Malachi – Reconnect with God's Covenant of Marriage

In 2016, Australia had a big debate about changing the definition of marriage. There were strong advocates on every side, voicing their thoughts in any way possible. Marriage seemed to be something that is vitally important to the society. However, at the same time, de facto relationships have been on the rise since the turn of the century. Unfortunately, divorce seems to be quite common these days as well. If marriage is that important, why do we have increasing rates of de facto relationships and divorces? Are marriages meant to be temporary instead of lifelong, especially if the relationship does not "work out"? What is actually unique to the marriage relationship compared to all other relationships we have in life?

In Malachi 2:10-16, YHWH addresses marriage, but it is not about the marriage between a man and a woman. It is the marriage covenant between YHWH and his people. We don't often think about our relationship with God as a marriage covenant, but it is a picture that will help us better understand the dynamics of our Christian life and our relationship with God.

Launch

1) Why do you think marriage is important?

God's Covenant of Marriage

Read Malachi 2:10-16

2) How did the Israelites profane the covenant of their ancestors? (v10)

    a. What do you think is this covenant of their ancestors referring to? (cf. Ex 19:3-8)

3) What are some words that YHWH uses to describe the man and his action of marrying a woman who worships a foreign god? (v11-12)

    a. What does this indicate to you about YHWH's thoughts on God's people marrying someone who worships a foreign god?

    b. Why do you think YHWH feels that way?

4) What does YHWH do about the man who has been unfaithful to his wife? (v13-14)

    a. What is the reason given for YHWH's judgement? (v15-16)

b. What does YHWH ask the people to do? (v16b)

Read Ephesians 5:25-33

5) Instead of the man doing "violence to the one he should protect" (Mal 2:16), what is the husband supposed to be doing? (v25-29)

6) According to Paul, what does the marriage covenant between a man and a woman reflect? (v32)

   a. With this in mind, how does that change your answer to question 3b?

   b. To those who are married, how does your marriage reflect God's relationship to us Christians in Christ?
      To those who are single, in what way is your relationship with God similar to a marriage relationship?

7) How can we be on our guard about our marriages? For those who are single, how can we help married Christians in improving their marriage?

The marriage covenant is important to God because that reflects the covenant between YHWH and his people, culminating in the covenant between Christ and the Church. This is why it is detestable to YHWH and he considers it a desecration of the sanctuary when his people marry others who worship a foreign god. Those who hates and divorce their wives are said to be doing violence to the one he should protect. Those are strong words but considering what husbands are supposed to be doing, it is not surprising. They are supposed to love their wives as Christ loved the church – a self-sacrificial love that helps her grow in her holiness (cf. Eph 5:22ff). This is not to say that wives bear no responsibilities. Like Eve, they are to be companions and partners (cf. Mal 2:14) to their husbands, helping them in fulfilling their part. It is then through this loving union between a husband and a wife that we can see God's love to his people in Christ. The marriage covenant is part of a much grander and beautiful picture in God's plan.

How then should we think about those who are single today in the church? They also reflect God's love towards us in Christ, but in a vastly different way. While marriage *primarily looks back in history* in its reflection of God's covenantal love, singlehood *primarily looks forward to* the future wedding supper of the Lamb (cf. Rev 19:6-9). The single life now, lived in complete joyful devotion to God, is a wonderful reflection of how things will be life in the new heavens and the new earth – the consummation of all things, particularly our relationship with God.

Marriage is part of a majestic and grand plan of God, displaying his covenantal love for us, culminating in the new heavens and the new earth. It is no wonder he takes it so seriously. Therefore, let us "on our guard" (Mal 2:16).