

Malachi 1:1-5

Please stand for the reading of God's Word

[1] The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

[2] "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob [3] but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." [4] If Edom says, "We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins," the LORD of hosts says, "They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.'" [5] Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!"

Give the context of the book of Malachi and then walk through this short passage.

Malachi was the last prophet chronologically. In the Biblical timeline, it will be at least 400 years of silence from God before the arrival of John: prophet Elijah to come. Malachi concludes with this "Elijah the prophet will come before judgement" and Jesus connects that for his disciples. Debate about whether the book is technically anonymous, *Hebrew for messenger*, and we are not given details of his family or location – like you would get with Zephaniah or Micah. Habakkuk and Nahum are similar, so it is not uncommon to the minor prophets.

We could date it sometime after the ending of the Babylonian exile and also following the events of Ezra-Nehemiah, where they struggle to rebuild Jerusalem's walls and temple. It is possible that almost 100 years have passed since then – Walls restored, Temple rebuilt, Priesthood reconstituted, and people are marrying – life has returned to normal for Israel. However, all is not well. The rebukes that God will give them through Malachi are that the people are Dishonoring God, the Priest are Corrupt, and that they're essentially trying to replace true worship with empty ritual and emotionalism. Let's pause and look at some of the issues in Israel. I want to look at this other things, so that you can see them as symptomatic of the deeper issue. The Lord loves them and has clearly proved it, but they don't believe God loves them and they are upset about. They are convinced life would be very different, if the Lord loved them – so, let's turn in the book of Malachi and look at those things:

1:10-**Dishonoring** the Lord as King in Worship. It's got so bad they would be better off completely close up shop. God is not accepting their sacrifices because there are giving junk instead of what they are supposed to give. We don't serve moldy bread for Supper. You are gonna find a couch on the side of the road and gift it to the church – can I get a donation receipt? They are bringing as "first fruits" to the church stuff that would be rejected on sight

at Goodwill. Similar to this, 3:8 they are robbing God of other tithes and offerings that they should also be bringing. In my former denomination, they did an extensive, multi-year study of giving at over 2,500 churches and estimated that average giving was at 1% of earnings per active household. Along with this, they are dishonoring the Lord because they no longer fear him – 3:5. Now days, it is not uncommon to hear preaching or teaching that attempts to convince you that you no longer have a need to fear God- usually results in no repentance. If you really believe that, you should apply it by making sure your own children have no need to respect or fear you about anything ever. If you love them, they'll love you back. That should be enough.

2:8 – Bad priests/**leadership** are a very large part of the problem. They're corrupt. They're showing partiality to their people and causing many to stumble in the things they are teaching – 2:7 explains what they should've been doing. It's one thing to neglect teaching on certain things – I am sure we have all had the experience of that when we've heard a preacher and looked at our Bibles and then listened again and been: Is he just gonna ignore most of Ephesians chapter 1? For example, in the passage in front of us, teaching that neglects the truth would sound like this – Well, we don't really know what God's hatred means in this passage. It's a mystery and so we are just going to focus on what the Bible says about his love. Not mention it at all and hope you don't notice. ** No, the whole book of Malachi is a rebuke to the people the Lord loves, because he will not tolerate them doing the things He hates. Now, teaching that is actively causing many to stumble would sound like this – What this passage really means is that the Lord loved Jacob and simply loved Esau less than he loved Jacob, but they just didn't have a good way to communicate that in the original Hebrew – that I hope you don't know how to translate. God just wants his people to recognize how much he loves them, so that they will love others like God loves them. ** Really? God is going to devote the country from the line of Esau (Edom) to destruction and if they try to rebuild he is going to tear it down again and he will be angry with them forever. Does that sound like something you love less? I love mustard a little less than I love Mayo, but I am not going on the warpath to see that mustard is forever devoted to destruction. Later in 2:17, we will read that people are calling evil - good and good-evil. These are priests that are supporting statements like 3:14 – pointless to serve God. It's a vain thing to serve the Lord, because you will get no practical benefit out of it.

2:13 – **Emotionalism** is used as an attempt to force God's action and, it would seem, soothe the conscience of the one who feels like God is rejecting them and their offering. Well, God is rejecting their offering because they are not bringing what the Lord asked for in the first place. It's very similar to what Cain did- he moans and cries when God does not receive his offering. Also, he moans and cries when he kills his brother and

doesn't like the just punishment God hands him. This is a view that sees God as a genie in the sky or, probably more accurately, the soft and easy uncle who never has anything to say good or bad, and will never say no to you after you start crying. They failed to see that they had a problem with their Faith.

It is to these people that the opening words of Malachi come – “I have loved you...” And, in the rhetorical back and forth that Malachi uses, the people immediately dispute this claim. This is not a good-faith, sincere question. We can appropriately read it as angry, embittered, and argumentative. This is exactly the kind of response we can expect from people that no longer fear God, prefer to sit under corrupt leadership, and replace true worship with emotionalism. We can break it down a little further, because there is a twisted logic to their temptation and sin – based on a lie about the LORD. Since God doesn't really love us, we are free to treat holy things with contempt and keep everything good that is ours. Since God doesn't really love us, we will gravitate to those priests that permit whatever behavior or lifestyle I feel entitled to as consolation for 'no love.' Since God doesn't really love me, I'll utilize these rituals and my emotions to get what I feel entitled to from this same God. This will then justify my belief about God's love when I don't get what I asked for.

The LORD's response back is profound. This word for love is ahav – the same used by the writer of Genesis to communicate Jacob's intense love for Rachel. It is the most general and still covers meanings from hesed -typical in psalms and dod – used in Isaiah and Ezekiel. Most commonly, it conveys parental love and loyalty. This fits the context exactly, God is treating them like his children. God doesn't give up on His People. They didn't start this relationship and they don't have permission to end it or the ability to end it. It's the spiritual equivalent of a four-year old saying they hate you and they're gonna run away.

In the Lord communicating that he has love them, does not convey how he simply feels about them in that moment. There is not an appeal to the wonderful, future plans that God has for them. There is no hint of the sentimental. The LORD's answer is in direct relationship to real people and how his love for one and hatred for the other unfolded in history. It is past-tense. God points to what has already been done and the implications are rooted in a Covenant the LORD has established and kept for many generations so far. Malachi is roughly 400 BC – Jacob and Esau were born in 2000 BC. I cannot remember the last time I've ever heard a politician or influencer go back 1600 years to reference our debt to Boethius or Augustine for our Western Republic and it's shared values. We're surprised if they talk about George Washington. Yet, it is the evidence of God's love for His people. It is in the history of what the Sovereign God has accomplished for His people.

It displays itself as a steadfast commitment to them, despite their present sins. The Lord is calling them to repentance, warning them. God is utterly devoted to them and has dedicated history to the end of making them His People, causing them to look like His People in holiness. 3:18 highlights this end. The result is evident – Jacob’s line exists behind rebuilt walls with a rebuilt temple and Esau’s line are bones being naved on by jackals in a wasteland that will never be inhabited by them again.

Why is Jacob loved and Esau hated?

- Who’s more alike than twin brothers? The Lord leads with that as a part of His answer back to the people. They are literally twins, same stock. Not identical but...for nine months when Rebecca was pregnant – she ate and they both were nourished. One kicked and she couldn’t tell the difference. They were both raised together and were merely the same sort of different kind of sinner. Esau was the 1st born and naturally entitled to greater privileges and inheritance. Jacob was a sneaky, deceiver and Esau was a vengeful, hothead. If you are just doing a straight through Bible reading plan like me-you’ll be in Genesis 25 soon. Ask yourself if Jacob is morally superior to Esau and see how the text answers you back. The best answer we can give is God loved Jacob because God chose to love Jacob. If you are a Christian, that is the best answer you can give. I don’t know. However, it does make something very clear to us about the Lord’s love for His People. It is not based on the character or actions of His People.
 - A pastor named G. Campbell Morgan gave this equation to describe and separate typical love from God’s electing love. Human love is Person A - Joe- loves person B -Jane- because of something about Person B. Joe loves Jane’s smile, eyes, sense of humor, how she cares about him, the whole package, whatever. It is a conditional love with expectation of shared unity, keeping the peace, and reciprocation to best sustain it, because Jane loves Joe in the same way. God’s love is Person A – the Lord – loves person B – His people- because of something about Person A – the Lord. God’s steadfast love to His People is based on God’s steadfast love – The LORD’s character, will, devotion, and action on behalf of His People is not directed or caused by His People.
 - Do you understand this same love has been displayed to you in history through the person and work of Christ. Before you were born and had done neither anything good or bad, that God’s purpose of election might stand, He loved you and sent His Son that at the appointed time to live and die for you. Are you looking to redemptive history to see the evidence of God’s love for you? Jared preached an excellent sermon on temptation

and it's evil last week – applying it to this: Arguing against God about His love for you normally takes the form of, I want God to give me a life that is cushy, comfortable, and carefree internally (feel nice) and externally (have nice). Instead we should want to engage in the life God has given us

We have all breathed in the air of the modern-evangelical church and it is in your lungs whether you want it there or not. I am tempted to dismiss and dispute God's love at any point when something doesn't go my way -I want to approach God on my own terms and the Bible gives me absolutely no ability to do that at any point, ever. I should be afraid of such a thought. This is the other side of faith that churches don't really like to promote. When God redeems you, God has right over you and the entirety of your life. It is not exaggerating when it says you are a slave of Christ – So, it is the Lord's very love for me that will not permit me to dishonor His Holy Name and replace true worship with psycho-pop, limp-wristed emotionalism. God takes no pleasure in that.

If you have this secure love from God because of his faithfulness to the Covenant he has made, you will have joy in unbearable circumstances and the daily resolution to commit to gradually changing by the Spirit's power. If God's love is conditioned on you being different, you will beg (have a tantrum) for better circumstances that you imagine will allow you to somehow experience or have God's love. If God's love is conditioned on anything you are able to do, you better become perfect right now, tonight, tomorrow morning at the latest. Thank God that his love toward his people has everything to do with His character and nothing to do with mine.

-Esau have I hated. Throughout Malachi, the LORD will convey what his love provides and does among His people. Yet, he leads with what his hatred has done against Esau and his descendants. God also includes what he will do to Edom in the future and the surrounding world.

-Laid waste his hill country (Desolation) – They were there and now they are gone.

-If they rebuilt anything, the Lord commits to tear it down again

-They will receive two labels – wicked country and people that God is angry with forever

Notice the repetition of the LORD of hosts (armies). God is showing up in force to tear down wicked and evil things. This will come to a resolution in Mal 4:1-3.

The history behind Edom is recounted in Numbers chapter 20 – Israel is freed from Egyptian captivity (hardship and difficulty) and they need to pass through Edom's territory. Edom not only refused this request but threatens to come out with their army and fight Israel if they do not move on. After generations have passed, they still want Jacob's blood.

-Moses calls them brother, but they refuse this natural kinship.

-Moses asks for mercy because of their hardship, but they show no mercy.

-Moses even offers to pay for passage, but they will not be reasonable.

Esau has gotten what is coming to him. God's judgement is perfect. Therefore, any hatred or anger that fuels it is likewise perfect. They refused though Israel sought for peace and kinship. They'll have no excuse when God's judgement comes. We can say the same of the institutions and organizations of man that behave the same way, for God is not mocked.

James 2:12-13 [12] So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. [13] For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

There are things that our world is fine hating and even expects you to hate them all the same. It is deemed hateful not to affirm and celebrate someone's sexual orientation. It is deemed hateful to not respect and encourage a person's decision, if it is made because they just want to be happy or happier. It is deemed hateful to speak certain parts of the truth of God's Word, because they could make someone uncomfortable or guilty or feel a sense of shame about themselves. You mean God's Word will do what it was designed to do with the Spirit's power working alongside it – don't grieve the Spirit of God as he works by impressing upon the hearts of people the truth of God's Word.

The final verse he: Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!"

God's word promises that you will be witness to this just judgement and, included within that Biblically, restoration of all things. This is the OT equivalent of "Matthew 16:18 I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

CLOSE IN PRAYER