

## Malachi #4 - Learn to Persevere

- All right, we continue our study in the great Book of Malachi. And here's why I picked it. We're getting ready for Christmas, amen. How many of you, it's crazy, let me just tell you a little secret. We're about a week away. Amen? You got a week to find a tree, find some gifts, right? Find some stamps, find some Christmas cards, find some people to send them to. I mean, it's, it's a complicated season, amen? How many of you have tried to go to the mall? It's like ants on an anthill. I drove up to the mall, prayed about it, went home. I'm going to order everything online. Have them deliver it to my house. It's over. It's just done. I mean the mall right now looks like a prison riot. It's that time of year where we're all getting ready for, for the coming of Jesus and for the celebration of His birthday. Well, the reason I picked the Book of Malachi, it's the final book of the Old Testament. It's the last word that God has to speak directly to His people to prepare them for the first Christmas and the coming of Jesus. And amazingly, what God really focuses on in the Book of Malachi is relationship. Relationship with Him, relationship with one another, starting with the members of our family. And the sociologists will tell us that we have between 500 and 2500 people that we relate to every year, but that we spend 40% of our time with the same five people. Those are usually the people that are nearest and dearest to you. If you're married and/or have kids, it would be those people. And those people are the ones that you tend to love the most and have the most relational frustration with. And so what happens in every relationship is at some point you reach the point of the perseverance test. And the perseverance test is are we going to go forward or are we going to give up? Are we going to hang in or are we going to hang it up? Are we going to sign up for another season or are we going to walk away and call this the last season? That's true in our relationship with God. That's true in our relationship with our spouse. And that's where the people in Malachi 2 find themselves today. They're not atheists. They're a little bit frustrated. They're worn down. They're beat up. They're tired. They don't know what's going on. They're in that kind of season that maybe you are, you're in. This is the time of the year. We're a little tired. We're a little frustrated, a little grumpy. And now we've got to work on all these relationships with relatives and family and friends. That's where they find themselves. And God has a specific word to them regarding their relationship with Him and with one another that applies for us as well. So we'll jump right in. I've, let me just tell you this, I have way too many verses. I'm going to cover way too much information. No one else in America is preaching on Malachi 2 today because it's awkward. You're welcome, it's my gift to you. Merry Christmas. All right, we're going to deal with your two most important relationships first. Malachi 2:10-13. And your first most important relationship is your relationship with God. And then your second most important relationship is your relationship with your spouse. So if you're married, that's your second most important relationship. And the law of priority is that it's God, then spouse, then kids, then your work. And the law of jealousy kicks in where someone or something takes the place of God or the person that's supposed to be in that position. And that's what's happening here. Their relationships are out of order and God is going to reset them according to the law of priority. "Have we not all one Father? "Has not God created us?" So the relationship with God is that God made us and He's a father to us. "Why then are we faithless to one another "profaning the covenant," is going to

talk a lot about covenantal relationship and the context of marriage. And we'll get into that of our fathers. He talks about Judah and Jerusalem. Just hear that as God's people. Their nation was a Northern and a Southern kingdom, just hear that as God's people. So He's speaking to the family of God. "Judah has been faithless "and an abomination has been committed in Israel "and to Jerusalem for Judah "has profaned the sanctuary of the Lord." That's the temple, the presence of God, the holiest place on Earth. "Which he loves and has married the daughters "of a foreign god." We'll talk about this. Next slide, please. "May the Lord cut off from the tents of Jacob, "any descendant of the man who does this." So he holds the men first responsible. "Who brings an offering to the Lord of hosts. "And the second thing you do, "you cover the Lord's altar with tears, "with weeping and groaning "because He no longer regards the offering "or accepts with favor from your hand." Okay. So here's what He's talking about. Here's what God is saying. Everybody's really hurting, they're all very emotional. There's lots of tears and drama. Amen? And God says, "Let's pull back." Let's do Google earth. Let's look at the big picture. The pain is caused by the problem of the structuring of the relationships. God says, "The way to fix the relational pain "is to start with the first, most important relationship. "The relationship with me." So whatever you're dealing with or whoever you're dealing with, the first issue is you've got to find the Lord in the midst of it and ask how's my relationship with the Lord? And is that in the position of priority that it ought to be? And God tells us two things, that He created us and He's our father. So as our creator, that means that God is our maker. And this is where we find meaning in life. Atheism has a continual problem of giving life meaning because here's the, here's how it works. If you come from no one, if you're here for no reason and when you die you're going nowhere, it's hard to find meaning. Amen? It's hard to find meaning. It's hard to find me-, where do you come from? Nowhere. Why are you here? No reason. Where you going? Nowhere. All right, there was an old atheist. He said that, I think it was Thomas Hobbes, he said, "Life is brutal, nasty, and short. "But so what?" Well, the so what is we need to live it. Right now Christianity says you come from? God. He made you. You're here on a divine assignment in a mission that your life has meaning, value, and purpose. God made you and put you here and your life matters. So you come from God, you're here for God. And when you die, you will have an eternal relationship and give an account to God. So all of life, according to the teaching of the Bible finds its meaning, finds its value, finds its purpose in relationship with God. You come from God, you're here for God. You will die and stand before God to be with God forever. That's the storyline of the Bible. So God is your creator. If you're here and you're not a Christian or you don't think biblically, I need you to know that your life is not an accident. Your life is not a mistake. Your life is divinely appointed by God and He knows you and He loves you and He cares for you. And He has a destiny and a purpose and a plan for you. And He says that His relationship with you is like a father. And for those of us who are parents, boy, once you get your kid, it changes everything. Amen? You realize, oh my goodness. if God loves me the way I love this child. And this is the time of year that remember that God came as a baby. And every time we see a child, we remember that God took the form of a child. Any of you that have the opportunity to hold your child or your grandchild, you give them this sacred opportunity to really celebrate life. And then you think, oh my goodness, the way I feel about this child is the way the Lord feels about me. This child hasn't done anything to earn love. They just start with love. They haven't done anything to earn relationship. They start with the relationship. That's the heart,

heart of God. That's the father heart of God, that He's a father that He cares for you. And so in context here, this means that God is loving. This means that God is relational. And as I've told you repeatedly the concept in the context of Malachi, it's like God calls a family meeting. And He pulls all of His kids together, His sons and His daughters. And He said, "Okay, I know things are painful, "I know things are hard, I know things are complicated. "Let's just start here. "I made you, you're not a mistake or an accident. "Secondly, I love you. "I'm your dad, I'm here to help. "We're calling a family meeting "so that I can give you instruction to be of help to you." That's the whole heart and context of the Book of Malachi. And what this relationship with God does, it meets our deepest relational need. That you have relational needs that are inexhaustible, right? And so what God is saying is part of the problem that we have in our relationships, because here talking about relationship with Him, relationship with spouse. If you invert that and you put spouse or children or friend or family or coworker in God's place, you're going to overwhelm and exhaust them because they're finite. God is infinite. Our relational needs are infinite. And if we put a finite person in an infinite position, we are going to exhaust them and we're going to disappoint ourselves. And so what God is saying is I know you've got some relational problems, but the first problem is we don't have a healthy relationship. And as a result, you are seeking from people, starting with your spouse, needs that only can be met by me. And so this first relationship with God, it meets the deepest relational need. And then it models healthy relationship. So God is saying let's work on our relationship first. So here's what I would tell you, whatever pain or problem, whatever temptation, trouble, or trial you have, first things first, how's your relationship with God? How's your relationship with God? Because until that is strong, everything else will be weak. Until that is mended, everything else will be broken. And so of all of your problems, your first issue is your relationship with God. It will meet your deepest relational needs. And it also models for you what a healthy relationship looks like. And then he talks about the relationship with spouse. And what the problem is is that the men have been with women that they're not supposed to be with. Does this still happen? All of the ladies said? Amen. Yes it does. Okay? And here's the problem. There are believing men that are doing one of three things. Number one, they're marrying, some of them are, unbelieving women. Are believing men supposed to marry unbelieving women? Yes or no? No, no. Okay. Some of the men are believers and they have married believing women, but they are seeing on the side, unbelieving women. Should men do that? No. Okay, it was a little firmer from the ladies, a little firmer, okay. Not quite the outcry I was anticipating, but it's early so we'll get there. Believer male with an unbeliever. Believer male with a believing woman and then has a, another woman. And then some of these men are believers who have married unbelieving women. And now they're frustrated because it's not ending happily ever after. Happily ever after. So he said, why would he pick this book of the Bible? You know, he was thinking the same thing on the way in this morning. Malachi seemed like a good idea until I got into it today, okay? And today, what he's talking about is relationship with God, relationship with spouse, and the pain of family dynamics. Does anyone know that some people experience this during the holiday season? Have you noticed that? How many of you, how many of you, the holidays are coming and you're like, oh, I get a nervous eye twitch. I think about seeing the relatives. Our family org chart is very complicated. I'm just reading books about the rapture and hoping I leave before Christmas, okay? Because what happens is life is filled with relationships and some of the most complex

and painful relationships are with? Family. You said it, not me. I was just echoing you, so I agree with you. And so what is happening here is that the dynamics of family are very complicated. Okay? And so number one, your most important relationship is your relationship with God. Number two, the relationship with your spouse is your second most important relationship. And what these men were doing, and in that culture, a man would marry a woman, a woman would not propose to a man, in that culture, a man would divorce a woman. A woman couldn't really divorce a man. So God holds the men responsible for the condition of their covenantal relationship. But let me just say this, that in our culture there is a powerful and pervasive myth. It's actually, it's actually a lie and it would encourage men to think and behave in the same way as the problem and pain of Malachi, Chapter Two. Let me, let me explain it to you. How many of you have heard this, that Christians and non-Christians, their divorce rates are the same? You heard that? How many of you ever heard that the adultery rates for Christians and non-Christians are the same? Okay. And sometimes you'll even hear, oh, Christians divorce more than non-Christians. And it becomes this powerful, pervasive, cultural myth. It becomes this compelling gravitational lie. Let me just tell you this, that's not true. That's not true. It was based on some faulty research some years ago where a research firm, I won't name it, but I know this research firm, they would go out and they would interview people and they'd ask, are you a Christian? Are you a Christian? Are you a Christian? Are you a? Now if you do this in America, particularly in the South, anywhere there's grits, right? Where, how do they answer? Yeah, yeah. They answer like that as they're reading grits. Yeah, yeah, I love Jesus, moonshine, and football. You know, and they say yes. Okay? Not necessarily in that order, but that's their Trinity, right? Grits, moonshine, football, okay? And they believe in Jesus. Okay. So what happens is if you ask someone they're a Christian, they say yes. Okay. They say yes. Similarly there was a research study done, if you go ask the average person, do you give money to charity, what do they say? Yeah. Because that's what you're supposed to say. You're like, no, I ate it all. I bought a lot of candy bars and I don't care about homeless people. Now, oh yeah, I give to charity. I'm a good person. So what happens is we lie because we say what we think we should be doing, not what we're actually doing. Not you guys, but the people who took the test. Okay, now that being said, they then, so what happens then is if you ask people, are you a Christian, they say yes, well almost every American statistically says they're a Christian. How many of you look at the country and you're like, I don't see it. I don't think it'll hold up in court. Or I don't think there's evidence to convict that we're all walking faithfully and biblically with the Lord Jesus. Well, because you can profess something that you don't practice. Right? You can profess something that you don't practice. Right? Like how many of you have a gym membership? How many of you, you can't remember where the gym is? Right? Right? So you can be part of something but not practicing it. So they did a follow-up study. There's a man named Bradford Wilcox. He's a researcher in sociology at the University of Virginia. He's considered perhaps the leading sociologist on marriage and family in our nation. And he did a comprehensive survey and he decided, and it's written up in sociological reviews, a book was written, every year he sort of updates his findings, and what he added was a few additional questions. Not about just profession, but practice. And so what he asked was, do you believe that the Bible is God's Word, that people are sinners and that Jesus is our Savior? On your beliefs, do you believe those things? And then in your behaviors, do you go to church? Do you read your Bible? And do

you pray regularly? Okay? And those who said yes to all of those questions, they're not just professing faith, they're practicing it. Okay? The Bible says, don't merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says. These are people that are not just hearers of the Word, they're doers of the word. Well, his findings are for those who both profess and practice faith, they actually, I'll summarize all the findings. It's the lowest divorce rates. It's the lowest, it's the lowest rates of spousal abuse. It's the lowest rates of adultery and the highest rates of marital happiness. So I want to encourage you that God's way still works. It just took two and a half thousand years for the researchers to catch up with the Bible. But God's patient. Amen? And what they find is if two believers marry and if they walk according to biblical principle, that God blesses and honors that, that their marriage tends to be more enduring, that their marriage tends to be more endearing. Does this mean that it's always perfect or easy? The married people said no, no. It just means we don't kill each other. That's what it means. Because Jesus died for us. So we give each other a hall pass. That's the way it works. Now, that being said, when people are married and they are believers and they have the best statistical marriages, and this is Protestant Bible-believing marriages, and the man who led the survey is not a Protestant, right? So he's not an evangelical, but he is someone who just followed the facts to find the truth. And that is people who walk with Jesus together have the best marriages. And here's what they found. The highest rates of divorce, what would you guess would be between two kinds of people who don't share the same religion? Don't share the. So let's say you're a Buddhist or a Muslim, or let's say you're an atheist or into a new age spirituality and you marry a believer. Those marriages have the highest rates of divorce. Why? Because Jesus predicted this. What He said is a house that is divided cannot stand. Division literally means two visions. If you have two visions, you have division. Division is a problem between a husband and a wife. And then it becomes more complicated when you add? Children. I believe the Bible's authority. I don't. I believe there's one God. I believe there's many gods. I believe we should go to a Christian church. I believe we should go to a mosque or temple. That's division. And the division needs to be eradicated by both the husband and the wife sharing God's vision for marriage, sharing God's vision for family. And so what they're enduring here and what they're suffering here is they feel the pain of their relationships, but they don't realize the problem of the architecting of their family. Right? So we'll continue, next line. We want to talk about contract marriage versus covenant marriage. This is something that I shared with the men on Wednesday night, a few weeks ago. We'll start up again in January. Grace leads the Life Groups for the women. I lead the Life Groups for the men and I shared this with the men. And so I'll share it with you. And it comes from Malachi 2. "But you say, 'Why does he not?'" Because what they're asking is God, how come you don't bless us? And God said, "Because you've got everything architected poorly. "I'm not going to bless your plan, I bless my plan. "So if you want blessing, right, "get rid of your blueprint and adopt mine." So here's what you need to know. God doesn't bless your plan, God blesses His plan. That's why we need to seek His will. Why does He not? Because the Lord was witness between you and the wife of your youth. How many of you know this? God attends your wedding. Sometimes we'll do weddings in churches, we'll bring the husband and the wife up, you know, on the alter to be married. And we'll just sort of give this sort of sanctimonious religious lip service to, oh, you know, here in the presence of God. And God says, "Actually, that's true." See God, God attends the wedding. God's there as a witness.

God's there as a witness "between you and the wife of your youth to whom you have been faithless, though she is companion in your wife by covenant." Let's talk about that. What He's talking to here is the men. So let me, let me talk to the men. Men tend to see marriage as contractual, not covenantal. This is why men can win at work and lose at home. This is why men are good with money and bad with relationships. Right? We're at Scottsdale, Arizona. Can I just say it? Right? That the way you do business is not the way you do family. Right? The way you do business is not the way you do family. So let me explain it to you. Let me show you the difference between contract and covenant. Contracts are not bad, but contracts are for business. Therefore, the transaction and purchase of goods and services, that's not how we do Christian marriage. The Bible says in Romans 12, don't be conformed to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. What that means is God's people are to think differently. So in a contract, or a contract marriage, it's two people. It's me and you. In a covenant marriage, how many people are involved? Three. God just said, "I was there at your wedding. I'm a witness. I'm a part of this." Right? A part of this. In a contract, I seek my best interest. How many of you negotiate contracts for business? We do this all the time, right? We do this all the time. Some of you do it formally for business. Sometimes it's just, I'm looking for a mechanic. I'm looking for healthcare. I'm looking for a landscaper. I need to bid out a job on my house. I'm getting bids. I'm looking for the numbers. I'm wanting to read the fine print. I'm hoping to negotiate the deal because I want to do what's in my best interest. That's a contract. In a covenant, I see God's will for our best interest. God, what do you want? What is your plan? What is your desire for this relationship? In a contract, we negotiate terms. I won't say his name, but one of the leading marriage and family experts on TV actually isn't someone who has any background in counseling. Their background is business negotiation. And what they used to do is they would go to two companies and then they would negotiate a deal. They've taken those skills to marriage and they just treat the husband and the wife like two competing interests in companies and then negotiate a contract between the two of them. In a covenant we serve each other. We serve each other, right? I'm for you, you're for me, we're for Him. In a contract, I keep a record of performance. If you do a good job, I compensate you. If you don't, I don't pay you or I negate the contract. How many of you, you rel-. How many, how many of you do have a performance review at work? Right? Is that okay? Yeah. How many of you have a performance review in marriage? How many of you, it's December, you're like, well, sweetheart, time for the performance review. I did a 360 review. I interviewed all the children and no bonus for you this year. We're going to talk about some things, right? See you all chuckle, but the truth is do we sometimes do this informally? A lot more women said uh-huh than men. That's interesting, insightful, and helpful. Thank you, ladies. So, but you know you've got this kind of relationship when you hear something like this. You owe me. Okay? When you hear things like that, you owe me. Okay? I keep a record of performance. In a covenant, love keeps no record of wrongs. Love keeps no record of wrongs. In a contract, I punish for failure. In a covenant, I forgive failure. In a contract, the goal is winning. In a covenant, the goal is worshiping. See, in a contract, let's say because business is like sports. Two teams take the field, we keep score, one wins, one loses. In marriage, that's not the goal. The goal is that we're one. So it's not win-lose, it's worship. It's worship. We're not two seeing which will win, we're one worshiping Him. And what you end up in a contract is a professional relationship. What you end up with in a covenant is a personal

relationship. Does this make sense? Does this make sense?

- [Congregation] Yes.

- Okay, thank you. I apologize for waking you up. Okay. So what happens is, if you understand this, you will win at work. If you understand this, you will win at home. Here's where men make mistakes. They do one or the other. The guy who only does this, he wins at work and he loses at home. The guy who understands this, he wins at home, he loses at work. You understand this? This guy makes money, not memories. This guy makes memories, doesn't know how to make money. So what I'm not saying is one is good and one is bad. It's like your right hand and your left hand. This is good for this and this is good for that. You go to work, you use your right hand, you come home, use your left hand. If use your left hand at work, you're going to love everybody, and they're going to gut you. Okay? Right? If you, if you go to work and you conquer everybody and you come home, nobody's going to have a relationship with you. So we need to be sort of ambidextrous as both hands. And this is true of men and women, but it starts and it rises and it falls with the men. That's why I'm speaking to the men. And so in this, what kind of relationship does God have with you if you are a believer? Which one? Covenant. Right? Right, God serves you. God forgives you. God doesn't keep a record. God helps you to worship. God wants a personal relationship. That's why you can't lose your salvation. That's why if you're adopted into the family of God, you don't have to worry about going to hell. It's not a contractual relationship where God is like, you're in, but I'm telling you, if your account goes upside down, you're going to go from kid to kindling and I'm going to flip your position. God doesn't do that. Because He's a father. Right? He's not a middle managing employer. He's a father. Get this? Okay. How many of you, now what I just did, maybe I helped, maybe I hurt, I don't know, but how many of you now it makes sense of some of your family dynamics? Some of your relatives you're like, it's all contractual, man. It's all record of wrong, punishment, performance review. Gosh, it's hard just to, now you know, now you know. And I'm not saying one is bad, one is good. I'm saying one is for the marketplace and one is for the home. Okay? Next section is going to talk a little bit more about marriage. "Did not." "Did He," God, "not make them one?" So in a marriage, the two become one. And it's not which one? It's a new one. Okay, it's now it's not which one. Right? Oh, come on, really? See when we first got married, single guys would ask me, how do you make Grace do that? I was like what? And they're like, you know, be a wife. It's not like we thumb wrestled and I won. We agree on what we're doing, we're one. Worship one God, right? Open one book, live in one house, sleep in one bed, right? "One "with a portion of the spirit in their union." The believer has the presence and power of the person of the Holy Spirit in their relationship. This means that marriage is supernatural. This means that marriage is innately spiritual. Okay? This means that the believing couple has a resource at their availability that the unbelieving couple does not. Because you'd be like, okay, you need to love each other. God gives you His love through the Holy Spirit. We need to forgive each other. God gives you the power to forgive through the Holy Spirit. See, the first relationship is the relationship between the Father, Son, and Spirit. That God, the God of the Bible is by nature a relational God. God does love. God does communication. God does perseverance. God does service. God does affection. God does covenant. God does devotion. And He gives the Holy Spirit to

those who walk with Him so that they can experience a measure of His power in their relationships. What this means is for your marriage to glorify God, it cannot be a natural marriage, it must be a supernatural marriage. You're going to need to love with the love that you do not have, forgive with the forgiveness that you do not possess, and endure with a perseverance that is beyond your ability and capacity. Okay? But God gives the Holy Spirit. And what was God seeking? See in football, we always drive toward an end zone, right? What's the end zone for God? See for us, the end zone is personal fulfillment and happiness. For God, the end zone is what? Godly offspring. We tend to think of having a good time. God wants us to think of leaving a good legacy. We tend to think in terms of days, God thinks in terms of generations. So, so here at the Trinity Church, we say that we open our Bibles to learn, we open our lives to love. So the Bible teaching is to build relationships so that lives and legacies are transformed. Not just you, but your children, your children's children, physical and spiritual people who would look to you as, as a leader and a predecessor for them. And so what happens is, let me, let me go from preaching the metal and for just a moment, what happens is we make decisions and we don't think about future generations. Has this been true in your family? Just looking back at your family of origins in your history, were decisions made that were shortsighted, not long-term, and as a result, they've created a lot of problems in the future because of a shortsighted decision in the past. Amen? We could see this very clearly when someone does it to us. If grandma and grandpa wouldn't have done that, if mom and dad wouldn't have done that, I wouldn't be here. But here's what you need to know, someone's coming in the future and the decisions you make today will affect them. So we're not just victims decisions made in the past, we're also determiners of those who are coming in the future and what sort of future they might have. Okay? And God comes to His people and they're making very short-term decisions and God's like, no, no, no, we need to, you need to think long-term. Legacy. Lineage. Godly offspring, not just offspring. How many of you found that offspring is easier than Godly offspring? Have you found that? Right? Making babies is fun. Raising babies is work. You don't even have to be a believer to agree with that point. That's just fact, Jack, that's the way that it is. Godly offspring, Godly offspring. So guard yourselves in your spirit, check your relationship with God, check your soul. And let none of you be what? Faithless. That means unfaithful to the wife of your youth. "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. Next slide, please. "So guard yourselves in your spirit and do not be faithless. "You have wearied the Lord with your words" They're wearing God out. How many of you know that's hard? God is all powerful and exhausted. You know, that's. God here is using sort of human language. But they keep coming to God and they're saying, here's how we want it to be, Pete, please bless it. And God is like, that's not going to work. How many of you know somebody that's got a bad plan and they're asking you to help. You're like, I love you, but that's not going to work. Come on help. You know why it's not going to work. There are many things that we bring to the Lord and we're like, Lord, here's how I want my life to be. And God's like, that doesn't work. Well, God bless it, make it work. No, God's like, I love you, that's not going to work. That's a bad architecting plan. That's a failure. That's doomed to not endure. And because He doesn't say yes, it's not because He doesn't love you. It's because He does love you and He doesn't want either of you to be wasting your time and energy on something that is not going to work.



"You have wearied the Lord with your words, but you say, "how have we wearied him?" They're talking back to God. They're arguing with God. These are older and younger people, but we're all the children of God. And this is like a family meeting where God is like, I'm trying to help. No, you're not. I love you. No, you don't. I'm here to make it all better. We don't see that. You kids are driving me crazy. How do we do that, right? All right. This is the children of God. "By saying everyone who does evil is good "in the sight of the Lord and delights in them "or by asking where's the God of justice?" Sometimes in our relationships, we will have accusations that we posit in the form of questions. Right? Why are you so stupid? That's not really a question, amen? You're like, I don't know. Why are you so mean? Why are you so evil? Why are you so selfish? Right, those aren't really questions. Amen? So you're like, could you talk about, I thought we'd, it's Christmas, man, talk about, talk about angels and Magi. Don't talk about me. Okay. What they're doing with God, they're accusing God in the form of questions. Okay? Now let me say this, some of the most difficult seasons of life are in regards to relationship with family. Okay? And so a couple of things here, I'll speak to just various groups, because again, what is happening, some of these guys, they married women that they should've never married, but now they're married. And now they got kids and the guys are like I want out. And God's like, hey, look, this is your family. You guys got to work it out. What about the kids? Other men are with a woman they don't want to be with and they got another woman and God's like, that's too many people. Right? This too, it's just you and your girl. We don't have a parade of you and your girls, right? That's that's too many people. God is trying to focus their relationship with Him to get them healthy so that they can have healthy relationships with the other. So how many of you, so those of you who are single, how many of you are single? Single? Okay. You guys can meet afterward. So for single, I'm just tired, it's one of those weeks, amen? It's going to go this way. He just says stuff he shouldn't. I know that's, that's why we came. We heard it would happen. So, okay. So for you who are single, for you who are single, the second most important decision you will ever make is what? Who you marry. Okay? Who you marry. And so in making that decision, you can't make it short-term, you gotta make it long-term. And you've got to think about, not just can we have a good time, but can we live a good life and lead a good legacy. And a part of it too, and sometimes when single people get together, they don't factor in the children because the children aren't there yet. But you need to fact-, okay, what kind of marriage are we going to have? What kind of life are we going to have? What kind of God are we going to worship? What kind of kids are we going to raise? What kind of spouse and parents are they going to be? Making the decision with the long view in mind. And it's better to be single than it is to surrender to a life of suffering. Okay? For those of you who, who are married, okay, Grace and I are married, some of you are married, many of you are married, statistically, 91% of you will be married at some point. Everything rises or falls, first and foremost, with both of you having a healthy relationship with God. All right? And a couple other things I would say, the last day of marriage is the most important day of your marriage. And for married couples, we take a lot of time, energy, and money and we put it into the first day. Amen? I mean, you can rack up some serious debt. Some of you men have no idea what cake costs. You're going to. Right? What happens is we put a lot of time, energy, money into the first day, but you also need to keep the long view and say the most important day is the? The last day. Time, energy, and money toward the last day. And what these people did, they had an awesome first day, but they didn't

make a plan for the last day. And I would even say, you know, as we head into the holiday season, is there anything you need to forgive? Anything you need to change? Anything you need to apologize for? Anything of the architecting of your family that you need to alter so you could be healthy? Is it perhaps dysfunction from extended family that is now impeding on your family? That's what's happening here in Malachi. These guys married into families they're not supposed to be in. Their families are not rightly architected. They don't love, worship, serve God. They're not healthy. Those dysfunctional extended families are crashing into the immediate families. Everybody's crying. It's a painful situation. And God says, well, let's just re-architect all of this with me and my Word in authority and I'll bless my plan, if you'll live according to my plan. This is an opportunity for us even as married couples and families heading into the holiday season saying, if it's not working, what will we be changing? Because let me say this, this isn't in my notes, not that I really have any, but you can either get a new marriage or a new spouse. Let me just bottom line this. Some people say I need a new marriage, therefore, I need a new spouse. You can have a new marriage with the same spouse. So their answer is I need a new spouse and God was like, you need a new marriage. You need a new family system. You need a new family structure. Because sometimes what happens is we get a new spouse, but we have the same marriage. What needs to change? Starting with you. Number three, for those of you who are children of homes like this. Family was poorly architected, mom and dad didn't get along, God, wasn't in first position. Some of you are feeling the complications of that, particularly during the holiday season. Number one, forgive, forgive, forgive. So that bitterness does not take root in your heart. Number two, flush, flush. Flush it, let it go, move on, be done with it. Okay? Number three, find something to be grateful for and some lesson to learn. Find something to be grateful for from your family system and find some key lesson for you to learn so that you can be healthier with a better future. And then for those of you who are divorced, the whole context here in Malachi 2, right? Again, I thought Malachi was a great idea until I hit this week. And now we're talking about divorce. Merry Christmas. There you go, right? But for those who are divorced, Malachi 2:16, the scripture that we're reading right here, in some translations like the New American Standard Bible says that God blanks divorce. What's the word? Hates. Here's what it doesn't say. God hates the divorcee. Because God doesn't hate the divorcee. God loves the divorcee. What God hates is not the person who's divorced, but the pain that the divorce causes. And every divorced person that I know, they hate that, too. They say I hate this pain that caused me and others to have a very difficult immediate and perhaps short- or long-term consequence. Right? So in saying this, it's always hard as your pastor who loves you to say here's God's standard. And then some fall short and then they ask, so what about me? I have good news for you. God does not divorce the divorcee. Does God divorce any one of His people? No. So even if your relationship with your spouse did not endure your relationship with God will always endure. And so what God is inviting is healthy, loving, healing, changing, restoring, forgiving, blessing relationship. The relationship that never ends, the relationship that never fails. He's used this word a few times that people have been faithless. It reminds me of this language in the New Testament where God says, "Even though you are faithless, I am?" Faithful, faithful, faithful. So what we want to do, we want to have love, encouragement, mercy, compassion. For those who have been through relational troubles, we also want to hold up a high Godly standard and encourage perseverance with the Lord and

spouse for those who are married. Okay? This leads to an inevitable series of questions that I will try and answer. What does the Bible give for reasons for divorce? Again, hear me in this. I'm a Bible teacher. I like to teach through books of the Bible. I preached through a few dozen. This is the last word that God gives and it stands for 400 years until the first Christmas and the coming of Jesus. And some would look at it and say, boy, this is a weird conversation, God. God's saying, "No, actually what I'm talking about "is marriage and family." Relationship with me, relationship with spouse, relationship with kids, I'm talking about faith and family. That's what God's talking about. And God's talking about faith and family because it matters. And when the holidays come, it's faith and family that are sometimes frustrating. This leads to, as God brings the subject up, my, my goal is not to pick on anybody, but to pick up the Word of God, and if something happens, I want to talk about it. But I can't hit a section like Malachi 2 where God says, okay, "Let's talk about marriage and divorce" and then just sort of move right along because all of you are going to have? Reasonable questions. Okay? So what are the biblical grounds for divorce? And I'll take them from order of maybe easier to the most difficult. Number one, death. Right? This immediately raises the question, can I kill my spouse? No, no, you cannot kill them. Dang it, I thought I was out. Okay, so a little, little humor, right? Little, little sugar helps the medicine go down. You're welcome. All right. So Romans 7:2, a woman, a married woman is bound to law, by law. Man, I'm at that age where if I'm not at the right distance, I can't read it. Any of you have that? Gosh, okay, okay. Amen, thank you, brother. In our resurrection body, we're going to be seeing stuff. It's going to be amazing. Okay, Romans 7:2, a married woman is bound by law to her husband while he lives but if her husband what? Dies, she's released from the law of marriage. 1 Corinthians 7:39, a wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. But if her husband dies, she's free to be married to whom she wishes only in the Lord. Here's what it means. Marriage continues in this life. If your spouse dies, your marriage is? Concluded. You'll have a relationship and have, and there's a big debate whether or not you'll be married in heaven. I don't know. We'll see when we get there. But you're married as long as you're alive. Once your spouse has gone, your marriage is over. That's, that's pretty simple. Number two, abandonment. 1 Corinthians 7:15, if the unbelieving partner separates, let it be so. In such cases, the brother's sister is not enslaved. Sometimes people just disappear. I mean, I've been doing this 20 some years as a senior pastor and some things are unspeakable, so I won't speak of them. But I mean, I've seen people literally move to another state. I've seen people change their identity and disappear. I've seen people move to another country and eliminate all lines of communication. You're like, people are like, what can I do? I don't, what can you do? I mean, they're, they have, they are gone, they are done, it is over. And there's nothing you can do. You can pray. You can wait. You can give it some time. But at some point you've got to move on, right? These two are a little clearer. Actually I know some people now, they don't know what country their spouse lives in. They know they're alive, they just don't know where they're alive. Number three, adultery and sexual immorality. The reason that this one is more complicated, sometimes it's overt, sometimes it's covert. Sometimes it's obvious. Other times it's sneaky and secretive and hidden. In the old covenant, Deuteronomy 22:22, if a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall what? That's the old covenant. There wasn't a lot of paperwork with that. Just so you know. Right? You weren't like, well, my attorney and their attorney, and you're like, actually, this is, this is, this is a lot simpler.

Okay? It wasn't often done. But sometimes, I mean, could you, I don't even go there. It would have been interesting, but we don't have time for it and I'd have to fire myself. So Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, if you're sort of a Bible nerd and scholar, and you want to look at this, it's all in the app. The notes are Matthew 5:32, "Everyone who divorces his wife, "except on the ground of sexual immorality," Jesus says, in Matthew 19:9, "Whoever divorces his wife, "except for sexual immorality and marries another woman "commits adultery." And there's in the Greek here, I'm not going to bore you, but there's two words. One is moichaó, means adultery. The other is porneia. We get our word pornography from it. It's all kinds of sexual sin. And what Jesus is saying is that the marriage relationship is that the two shall be one flesh and sexual immorality, particularly adultery, it violates those covenantal sacred commands. Okay? Now you just need to know we live in a world that doesn't think that the marriage is particularly important or that the intimate relationship is particularly sacred. God does. God does. God does. And number four, hardness of heart, this is the judgment call. This is the most difficult. When I was a young, newer pastor, I was a bit, I would say, idealistic, which can make you legalistic. Idealistic is where you're all about the ideas but you forget that you're dealing with people. That's why communism works on paper. Right? It does. And then you get people involved, you're like, oh, it doesn't work. Because people are not ideas. And people are complicated. And lives and relationships are difficult. Okay? So for me, as a younger, newer pastor, some decades ago, I was more idealistic, which caused me to be more legalistic. I now see this as God's loving provision for people's protection. Jesus says this, "They said," so they're arguing with Jesus, "Moses", go back to the Old Testament, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce "and send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your "hardness of heart." Hardness of heart. Let me say this to people with hearts that are tender toward the Lord and one another end up in a different place than if one person has a hard heart and one person has a tender heart or two people have a hard heart. That really, before there are problems out here, there's a problem in here. This is your emotional life. This is your spiritual life. This is your relational life. What we're seeing in Malachi, true or false, their heart is hard toward God? Their heart's hard toward God. They're like, they're yelling at God. They got accusations of God. They're fighting with God. Their heart is hard toward God. If your heart is hard toward God, eventually your heart gets hard toward everybody else. How many of you have seen just somebody who is just bitter, locked up, angry, frustrated and it affects all of their relationships. You have many relationships, but you have one heart and all of your relationships come out of your one heart. So if your heart is hard, it affects all of your relationships. So my question to you today, and I would ask the Holy Spirit to give you a word, if you had to pick one word to describe the condition of your heart in this instant, what would that word be? Okay? If it's not a tender, loving heart, then something needs to heal or be changed or repented of or softened so that your heart is tender and loving toward the Lord and then it can be tender and loving toward each other. But under all of the ultimate relational problems is the hardness of heart toward God and others. Okay? So what I love about Jesus, because they come to Him and they want to argue all the details. They're like, okay, here's this team and this team and this team and this team and this team and this team and this team. Okay, Jesus, where are you at? How do you parse the Hebrew? What team are you on? How did, what, what group do you align with on this very complicated. And Jesus just said, "Your heart." They're just like, oh, dang it. Now we got to have a relationship with God. And

not just have math equations that we try and shove lives into. We need to be relational people that do life with God and one another. And that's the key. "Because of your hardness of heart, "he wrote you this command, "but from the beginning of creation," he goes all the way back to God's intended order, "God made them male and female." America doesn't believe that. Just throwing it out there. I'll lean over the plate, take one for the team. But God made us male and female. "Therefore, a man shall," he goes back to Genesis, "leave his father and mother, hold fast to his wife." That's marriage. "And the two shall become one flesh." God's plan was a man and a woman, a man grows up, takes responsibility for himself, pays his own bills, marries a woman, they consummate their covenant, the two become one flesh and they do life together. That's God's plan. "So they are no longer two, but one flesh. "Therefore what God has joined together, "let not man separate." Right? What he's saying is that some got divorced because of hardness of heart, but that was not God's original intent and design. And if two people would bring their heart to God, say God, "Here's my heart. "Change my heart." Will God answer that prayer? Yes. And that will change their relationship. Okay? If you will bring your heart to God, He will change your heart. And then two changed hearts can have a changed relationship. Okay? Couple of things briefly. Because I get this question all the time. And then we'll, we'll go to Malachi 3. I get this question all the time, even in emails, literally almost every day. Okay? At the ministry website, somebody sends me an email and it's the whole story of their marriage and then at the end they ask this question, can I get a divorce? Firstly, that's not an email decision to a stranger. Amen? Other, I mean, I guess I could just sit at my desk all day and be like, yes, no, yeah, yeah. I mean, right? Like it doesn't work like that. People are not math equations. Okay? So a couple of things, if you are in a tough season and/or you're walking with someone who's in a tough season, number one, your heart is wrong if you're actively seeking to make your circumstances fit some criteria. If you're like, well, how do I get out? You're like you do like this - awesome. Then you figure a way to get there. No, no, no. Then your heart's wrong. Your heart's wrong. Number two, you do not have to end the relationship even if you have grounds to. People can forgive one another and reconcile and it could go from willful to wonderful. It happens. Number three, you can't make this decision in isolation. You bring in wise counsel. And I'm not talking about family and friends that just agree with you and take your side. I'm talking about pastor, Christian counselor, somebody who's wise. You cannot make this decision in haste. Just get angry and then double down. And then because you're stubborn, see it through to completion because you're angry in a moment. And you can't make it in lust. You got somebody else. You're like, I got to get rid of this so I can pick up that. No, no, no. That's a heart problem. And then lastly, let me say this clearly. Great, great abuse happens when we tell one person to obey the Bible and not the other. Okay? The Bible speaks to husbands and wives. So we need to speak to husbands and wives. And all if you do is quote all the verses for the husband and not the verses for the wife, that's going to be an unfair, unholy, unhelpful relationship. If all you do is quote all the verses for the wife and not tell the husband what God tells him to do, you're setting up, again, an unhealthy, unfair, unloving, unholy relationship. It works if both people surrender to God. It works if both people submit to God. It works if both people obey God. It works if both people will bring their heart to God. Okay? And so I've even had recent conversations at the church where, you know, the relationship is in a difficult place, but the friends or family or counselors or whomever's involved are only reading the Bible and

speaking the Word of God to one person, not both. Both need to hear what the Word of God says and do what the Word of God says if there is to be any hope for the relationship. So here's where we find ourselves. This is the end of the Old Testament. This is a 2000 year experiment. This is God setting up the nation of Israel. This is God setting up the family. This is God setting up the old covenant church and the temple and the priesthood and the sacrificial system. And it's all foreshadowing the forthcoming of Jesus. And it's all to get people ready for the first Christmas. And how's it going? Terribly. What do we do with that? Well, the big idea is this. Family without Jesus doesn't work. Church without Jesus doesn't work. Nation without Jesus doesn't work. Family without Jesus doesn't work. Church without Jesus doesn't work. Nation without Jesus doesn't work. The reason it's not working is Jesus hasn't shown up yet. And so what it creates is this thirst, this longing, this hunger, this appetite, this need, where is Jesus? And they end, I think it's in Chapter Two, verse 17, asking where is the God of justice? Chapter Three, here's what God has to say, "Behold." Pay attention. Good news, it's not, you it's me. I'll fix it. You're the problem, not the solution. "I will send my," who is that? "Messenger." Who's that? That's John the baptizer. That's Jesus' weird homeschool, rural Jerome, Arizona, already Jedi robe, bug-eating, honey-chugging cousin. Amen? He's a weird kid, but he loves the Lord. So he's going to do the job. "Behold, I send my messenger "and he will prepare the way before me." He is going to pave and plow. Right by our house, Grace and I went for a walk yesterday, they're getting ready to put in a whole housing development. First thing they do, they come in and they absolutely clear everything so that there is a path for everyone else to venture on. That's what he is doing. John the baptizer and who? The Lord. Who's that? Really? Really? Really? I don't know. Okay. If you are new, when I ask questions, there are two answers, Jesus or carne asada. Those are the two answers because whatever the problem, those are usually the solutions. Amen? Okay? So we're going to do this again. And who? "The Lord whom you seek will." Who is that?

- [Congregation] Jesus!

- Okay, better. You didn't say carne asada, good for you. All right. "And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to," where? The temple. The temple was the presence of God. It was the place that people would meet with God. It was the intersecting and connecting point between heaven and Earth Question, does the temple exist today? No, I've been there. It's not there. They're like, hey, we're going to take you to the temple. It was like, somebody took it and it's gone. I don't, where is it? They're like, oh, it got destroyed. We've been there. When did it get destroyed? 70 AD, a long time ago. So for my Jewish friends, who I love, you're waiting for the Messiah. You missed Him. His name is Jesus. He came to the temple. The temple was destroyed. 70 AD. It's God's way of saying, okay, just to make sure you know who it was. Historically, whoever this person is, he had to come by 70 AD. There has been no temple since 70 AD. "And the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight," the relationship, covenantal language. God wants a covenantal relationship with you. God does not have a contractual relationship for you. You sin, you need to reincarnate, pay off your karmic debt to pay me back, that is contractual. You need to suffer, go to purgatory, pay me back, that is contractual. You need to die, you need to go to hell, that is contractual. You can have a covenantal relationship

with God through Jesus Christ, where He is faithful even when you are faithless. He is forgiving even when you're undeserving. That He is loving from His pure heart even when you are unloving from your hard heart. That's the father heart of God. He is coming. He is coming. And let me tell you this. They were awaiting the first coming of Jesus, which we're going to celebrate big time in the coming week at Christmas. We are waiting for the second coming of Jesus. God gives prophetic promises. They waited by faith for the first coming. We wait by faith for the second coming. The God who was faithful to fulfill the covenantal promises in the first coming will be faithful to fulfill all of the covenantal promises at His second coming. Amen? You can trust this Jesus. "Says the Lord of hosts, "the God who rules over the angels and demons, "but who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears?" Next slide, please. "For He is like a refiner's fire and fullers' soap. "He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver. "He will purify the sons of Levi." Those are the Old Testament leaders and the pastors and priests. "And refine them like gold and silver, "and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. "Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem "will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old, "as in the former years." Last slide, please. "Then I will draw near to you." Jesus is coming "For judgment. "I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, "false, demonic, pagan spirituality and religion, "against adulterers, against those who swear falsely, "against those who oppress hard workers in his wages, "and the poor, the widow and the fatherless, "against those who thrust aside the sojourner "and do not fear me says the Lord of hosts." Their question is God, when are you going to deal with all of these people? And God says, "Don't worry about it. "I'll take care of those people. "Right now, what you worry about "is my people take care of yourself." And what God says is trust me to deal with everyone else and then invite me to deal with you. So here's what God says. Jesus is coming because family doesn't work unless Jesus is in it. Jesus is coming because church doesn't work unless Jesus is in it. Jesus is coming because nation doesn't work unless Jesus is in it. And what He says is that God not only will forgive through this man, Jesus, and He lived a life that we have not lived. He lived a life of complete and perfect relational obedience. He is without sin. He is God, He is Savior, He is King, He is Christ, He is hope, He is love, He is joy, He is peace, He is salvation. And He gives the gift at Christmas that you cannot earn. That's the gift of salvation. And then I got really good news for you. When he's talking about refining and he's talking about soap, what he's talking about is purifying and cleansing. The way it would work, you would heat up a metal to draw out the impurities. With soap, you will clean yourself from that which is unclean. You can be forgiven by Jesus Christ. You can be loved by Jesus Christ. You can be made new by Jesus Christ. And you can be made clean through Jesus Christ. He wanted these people to not just know that they were forgiven, but to experience God's cleansing power. You can be forgiven and you need to know that whatever you have done, in your heart, in your head, with your hands, it can be not only forgiven, but made clean through this man, Jesus Christ. Just like this morning, you used soap to clean your hair and soap to cleanse your hands. You use soap to clean your laundry. You use soap to cleanse your dishes. They get dirty, but you make them clean. You, my friend, even though you belong to God, you will sometimes get yourself dirty. But this God will make you clean. He will clean you up so that you no longer live under the condemnation. You no longer live under the guilt. You no longer live under the shame. You no longer live under the defilement. You no longer define yourself by what you have done or what has been done to you.

You will celebrate because of what Jesus Christ does for you. And I love that. These are guilty, filthy people who are forgiven and made clean. For those of us who are guilty and filthy, clean, guilty and filthy people, rather, this is good news. Amen? All right, so here's what we're going to do. We're going to sing. We're going to celebrate. Merry Christmas. There's hope for you. There's hope for your marriage. There's hope for your kids. There's hope for your family. There's hope for our church. There's hope for our nation. There's forgiveness. There's cleansing. Who is that that provides it?

- [Congregation] Jesus! Jesus, amen! Well, let's sing to Him and celebrate Him. Let me pray. Father God, thank you so much for this last word of the Old Testament. God, I am convinced that, that soft words produce hard people and that hard words produce soft people. God, we receive any hard words, not because you hate us, but because you love us. And if you're pushing a little harder it's because our heart is already hard and you need to push through that resistance to give us a tender heart. God, for any who would hear this, I pray, Lord God, that they would know that there is forgiveness in Jesus. There is cleansing in Jesus. There is hope, help, and healing in Jesus. And God, we confess, without Jesus, the family is a mess. Without Jesus, the church is a mess. Without Jesus, the nation is a mess. So God, as they received this Word, as they walked in this Word, we walk in this Word. By faith we trust that the God who promised He was coming is coming again. And all the promises that He makes will come true. And His son, our Risen Savior, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the heart of the covenant, the giver of grace, the forgiver of sin, the cleanser of unrighteousness, the changer of our hearts, in whose name we pray. Thank you, Jesus.