

Malachi sermon – Malachi 1:1-5 – God loves us

1. What love is this? [*Malachi 1:1-5*]
2. Hallowed be your name [*Malachi 1:6-2:9*]
3. Breaking faith [*Malachi 2:10-16*]
4. Ready for justice [*Malachi 2:17-3:18*]
5. The dawn of that day [*Malachi 4*]

In the past 2 weeks we've had 2 very interesting and helpful talks on Prayer and Heaven. If you were away or want to listen to the talks again they are on the church website. All the talks are on the church website in Questions are really important aren't they? A minister decided that a visual demonstration would add emphasis to his Sunday sermon. Four worms were placed into four separate jars. The first worm was put into a container of alcohol. The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke. The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup. The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil. At the end of his talk the minister reported the following results: The first worm in alcohol Dead. The second worm in cigarette smoke . . Dead! The third worm in chocolate syrup..dead! The fourth worm in good clean soil...alive! So the minister asked the congregation; "So my friends, what did you learn from the demonstration?"

Maxine, sitting in the back raised her hand and said, "As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!!" That pretty much ended the service.

So I need to be careful what questions I ask. This is just a funny story but we have a lot of questions these days don't we: Like

- *When will the threat of coronavirus be over?*
- *What's the right course of action to take in the meantime?*
- *When, if ever, will things return to normal?*
- *Should we wear face masks in church, at the shops, at work?*
- *Should our groups meet online or in homes?*
- No easy answers for all of these.

The book of Malachi is a series of statements and questions in the 55 verses of the book. God makes a statement and then the people question it. Do you really love us God? How have we gone against you? The questions doubt God's word and the prophet Malachi gives the people God's answers to their questions. The book of Malachi is very short and 85% of it is just God's word to his people.

In fact the very first verse says very clearly what this book is all about. How does it start – "A prophecy: the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi." These words that we are going to think about over the next 4 weeks are God's word to us. Isn't it tragic to see married couples when they have stopped listening to each other? Or frustrating to be in a workplace in which people don't listen to each other? Isn't it sad when politicians just repeat their formulas and don't listen anymore? And it's distressing for us isn't it when our friends don't hear what we are saying to them?

All of these things are very sad. But it is even more tragic when people don't listen to God's words to them. It's easier to speak than to listen. It's easier to speak to God than to listen to God. The words of Malachi were the words of God for as we know from 2 Peter 2:1 'no prophecy ever came by human will, but men carried along by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.' These are the words of God given to Malachi – the whole of Malachi is the word of God so we need to listen.

Before we look at the first words that God speaks I want to give a little background. This is Dave Newmarch's 5min overview of the Old Testament. Because Malachi is speaking at the back end of the OT – so what was he remembering as he writes down God's words. Here we go:

The united nation of Israel split into two kingdoms after Solomon died. The northern kingdom was made up of the majority of the Israelite tribes, and it retained the name 'Israel'. It set up a new capital for itself in Samaria and was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The southern kingdom, made up of the tribes of Judah and Benjamin, remained in Jerusalem and was known as Judah. By the time of Obadiah, the northern kingdom no longer existed, and the term 'Israel' now generally referred to the southern kingdom, Judah.

These verses 2-5 are tough verses. They are all about the doctrine of God's free and sovereign electing love, and its counterpart in God's passing over others leaving them to sin and condemnation. It's a hard doctrine for us to wrap our minds around and yet it is here, clearly spelt out by God in no uncertain terms. How can a loving God, seemingly reject some and choose others. Remember that God is speaking here to the Israelite people, a people that had become skeptical, careless, indifferent, disobedient to his word. To this people Malachi preaches the truth of God's free and sovereign electing love in terms more bold and more unmistakable than anywhere else in the Old Testament.

These truths are not only designed by God for the comfort and courage of the mature; they are also designed to shock the presumption and the flippancy of careless Christians—Christians whose grasp of the love of God is so shallow that it makes them careless and casual and even presumptuous in his presence.

When God said in verse 2, "I have loved you, says the Lord," the Israelites respond skeptically, "How have you loved us?" Remember that the people aren't literally saying this. God is actually saying this is what you are saying. On the outside the people are probably doing their religious activities, their sacrifices, their prayers, all the right rituals. But inside there is a question. We've been back here in our land for 100 years now, but you haven't restored us to our former glory. We're still being controlled by the Persians, our temple is small. You haven't kept your part of the bargain, God. You don't really love us.

So God's response is, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau."

God's Answer

Now what sort of answer is this? The descendants of Jacob have asked, "How have you loved us?" How is it an answer to say, "Jacob I loved, Esau I hated"?

Well there's that little question, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" What does that mean? Why did God ask that? He asked it because he knew that the answer to that question contained the key to the essence of his love.

What is the answer? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? The answer is yes. In fact as every Israelite knew, Esau was not only Jacob's brother, he was his twin brother, conceived in the womb of Rebecca by their father Isaac, who was Abraham's son. Jacob and Esau were twins. And not only were they twins, Esau was the elder, which means that by all customary rights and privileges he would be the main heir of the father's blessings.

Now what is the point of saying, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" The point is this: Based on what you and Esau were in yourselves I could just as easily have chosen Esau as you. Isn't he your brother? Weren't you twins? Isn't he in fact your elder? But I chose you, and passed him by. It took the people

back to the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 7:7,8 as he speaks to the Israelites at Mt Sinai when he renewed the covenant with his people – “GOD wasn’t attracted to you and didn’t choose you because you were big and important—the fact is, there was almost nothing to you. He did it out of sheer love, keeping the promise he made to your ancestors. GOD stepped in and mightily bought you back out of that world of slavery, freed you from the iron grip of Pharaoh king of Egypt”. – The Message

So we read in v.3& 4 that Edom, the nation of the people called Edomites, who were the descendants of Esau are going to feel God’s wrath. Edom was oppressed by Babylon in the same way as was Judah. However, Edom was not the object of God’s electing love, God did not choose them unlike the descendants of Jacob which was Israel. Though the earthly destiny of the two nations appeared to be very similar, a vast gulf separated them. Both were descendants of Abraham, but Israel was chosen by God, and Edom was not. Both Israel and Edom deserved god’s wrath or punishment and judgement. Indeed, Israel perhaps deserved even more judgement, because of its greater privileges; for greater blessing brings greater responsibility and so greater judgement. Both were under God’s wrath and hatred because of their sin; but in Israel’s case God covered his wrath with his mercy, and in Edom’s case, he did not. It wasn’t that Jacob deserved better treatment than Esau, or that God’s people deserved better treatment than the Edomites. It was the case that God has decided to set his love on undeserving Israel, and to continue that covenant love to his own people. An outsider might see very little difference between Israel and Edom, but those who have heard the word of God know that there is a great difference between them.

So is it right for God to judge Edom? Well, yes, because they are characterized by wickedness: they are the wicked country.(v.4) But wasn’t Israel wicked as well? Yes, but God has mercy on Israel, and so the holy God has made his people holy. God is free to act in mercy. And free to give mercy to those whom he chooses. This destruction of Edom will actually be a sign of hope for Israel. It is not that Israel is safe from attack and defeat; it is that as they see Edom being defeated, that Israel, taught by God through his prophets will see a sign of hope, Edom’s defeat is a reminder of God’s mercy on them, and a sign of the future judgement. They should be judged in the same way but God is being merciful to them though they don’t deserve it. And also the fact is that the Lord God is not just a local God. He is the judge of all the earth, and all the nations, he is great beyond and above the borders of Israel. And Israel’s continued existence is a reminder of God’s grace and love in making them his holy people.

All this shows that God’s love is true: **I have loved you**. God’s people should know that they are loved by God; individual believers should know that God loves his people; and the world should know that God loves his people. And the convincing sign of God’s love is that he has not dealt with us according to our sins but according to his mercy, that in his wrath, he has remembered his mercy. The only escape from the wrath of the Lamb, is to find our refuge in the blood of the slaughtered lamb. And the church today, like the church in Malachi’s day, is saved only by God’s mercy.

Do you find this language of love and hate hard to accept? Remember that Jesus used this language in a similar way when he said, “Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14:26)

So does God love the church? Does God love me? If we try to answer these questions in terms of how we feel, or in terms of how blessed we are in the way that God has met our needs or desires, or in terms of comparing ourselves with others, we may at times doubt God’s love. The overwhelming and convincing proof of God’s love is that he has not dealt with us as our sin deserves, but has had mercy on us in Christ Jesus and his death. So, through the sacrifice of Christ he has set the judgement and wrath that we deserve aside from us, and has clothed us in Christ’s righteousness. He has not held our sins against us, but accepts us in his beloved Son: as Christ took our sins, so we receive his righteousness. This is God’s amazing grace to his people in general and to each one of them individually. This is the convincing sign of God’s love. We think that we will make God appear more loving by setting aside his wrath and judgement; in fact if we do this we obscure God’s love,

and make ourselves depend on our feelings and circumstances, and so more vulnerable to doubts and despair.

If we assess God's love by how he meets our needs, then our greedy hearts will always find him wanting. If we assess God's love by his mercy in saving us from the death, judgement and hell that we by nature and by actions deserve, then we will constantly marvel at his amazing love and amazing grace.

This is a really important issue for us as we think about the meaning of the death of Christ. We often think of Jesus as saving us from needs and problems that are central to our own concerns. We praise Jesus that he has saved us from failure, futility, loneliness, lack of meaning or lack of joy. We praise Jesus that he has loved us, and revealed the love of God. However, we can easily miss the main point of our salvation: Christ has saved us from God's just judgment. Christ shows us the love of God, and God shows us his love in Christ, in that Christ came for unworthy people, God's enemies, ungodly sinners, dead in our sins, and that Christ laid down his life as a sacrifice, and rose again to make us alive with him. The amazing thing is that the more we know the wrath of god, the more we will marvel at his merciful love, his grace to us in Jesus.

Rob challenged us last week – how much do we desire heaven? The challenge this week – how much do we desire to really know God's love and live in that and treasure that. Let's get into God's word and discover more and more about God's love; let's reflect on all that God has done for us in Jesus on the cross, but also everyday in the everyday things of life.