

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, MAY 23, 2021

SERMON: "...And Knowing is Half the Battle!"

TEXT: MALACHI 2:10-16

If you have ever sat in on one of my Bible studies or listened to many of my sermons, you will soon realize that I stress knowing the background or the context of what you are studying. "Context" is defined as:

"...the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood and assessed."

Sure, you can read the bible and get a lot out of it, but the reality is that we are dealing with an ancient (albeit divinely inspired) document with three different languages being translated for our English version (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic). We are dealing with ancient mindsets, circumstances, worldviews, as well as theological and philosophical ideas. To properly understand what God is telling us, we must do our due diligence and put the effort in.

I love musicals and one of my favourite ones is the classic "Fiddler on the Roof." The musical is about a Jewish family who lives in the rural town of Anatevka around 1905, in an area of Imperial Russia known as the "Pale" settlements – and area set aside for Jewish settlements. The Jewish people at this time were discriminated against and often banned from living in many of the cities of Russia.

The musical focuses on Teveye, a poor milkman who has been blessed with 5 daughters. Jewish and historic tradition is very important to Teveye and all throughout the musical, he is challenged by the reality of a changing world.

Teveye loves to quote scripture in answer to the problems of life, but he is not always accurate. In one memorable scene Teveye states:

"As the good book says, when a poor man eats a chicken, one of them is sick." A friend of Teveye counters, "Where does the book say that?"

Teveye responds with, “Well it doesn’t say that exactly, but somewhere there is something about a chicken!”

We laugh at this, but sadly, many well meaning Christians do the same type of quotes, attributing sayings to the Bible wrongly. Here are some of the most common compiled by Aaron Earls of Lifeway Research:

1. Adam and Eve ate an “apple” – the fruit is not specified.
2. Three Wisemen – the number is not specified; we are told of three specific gifts.
3. Jonah swallowed by a whale – the original language states a “big fish.”
4. Money is the root of all evil. 1 Timothy 6:10 tells us that the “love” of money is the root of all evil. God may choose to bless you financially...the question is “How will you use it for His glory?”
5. “This too shall pass” – attributed to Chicago Bears iconic coach Mike Ditka wrongly quoting a phrase that appears over 400 times in the King James Version, “it came to pass...”
6. “Cleanliness is next to godliness” – used by parents worldwide to get their kids to clean their rooms. It is not found in scripture.
7. “God will not give you more than you can handle.” The result of someone trying to paraphrase 1 Corinthians 10:13:

³ The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure.

The point of the verse is not what is often quoted or put on inspirational memes and posters. Often people are faced with something that we, in our own strength, cannot handle – but God can and does! As Mr. Earls states in his article:

"If we could handle everything that came our way, we could take care of our sin problem. But we couldn't and we can't. That's why we needed (and continually need) Jesus."

Today we look at the third argument between God and Israel found in Malachi. If the average church member knows a quote from Malachi, it is found in our argument today. Sadly, the quote found here is often taken out of its context and has been used as a battering ram that has caused harm to those within and outside the church.

Let's look at our scripture lesson, Malachi 2:10-16:

¹⁰ Are we not all children of the same Father? Are we not all created by the same God? Then why do we betray each other, violating the covenant of our ancestors?

¹¹ Judah has been unfaithful, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. The men of Judah have defiled the LORD's beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols. ¹² May the LORD cut off from the nation of Israel every last man who has done this and yet brings an offering to the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

¹³ Here is another thing you do. You cover the LORD's altar with tears, weeping and groaning because he pays no attention to your offerings and doesn't accept them with pleasure. ¹⁴ You cry out, "Why doesn't the LORD accept my worship?" I'll tell you why! Because the LORD witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows.

¹⁵ Didn't the LORD make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ "For I hate divorce!" says the LORD, the God of Israel. "To divorce your wife is to

overwhelm her with cruelty,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.”

In this third argument, God turns from addressing the priests to addressing the nation of Israel. God’s argument against the people is:

“¹¹ Judah has been unfaithful, and a detestable thing has been done in Israel and in Jerusalem. The men of Judah have defiled the LORD’s beloved sanctuary by marrying women who worship idols.

My desire at this point is that you are seeing a common thread running through Malachi. That thread is the necessity of keeping our side of the covenant with God and the ramifications of being unfaithful to God. Malachi is a warning about outright disobedience!

Why did I really impress on you the need to know the context of what you read in the Bible? This section is a prime example of mishandling scripture and that misuse of scripture can become detrimental.

People, and by people, I mean often pastors and teachers, will look at this section and the point they make is “God hates divorce!” No context is given, no teaching on history or setting...simply it is decided that the bible says “God hates divorce!” so it must be a rule set in stone for all time, for all people. This is a misuse of scripture. One of the skills every Christian must learn is how to discern what is being taught in the pages of scripture.

The context of Malachi is Israel’s ongoing, deliberate, malicious rebellion against God. In Malachi 2:10-16 God is giving a concrete example of “HOW” they are rebelling. When you break your covenant with God it impacts every area of life.

David Smith, in his book “Divorce and Remarriage: A Primer for Christians,” shows us how this section can be broken down into three sections that show us how relationships are being decimated. Verse 10 shows the breakdown between individuals. Verses 11-13 shows the breakdown in

relationship to God. Verses 14-16 shows the breakdown in the covenant relationships between husband and wives.

God begins by asking three questions:

1. Are we not all children of the same Father (God)?
2. Are we not all created by the same God?

These two questions are **rhetorical** and are written in such a way as the only answer can be “YES!”

The third question is based on the answer given in the first two:

3. Then why do we betray each other by violating the covenant of our ancestors?

The three questions build on each other for dramatic effect. Individually we are united through a divine Father. As we are united together, our unity becomes a national identity. If we say we want unity, if we say we want our nation to prosper.... why do we betray each other by rebelling against God? The people are being accused of being unfaithful or breaking faith with God. The Hebrew term used here gives the idea of “treachery towards one who should expect fidelity.” This unfaithfulness towards God is so serious that they have taken the holy things of God and polluted them.

The concrete example of this pollution is the fact that the men of Israel have historically and habitually married foreign women who worship false gods. When this happens, the husbands break their covenant with God and follow their wives into idol worship. God was pretty specific that His people were to have “no other gods before them” (Ex. 20).

If it wasn't bad enough to marry outside the faith, the men of Israel were divorcing the “wives of their youth.” These would be Hebrew women who worshipped the one true God. Dr. Smith points out that the priests were already taken to task for polluting their faith through substandard offerings, now the men of Israel are introducing “wives and mothers who are ignorant of the LORD and do not follow Him.”

Israel has fallen so far and so quickly from the standards that had been re-established by Ezra and Nehemiah during the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the temple, they are rebelling openly against God and still strive to keep up religious appearances by going to the temple and offering sacrifices.

Why did God not accept their offerings? The men of Israel were not just engaged in one act of betrayal, they were involved in a double betrayal! They were breaking their covenant with God and with their wives. These wives were the ones who helped through the hard times of their lives only to be replaced by a newer model.

The section ends with a warning about faithlessness.

FOR TODAY

Even though many use this passage for the basis of a sermon on divorce, I am not going to do that. This passage is not really about divorce but rather acts as an object lesson about being faithful to the LORD. A biblical understanding of divorce is a huge topic that I will save for another sermon series.

Today, as we look at the accusations God levels towards His chosen, loved, children, we should ask ourselves the hard questions. ***How do we betray our relationship to God?***

I believe that one of the most dangerous spiritual ailments to attack the church of Jesus Christ today is the disease of conforming to the world's standards. Instead of becoming holy as God is holy, we take God and put Him in the world's box. The world wants God to be user-friendly, politically correct, a belief system that is fine to subscribe to as long as it doesn't interfere in the lives of others.

The Christian world is just as indiscriminate in our personal lives and relationships, especially when it comes to marriage. One issue that pastors have to make a decision about, is whom shall they marry. There has only been one occasion where I have refused to marry a couple. This was a

couple that came to me and one was a professed follower of Jesus and the other was not. The bible is very explicit in this regard in 2 Corinthians 6:14:

¹⁴ Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?

Sadly, one Christian marrying another is not a guarantee that a relationship will survive but it is the relationship that we are called to be part of. When both are believers, there is a foundation to build upon. Often Christians will buy into the worldly belief that "you can't choose who you love!" This is absolutely false. We are admonished that we are to enter into the marriage covenant wisely. As with all worthwhile endeavors, marriage takes more than just "love." It is a lot of hard work, dedication, and faithfulness. I have entered into many counselling sessions where the original idea was to "marry and then fix" the relationship. I have heard many, through tears, admit that they thought they could save their spouse, but it did not work. Too often the opposite happens. The believer is drawn away from the practice of their faith rather than the believer bringing the non-believer to faith.

This scenario is not new. In Deuteronomy 7:3-5, the prohibition of marrying foreign women is given:

³ You must not intermarry with them. Do not let your daughters and sons marry their sons and daughters, ⁴ for they will lead your children away from me to worship other gods. Then the anger of the LORD will burn against you, and he will quickly destroy you. ⁵

It is an ongoing battle for the people in their covenant relationship with God. One of the most famous examples of this is King Solomon. After David's death his son Solomon become king. We have the story of how Solomon finds favour with God because of his faithfulness. God enters into a

covenant with Solomon and grants him the gift of wisdom to govern God's chosen people well. God is so impressed with the request that he also grants Solomon riches and fame. The key to this is that if Solomon remains faithful to God, God will grant him a long life. Sadly after a life lived in the service of God, Solomon married outside of the faith and allowed his foreign wives to lead himself and the country into idolatry (I Kings 11). This betrayal angered God and God allowed Israel enemies to rise up against the nation.

Taking our faith seriously in all aspects of our lives. There is not one area of your life that your covenant relationship with God, sealed by the blood of Jesus, that is not God's to control. We cannot compartmentalize our lives and say that these areas are God's and these areas are mine. We need to reexamine our hearts and minds and make sure we have surrendered all that we are and all that we have to God for His use as he sees fit.

May we learn from our own spiritual history that God's blessings and promises are based in the fact that we do not betray God by conforming to the world's ideas as opposed to becoming holy as God is holy.

Let's pray...