bulletin board, which was otherwise known as the door to the Wittenberg Church. The presenting problem Luther was addressing was the sale of indulgences which was the false teaching that surviving loved ones could pay to spring their late loved ones from the mythological place called Purgatory into heaven. But real problem was the direction the leadership of the church was taking. The Roman Church was in decline because the leadership was all about power and prestige and less and less about furthering the Kingdom of God. The Pope who was supposed to be God’s mouthpiece for his people was as corrupt and sinful as anyone else. Bishops were little better. And the local parish priests were ignorant and didn’t know the Bible. Oh, there were faithful men and women, like Luther, who were striving to remain faithful. It was into this that Luther took a stand and that stand became a key part of the renewal of the church we know as The Reformation. It also brought about a reformation of its own in the Catholic Church that dealt with many of the problems there.

Luther’s 95 Theses made the leaders of the Church squirm. They didn’t like what they were reading and hearing. The truth was way too close to home.

Malachi 2 got me squirming. I don’t like what it says at all! It points accusing fingers at me and my brothers and sisters in ministry. You see, in many ways, Malachi is a message for preachers and all church leaders.

Let me read our text and you will see what I mean.

**(Read Malachi 2)**

Maybe you now know why this chapter makes me squirm. It’s speaking to me. Am I one of those preachers the prophet is pointing his fingers at? I read these words and I think “Is he talking to me? Am I one of these priests who is abusing the trust placed in me by my God and by my people?” I pray not. But if I am, I’m glad for his grace as I look to him for direction and correction.

Malachi is speaking those in covenant relationships. Priests are in a covenant relationship with God to be his faithful instruments. The people of God are in a covenant relationship to be his faithful people. And also Malachi is speaking to married couples. We will look at all of these this morning.

**Preachers need to be faithful**

- But they were not. Last week I mentioned that I would finish what chapter 1 was covering in my talk this week. Well, we’ll see. God, speaking through his prophet begins hammering the priests in Malachi 1:6 with *O priests, who despise my name. . .* and barely lets up all the way through this second chapter. God is concerned that the ones he trusts to speak truth into the lives of his people are doing that, and it’s obviously not happening here. Preachers were not doing what they were called to do. In graphic terms he points out that they were no better than the manure of the animals they sacrificed. Listen, *Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.* Malachi 2:3. You see, when animals were sacrificed, their innards were taken away and disposed of that the edge of camp. The prophet tells the priests that the manure and the awful contents of the sacrificial innards would be smeared on their faces.
- Such was the message the preachers were spreading – it was no better than cow manure. Commentator J. M. P. Smith writes, “*The priesthood is conceived of as much more than a body of men set for the exact performance of the ritual, or as men through whom the will of God is made known as messages are transmitted through a telephone. It is rather an agency endowed with great possibilities as a positive force for instruction and reproof and righteousness. But in verse 8 he says “You have caused many to stumble.” The very instructional law that came from the mouth of the priest, which should have guided men in the way of Yahweh, have been used to turn them away from him.*”
- They were providing exactly the wrong kind of model. The preachers were leading their people with the wrong kinds of practice. Some of you might remember a Father’s Day sermon I preached years ago based on a country song by Rodney Adkins. It was about modeling. Listen to the words of the first verse and chorus,
 

*Driving through town just my boy and me  
With a happy meal in his booster seat  
Knowing that he couldn't have the toy  
'Till his nuggets were gone  
Green traffic light turned straight to red  
I hit my brakes and mumbled under my breath  
His fries went a flying and his orange drink covered his lap  
Well then my four year old said a four letter word  
That started with "s" and I was concerned  
So I said son now “Now where did you learn to talk like that?”  
He said  
“I've been watching you dad, ain't that cool  
I'm your buckaroo, I wanna be like you*

*And eat all my food and grow as tall as you are  
 We got cowboy boots and camo pants  
 Yeah we're just alike, hey ain't we Dad?  
 I wanna do everything you do  
 So I've been watching you"*

- Modeling is a huge responsibility and I pray I am portraying Christ and his holiness and righteousness. Otherwise I'm breaking a covenant I made with God when I answered his call to lead his people. If I look like Jesus, then there is a far great chance my people will look like Jesus.
- A model is offered. In verse 4 he offers, *So shall you know that I have sent this command to you . . .*

#### **That my covenant with Levi may stand**

- Referring back to the assignment of the Tribe of Levi to be the priesthood, the Lord hoped that the motive of his covenant with Levi would warn the priests to properly respect their calling. As he does this he offers Levi's example in a simple list:
  - Levi feared God. No, he was not afraid of God, instead he gave God the kind of reverence only the Lord of Hosts is worthy of.
  - Levi knew God's word and verse 6 tells us *True instruction was in his mouth*. At the very least a preacher needs to speak truth.
  - And Levi had a Godly character: Verse six continues with, *He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity*.
- The preacher needs to apply the words of verse 7, *For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts*. Malachi 2:7. That's a no-brainer, right? But many of us have fallen far short in this. Too often we avoid the tough subjects. Too often we major in minors that have no eternal value. Too often we veer off into politics and fall into that quagmire. Too often we soft-pedal or even condone sin in order to keep the peace. The job of a preacher is to be faithful in season and out. That is keeping covenant with his Lord. Please call me on it if you think I'm straying from my calling.
- Malachi moves into a different covenant as he talks . . .

#### **About Marriage**

- I'm out of time but I cannot miss finishing out with how marriage is a good visual of the kind of covenant a preacher has with God and with the people he serves. And it is also a good picture of the relationship the people of God have with God himself. The Book of Hosea is a clear illustration of the broken relationship between God and his chosen people. There are numerous references to the same in other books. This is because marriage is God's holy institution which he loves. So it's a good illustration.
- First he nails the priests again. In verses 8 – 10 he points out how they have been unfaithful to their covenant with him by whoring after other teachings. He accuses them of what appears to be marrying people from outside of the faith, which may very well have been the case. But it also may be that they were taking after false teaching that watered down the true word of God. Both of these will corrupt one's message. Regardless of what was happening, it was leading God's people away from the truth and into false teaching. This false teaching *caused many to stumble and corrupted the covenant of Levi*, Malachi 2:8. In other words, these preachers broke their marriage vows with God and with the ones entrusted to their ministry.
- This moves into a teaching on marriage which had become a diluted and disposable institution. And what with the state of marriage over 2,500 years later, even in the people of God, this remains a timely message and we find it in Malachi 2:13-16. Listen to verse 16 again, *"For the man who does not love his wife but divorces her, says the LORD, the God of Israel, covers his garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So guard yourselves in your spirit, and do not be faithless."* Some translations render it like this, *"For I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "and him who covers his garment with violence," says the LORD of armies. "So be careful about your spirit, that you do not deal treacherously."* Malachi 2:16 (NASB), and Peterson paraphrases it like this, *"I hate divorce," says the God of Israel. God-of-the-Angel-Armies says, "I hate the violent dismembering of the 'one flesh' of marriage." So watch yourselves. Don't let your guard down. Don't cheat.* Malachi 2:16 (The Message). Here's the point, society for sure, and God's people to a large extent, play very fast and loose with something that is very, very special to God and there are dire consequences to that and we see it all over society.
- David Guzik writes this in reference to what God says about marriage here: *"When we sin by breaking our marriage vows or by taking God's gift of marriage lightly, we sin against something holy to God. He has set apart marriage for a special meaning, a special purpose in the life of His people. When we sin by breaking our marriage vows or by taking God's gift of marriage lightly, we sin against an institution that God has established. Marriage is God's idea, not man's; He formed and established the first marriage as a pattern for every one afterwards (Genesis 2:20-25). Because it is an institution, we are not allowed to define marriage in any way that pleases us; God has established marriage and we must conform to what He has established."*
  - God loves marriage for what it displays about His relationship with us.
  - God loves marriage for the good it does in society.
  - God loves marriage for the way it meets the needs of men, women, and children.
  - God loves marriage as a tool for conforming His people into the image of His Son.
- If God so loves marriage – and he does. And he has defined marriage from the beginning in Genesis 2 and many other places as between one man and one woman for life, who are we to mess with that perfect covenant? The answer is clear. There is no other definition of what marriage is.

**Conclusion:** This has been a hard message and I've not even begun to justice to the subjects contained in this powerful passage. On this, the final Sunday of October which is Pastor's Appreciation Month when I've been regularly reminded of what is a year-round reality to me that I am a supremely blest and loved pastor, I've had to preach a convicting passage that puts me, as a pastor and spiritual leader, under a microscope. As a pastor who has loved many of my church family through the difficulties and heartaches of marriage difficulties and even dissolution, I've had to preach a message to my loving church family that God hates divorce. That's draining. But God's word is God's word and, in the words of Isaiah 55:11, it does not return empty. But here's another thing, when the consequences of crushed covenants crash in we can always be assured that God's grace is greater than all our sin and he is good all the time and his love took him to the Cross in our place. We can sing,

*Oh love that will not let me go  
I rest my weary soul in thee  
I give thee back the life I owe  
That in thine ocean depths its flow  
May richer, fuller be*

I'm an imperfect preacher, but my eyes are on my perfect Lord.

We are all very imperfect souls who are looking to the one who promises to never leave us nor forsake us. Let's all hang on to that love that will not let us go. Amen.