

For Better or Worse

Pastor Ken

Week 1, May 21, 2023

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. (Malachi 2:14-NLT)

Danice and I have been married for 34 years, or is it 35 years? Oh, well when you get that many years going on the odometer, it all runs together. And one of my problems over the years has been that I often get confused (not forgetful), simply confused, about what day our anniversary is on.

You, see Danice's, birthday is on July 24, and our Anniversary is November 26, and I get dyslexic sometimes and confuse 24 with the 26. Fortunately, my assistant has been helping me over the years, and she reminds me of the date. I just thought of something Danice, is my assistant these days.

Now, I have found a fool proof way to not get the date wrong ever again, Danice and Janice Pyle in our office have the same birthday July 24, I just ask Janice when her birth date is. Problem solved.

Marriage is so much more than the engagement ring and the wedding ring, don't forget the suffer-ring.

A pastor was marrying this couple, and in the olden days they used to ask the question in the ceremony, "if there is anyone here, that disagrees that this couple should be married, speak up or forever hold your peace." Remember that part of the wedding?

Suddenly, one voice rang out. "I disagree. I disagree. I disagree. I disagree." The Pastor looked at the groom and said to him, "quiet down, you can't be disagreeing, you ain't been here long enough."

When Danice and I were first married, we moved to San Diego (Sun Diego), where our oldest son Kenny was born. We used to drive to work together. She worked for a court appointed receiver, and I was the college pastor at a church of about 4000 at Faith Chapel.

One day, on the way to work, she would drop me off first, I said, “hey babe, why don’t we pick a bible verse, read it out loud and then make a comment and finally, pray for each other. I said, why don’t I go first. So, that day on Hwy 94, heading to La Mesa and Faith Chapel, I said, the bible reads in Ephesians 5:22 (NET), *“Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord,”*

And then I said, “no comment needed.” Then I prayed. Snickered. Well, those last few minutes were very awkward. You think? I did not know a Vega could squeal its tires, and she did it as she pulled out of the church parking lot.

The next day, on the way to work, it was about a 10-minute drive from Lemon Grove, Ca., to La Mesa, Ca., and she reminded me of our new practice and said, “ok, I have a verse for you.” And she read from Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy? What does that book have to do with marriage, I thought.

⁵ *“A newly married man must not be drafted into the army or be given any other official responsibilities. He must be free to spend one year at home, bringing happiness to the wife he has married. (Deut 24:5-NLT)*

Then she said, “I am still waiting for my year of happiness.”

Both Danice and I come from homes inflicted by divorce, it doesn’t mean that our parents were not good people, sadly divorce entered into our past. So, each of us carried some baggage into the relationship. In fact, a purpose of marriage is to help each other heal.

Now, let me tell you something about my past, I prepared myself for marriage, by giving God 5 years of my life during my seminary training. It was not a requirement, I just wanted to do the work needed to be the person that loved God and honored my wife when the time came.

I had been pretty carnal before I became a Christian and since I was going to be in the ministry, I accepted the reality, that character is a critical part of ministry and marriage.

So, I not only have a degree in theology, but a degree in education with an emphasis in family counseling. That still was not enough, because like all couples, marriage starts out as a dream, and it doesn’t take long before it can become a nightmare.

Because of this reality, in the early years of our marriage and my marriage counseling I came up with a definition of love: Unconditional commitment to an imperfect person. Unconditional, there is nothing you can do to stop me from loving you. To an imperfect person, marriage is not a pipe dream. This is not Cinderella and her handsome prince.

When I give coaching to couples in marriage, I tell them there are four bases you have to touch in order to score a run.

First Base: His Needs, Her Needs.

Second Base: Cultivating Skills of Conflict Resolution.

Third Base: Developing Marital Intimacy.

Home Base: Marriage is a Covenant.

From time to time, a crack shows up on the wall of your home. This time a really big crack spreads across the living room, so you hire a painter to come over and fix the crack in your plaster.

He comes over, sands the wall, feathers in the texture and paints the wall making it look like new. You pay him and are glad you have your living room back to housing and hosting conditions.

A month later the crack returns in the same place, in your living room. That crack resurrects again. It reappears. Frustrated you call him back. He comes over and fixes the problem for no charge, and you think once again the problem is solved. You are happy.

Then about 2 months later, the crack reappears and brings friends and family. Aunts. Uncles. Nieces and Nephews. You have a family of cracks on your living room wall. And now the cracks are spread out all over the wall, not just in one place, but many places.

So, you decide you need a new painter, so you hire someone else, and he comes over and you say, "look, I have this problem, this wall is filled with cracks, can you fix it?"

You ask, "Can you fix it." The painter stares at it. He makes some sounds of thinking. He looks at it closely. He looks at it from a distance. He asks what rooms were above and below the cracks.

Then he says, "I am sorry I can't help you."

"Isn't this what you do", you ask?

"Yes, but I can't help you."

You ask, "Why can't you help me?"

"Because you do not have a problem with cracks on your wall." You are stunned and wonder if there might be more cracks in the room than on the wall and you ask, "What do you mean? I see cracks on the wall."

"Yes", he says, "there are cracks on the wall, but that is not your problem."

"Those cracks are your symptoms. Your problem is that you have a shifting foundation. The foundation under the house is moving. So, what you see on your wall are symptoms of a deeper problem. Until you repair your foundation, you will be forever doing patchwork on your wall."

Today, even the best marriages have some cracks. Marriage problems and divorce have become normalized in the culture and in the church. For many, what started out in the church house has moved to the courthouse.

Don't you think it is time to stop repairing cracks and start repairing some foundations?

Isn't it time to stop the fighting, and start the praying?

Isn't it time to stop thinking about self and start thinking about your spouse?

Isn't it time to stop getting angry and start getting hungry for God's Word?

Isn't it time to stop looking for another spouse and start loving the one that God has given you?

If you don't address the foundational problems in your marriage, you will always have cracks in the wall.

I am convinced that no topic is more relevant for this pulpit and this preaching than getting back to the basics of God's design for marriage.

Marriage is God's idea, and many have taken something so wonderful and completely abused it, misused it, trashed it and bashed it, prostituted it and marooned it.

The devil does everything he can to get bring people together before marriage, living together, sex before marriage and then does everything he can to keep people away from each other after marriage.

Stop sitting in silence and sadness about the state of your marriage, single life, divorce, or any other challenges with marriage related issues and stop looking at the cracks and start fixing the foundation.

The stigma in the church today is too many people sit in silence and suffer with their marriage, mental health, and money problems.

I want to use these last couple of minutes to help you understand the most important word in marital vocabulary. In a marital glossary of terms, this word is the most important.

If you understand this word, implement it, apply to everyday marriage and pre-marriage for those of you asking God to give you a spouse, this word can change and heal any relationship no matter how many cracks are on the marital wall.

In Malachi 2:14, God says, "*she is your wife by covenant.*"

The name *Malachi* means Messenger of God.

God is thundering from the heavens with hope and help for marriages today. With hope and help for those who have been bruised and abused by marriage activity.

She is your wife by covenant. They were talking about divorce in Malachi 2, and God says the reason you can't end this relationship is because she is your spouse, wife and mate by covenant.

This is the theological, practical, imperative, and most important word and it is the foundation to marriage. God's people in Malachi's time had gotten complacent in their worship of Him. They had allowed going to church, reading their bible, praying, and the giving by God's people of their tithe, - God's people had allowed it to become routine. Bland. Vanilla.'

Their faith had movement, but not motivation.
Their faith had practice, but not passion.
Their faith had church attendance, but not repentance.
Their faith had worship, but not weeping.
Their faith had giving, but not sacrifice.
Their faith had prayers, but no power.

The children of Israel, in Malachi's day faced no enemy.
An invisible enemy. Not an enemy outside, but one inside.

You see there was a temple to build.
No promise land to possess.
No miracles to cry out for.
No enemy to defeat.

Such times of faith, invite God's people to treat church, faith, and worship of God as a mere hobby. As habit.

And when faith and a relationship to God becomes routine, it soon it soon turns rebellious. When your faith becomes routine, it is not long before it becomes rebellious.

Look at the verses we read a few minutes ago: 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. (Malachi 2:14-NLT)*

Malachi tells us that when your faith falters, and your worship slips, your marriage is not far behind. What keeps the marital fires burning is not a home, kids, or not financial blessing, what keeps the marital fires burning is a burning desire to know and serve God.

So, Malachi goes to work and creates a crisis, when God's people did not know there was a crisis. God wakes us up to a crisis with Him, during times when the only thing we are concerned about is self.

God will not allow you to disregard what He has to say about marriage. And neither will I. Whenever God wanted to establish a personal relationship, a new relationship with his people he would, "covenantalize" the relationship.

A covenant is a divinely created relationship bond.

*It was through the covenant that God would make himself known. (Sinai)

*It was through the covenant that God would deliver the people. (Egypt)

*It is through the covenant that God would bless. (Promised Land)

*It was through the covenant that God would keep his word. (Send a Redeemer-Christ)

The word *covenant* is a divinely initiated commitment between God and His people. At the heart is the idea "to cover."

The reason you need to understand covenant, is because God operates according to the agreements he makes through a covenant. Noah. Abraham. David. New Covenant.

Let me focus and feature your attention on the God's covenant with Noah. You build an ark. You will be safe. You trust Christ and get into the ark of Christ's forgiveness through faith, and you will be safe.

Covenants are powerful. Covenants are personal. Covenants are permanent. God made a covenant with his people that they would possess a land of Promise. The Promised Land. Israel. Palestine.

A covenant of land given by God to his people would be powerful, personal and permanent.

Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; he is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love him and keep his commandments. (Duet 7:9-NIV)

When people of faith read the Bible, they understand the intrinsic connection between the Jewish people and the land of Israel. In fact, as we note in the Bible, there are over 1,000 verses in the Hebrew Bible connecting the Jewish people with the land of Israel.

A covenant is like holding an umbrella over your head when it is raining, the umbrella does not stop it from raining, it just stops it from raining on YOU! Because it provides a covering.

Covenants provide a covering. This allows God to step into any situation because (healing, deliverance, financial, marital), two parties have entered into a covenant. Covenants are kingdom mechanisms by which God will faithfully operate in your life.

If you have accepted Jesus Christ, you are a part of the New Covenant - because of Jesus sacrificial life and death, and resurrection, rapture and return.

God tells us that she is your wife by covenant. So, you only need to understand one word. Marriage is covenant. More than a contract.

*¹⁴ Make for yourself an ark of cypress wood. Make rooms in the ark and **cover it** (this is the same word for redemption in the NT, kaphar), with pitch inside and out. ¹⁷ I am about to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy from under the sky all the living creatures that have the breath of life in them. Everything that is on the earth will die, ¹⁸ but I will confirm my covenant with you. You will enter the ark—you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (Genesis 6-NET)*

Now, we have defined the covenant - in the weeks to come we are going define how it works. And I have given you a peek at what we are in store for.

God designed marriage covenants to mirror His image.

Then God said, *“Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.”* (Genesis 1:26-NIV)

God designed marriage covenants to bless us with a spouse.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. (Genesis 2:20b-NIV)

God designed marriage covenants to clarify our responsibilities of love and respect.

³³ *However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband.* (Ephesians 5:33-NIV)