

**RAISING GODLY CHILDREN
MALACHI 2:10-16**

NEED: CHRISTIAN HOMES

PROPOSITION: THE BEST CONTRIBUTION WE CAN MAKE TO THE MORAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR CHILDREN IS A SOLID CHRISTIAN HOME.

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAD COUPLES TO RENEW THEIR MARRIAGE COMMITMENTS TO EACH OTHER.

INTRODUCTION:

Our government released the latest crime statistics this past week. There was encouragement in a decrease in the number of major crimes committed in this country over the past year.

However, there is underneath all that optimism a frightening reality. There is an alarming increase in the number of crimes committed by children and adolescents. These crimes are becoming increasingly violent. In the United States from 1985 to 1991 the number of sixteen year old arrested for murder rose 158%; the number of fifteen year old rose 217%; the number of thirteen and fourteen year old rose 140%; the number of twelve year old increased 100%.

What is happening to our children?

I heard on the news this past week that one of the states had passed a law that makes parents financially responsible for the actions of their children. A case was already being tried in the court. A juvenile had wrecked considerable devastation upon others and the parents were being tried for not acting responsibly with reference to their child. If convicted, it carries fairly stiff penalties.

I have been interested to find that in the scriptures God has a special concern about children. One of His purposes for the family is that they would bring into the world children that would develop in to responsible and good citizens. With reference to his own people, God is concerned that His people bring up godly children. He wants the faith to be passed from generation to generation through the children of those who share the faith.

In a searching passage the prophet Malachi delivers a word from the Lord to his generation. It is primarily a word of denunciation concerning the short comings of that generation. Woven into that word of denunciation is a special message concerning how to raise Godly children.

Interestingly God does not give instructions about how to discipline the children or how to give moral instruction to the children. Rather God puts the emphasis upon the building of a healthy, stable marriage. A good family is the best gift that any parent can make to the moral and spiritual development of their children.

From these words of Malachi, there are two great lessons we can learn.

I. START THE MARRIAGE RIGHT.

If you are to have a good marriage, it must have a good beginning. From the prophetic word we can draw out some important lessons about the beginning of a marriage in the right way.

1. Choose the right person for a marriage partner.

The first word of denunciation from the prophet addresses a prevalent practice in that day. Even

though God had given clear and specific instruction to His people concerning who they could marry, His people had ignored His will. He accuses them of actually violating the covenant and breaking faith with Him. "Judah has broken faith. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the Lord loves by marrying the daughter of a foreign God. As for the man who does this, who ever he may be, may the Lord cut him off from the tents of Jacob - even though he brings offerings to the Lord almighty." God's people were to marry within the covenant. This meant for an Old Testament Israelite that he or she was to marry someone who was a worshipper of the God of Israel. The primary concern when seeking a marriage partner must be who do they worship. In Malachi's day the men of Israel were taking wives who were worshippers of idols.

I get the sense that in our day there has been a slippage at this point. In the name of tolerates we have lowered the standard at this point. The word of the New Testament is that we are not to be unequally yoked with a non-believer. Marriage with an unsaved person is an unequal yoke for a believer. The first concern that you must have if you are going to give to your children the right kind of home is marrying a person who fears and serves the living God.

I would add a word of caution! It is not enough to find someone who is a member of a church. Church membership has become so easy in our day that it really doesn't say much about the spiritual commitment nor the object of worship in the life of a person. Your concern needs to go deeper than that. Is this a person who has a heart to love and to serve God with me?

2. Establish the right kind of relationship.

Marriage needs to be begun with the right kind of relationship. The prophet helps us at this point as he gives the word of denunciation to that generation. When he begins to address the problem of the breakup of marriages, he says "It is because the Lord is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant."

The first word that He uses that describes the right kind of marriage is "Partner." The older version translates the word "companion." The idea in the word is that of two people who have joined themselves together by a compact, a partnership. You need to begin your marriage with an understanding that you are forming a lasting partnership with the other person.

The other word used in the text that indicates the right relationship is "the wife of your marriage covenant." The word "covenant" has a sacred quality to it since it is the word that God has used of his relationship with us. God has bound himself to us by covenant. Marriage is a covenant. You are to see yourself entering into a relationship with the other person in which you bind yourself through a solemn commitment until the day of death.

Where does the modern phenomena of couples living together in what they have called "preparation for marriage" fit into this? The best answer is that it doesn't. Anyone who attempts to get ready for marriage by living with someone outside of the covenant of marriage has made a tragic mistake. One recent study made by the National Survey of Family Growth

found that women who were not virgins when they got married had a divorce rate 71% higher than virgins. Other studies are producing the same kind of evidence. A recent study found that of the couples that live together with the intention of getting married some day that only 25% of the women ever marry the man they live with. An even smaller percentage - 20% of the men end up marrying the person. This means that if you cohabit with someone before marriage there is at least a 75% chance that you will never marry that person. The best gift you can give your children in terms of a right marriage is to begin your marriage as a virgin and then to enter into a life-long covenant with that person you are marrying.

3. Enter into partnership with God.

There is an underlying assumption in this passage from Malachi. The assumption is that God makes Himself available to assist that couple who make the right commitment to each other in marriage. "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? Because he was seeking godly seed." There seems to be something more involved than God just providing us a pattern to go by. It seems that God Himself is prepared to do something special in the life of the woman and the man who make Him their partner in the building of a Christian marriage.

This is basic! If you want to raise godly children make sure that your marriage is begun in the right way. Nothing should be approached more seriously, solemnly, prayerfully, carefully, than the entering in to a covenant with another person to build a home and to raise a family.

II. MAINTAIN THE MARRIAGE COMMITMENT FOR LIFE.

What does it take to maintain a happy marriage. Debbie Crawford was a school teacher in Kentucky when she and her husband were married. While she was away on her honeymoon the third graders in her class came up with a list of suggestions for her and her new husband. Ann Landers later included these in one of her articles. Some of the advice they gave was:

My advice for a happy marriage is if someone wants to use something of the other person's, let them use it. Don't let it become a fight.

You should have two kids, four is too many.

Take turns doing the chores.

I recommend that when you get into a fight, end it being friends.

Take the smallest cookie.

Go places together, like go out to dinner.

Mostly say "yes" but if you see you are going to have hotdogs for dinner and you really don't like hotdogs, it is ok to say so.

Try not to get a divorce.

Be wealthy.

Stay lovers for the rest of your lives.

Do not marry another person.

Some of the pointers the children give have a lot of validity to them. But I like the pointers that I find in the prophecy of Malachi better. They go a little deeper than the size of the cookie that you choose off the plate.

1. Remember whose you are.

In the midst of this word through Malachi we are reminded that we should remember whose we are as we relate to our marriage partner. "Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?" These words obviously call on us to remember whose we are. We are the children

of the one true and living God so this should affect how we relate to each other. Then later the

prophet says, "Has not the Lord made them one? In flesh and in spirit they are His." The most

important fact about your life as a Christian marriage partner is that you are His. This means that His will must always be the supreme thing in our relationship to our marriage partners.

2. Keep an open spirit.

Twice in these words from the Prophet we hear him address the importance of the spirit. "So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." The prophet closes this particular message by repeating the same statement. The spirit is the inner you. It is where anger, bitterness, resentment, malice, and all such negative emotions find their home. The spirit is the part of you that enables you to relate to God and to receive from God His love and His grace. The prophet wisely knew that the things that ultimately destroy a marriage do not come from the outside. The things that ultimately destroy the marriage come from within. Marriages does not fail because of some attack without, rather they fail because of neglect within.

If you will keep your spirit right - keep out of it everything that hinders openness and communication with your marriage partner - then you will be able to perserve your marriage.

When ever your heart is right with God, and his Holy Spirit is free to reproduce in your life the fruits of the Spirit, your relationship with your marriage partner will be secure. Broken marriages begin with defiled spirits. You allow the wrong things in your spirit which should be infilled with the presence of God and your marriage is in trouble.

3. . Keep your word.

Since marriage is a covenant, it is based on a promise. Twice in the passage the prophet admonished the men of that generation "And do not break faith." He means that you are to keep your word, you are to be a promise keeper.

I applaud the emphasis that Promise Keepers are giving to this particular aspect of marriage. The words that we spoke at the marriage altar are important. They are to be kept. When we promise to love and to cherish each other, that is what we are to do. I read with interest a story that made the Christian news sometime ago. It involved Dr. Robert McQuilken. I met Dr. McQuilken when I spoke in the chapel of Columbia Bible College some years ago. At that time he was the godly and trusted president of that Christian institution.

The news story reported his resignation from the school. The thing that caught my attention was the explanation that he gave to the trustees, student body, and supporters of Columbia Bible College for his resignation. Some years before his beloved wife, Muriel, had become a victim of Alzheimers. Her victimization by this dreaded disease was rather slow. For a time he was able to hire a caregiver to stay with her and take care of her. But the time had come that such caregivers were no longer effective. Muriel was fearful and insecure any time Dr. McQuilken was out of her sight.

He explained to those interested in the college that he had made a promise to Muriel in a marriage altar that he would always be there for her. He had promised to love her in sickness and in health, for better and for worse. He reminded the supporters of the school that she had always been there for him, but now she needed him as she had never needed him before in all of their marriage. His word to her was more important than any position that this world could give him. So, he resigned as the president of Columbia Bible College to be the caregiver for his wife

full time.

I don't know Dr. McQuilken's children, or grandchildren, but I do know they will not need many sermons on love, commitment, and faithfulness. They have been privileged to see one. It is this kind of commitment that it takes to maintain a marriage in a fractured, broken world like ours.

But our concern this morning is not just maintaining marriages. Rather it is giving our children the kind of home they need so they can become godly children. We will never solve the youth crime problem in this nation until we begin to give our children the kind of homes in which godly character can be formed.

I am calling on every married couple in this church to recommit themselves to such a task. I am calling on every single adult and young person to commit themselves to have a goal like this in mind when they come to take the steps of marriage. May God make it so for each of us.