

# God's Unrelenting Love

## Malachi 1:1-5

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*Legacy (Malachi)*

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[livinghopechurch.net](http://livinghopechurch.net)

“The debt was so great, that while man alone owed it, only God could pay it.”  
~ **Anselm**

**Malachi 1:1-5**, “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!”

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to Malachi 1. We are beginning a series in Malachi called “Returning to God’s Love.” I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “God’s Unrelenting Love.”

### **The Prophet & Malachi Today**

Many might wonder what a 2,400-year-old book can teach us. In **Romans 15:4** Paul wrote: “whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

Malachi is the last of what are called the 12 **Minor Prophets** of the Old Testament. They are minor only because of their length.

### **The Power of God’s Love**

Spurgeon: “Nothing binds me to my Lord like a strong belief in His changeless love... Thank God you have got a Father that can be angry, but that loves you as much when He is angry as when He smiles upon you.”

God doesn’t just give us a spare corner of His heart. The vast, entire, infinite, unfathomably loving heart of God belongs to you as God’s born again child. Malachi was called to deliver this message of God’s love and favor to a people who were apathetic and blinded.

### **The Role of Prophets in the Old Testament**

Prophets have a very specific role in the Old Testament.

First, prophets were preachers—**divine mailmen**. God would reveal His Word to them and they would publicly proclaim this word to the people unedited. Typically, they were chosen to

admonish, reprove, denounce sin, threaten with the terrors of judgment, and call people to repentance. This made them very unpopular.

Second, prophets were watchmen—**divine guards**. They guarded God's honor by warning against poor political decisions, the dangers of idolatry, false worship, and the worthlessness of religiosity.

Third, prophets were also predictors—**divine future-tellers**. In addition to preaching and watching, prophets announced future judgments, deliverance, and foretold of the coming Messiah and His kingdom. From the prophecy of Malachi, we can expect to hear a call to repent from our sin, a warning against our idolatry, and a promise that our savior Jesus Christ saves.

### The Questions & Malachi

As a prophet, Malachi was a man chosen to represent God and speak for God. Malachi's prophecy consists of a series of easy questions God answers. These questions come from the minds of the people responding to some of God's confrontations like:

"I love you. Yet you have despised my name. You have polluted my covenant. You have wearied me with your complaints. You have robbed me. You have spoken against me." So Israel responds... All of Israel's questions, or arguments, begin with HOW...

- HOW have you loved us?
- HOW have we despised your name?
- HOW have we tired you out with our complaining?
- HOW have we spoken out against you?
- HOW shall we ever return to you?

These people believe they have been faithful, but God has let them down. They are truly blinded by their own spiritual pride. Instead of humbly accepting God's corrections, they judge God, not with their mouths, but in the depths of their hearts—just like us.

## I. We need to **Declare** God's Love from His Word (Mal 1:1-2a).

### A Burden of Love

Here we have a people who did not feel loved by God. But they needed to know God loved them no matter what the circumstances were in their lives.

You need to know God loves you no matter what your emotions are telling you. You are loved. **Malachi 1:1-2a**, "The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. 2 "I have loved you," says the Lord." An unknown prophet named Malachi receives a Word from the Lord called an oracle, literally translated "the burden" of the LORD. It is called a burden because there is weightiness to the message of this little book. It is a message intended to be heavy enough to break the human heart.

The message of Malachi is a call for true worship. "I love you" God says. You were created to love Me. Worship me. Count my love as better than life. In order to make worshippers, God reveals His heart. "I have loved you!"

### God's Covenant People

"I have loved you." God is not only describing His nature as a God who is love; He is declaring His eternal disposition toward His covenant people. "For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth" (Deut 7:6).

Wow, this is how I am seen by God through the merits of Christ! He loves me!

### They Don't Believe God Loves Them

Astonishingly, the people responded: 'In what way have you loved us?' (v. 2).

The love of God for his people is so great that it would seem to be beyond question, but these people did question it. And many are questioning it today. They look beyond a thousand blessings to see one difficulty, and on the basis of that they doubt the love of God.

Refusing to let the doubt of Israel go unanswered, the Lord points to three phases of his love for them.<sup>1</sup>

### A Hundred Years Has Passed

Why do they feel this way (not loved by God)? A hundred years has passed since the temple has been rebuilt and worship resumed. It has been 100 years since through Zechariah, God promised to return to Jerusalem, to dwell in the city, to defend the city, to institute peace and bring prosperity. God promised fruitfulness. God promised **safety**. God promised **prosperity**. God even promised **respect** from the world saying.

**Zech. 8:20-23**, "Thus says the LORD of hosts: Peoples shall yet come, even the inhabitants of many cities. 21 The inhabitants of one city shall go to another, saying, 'Let us go at once to entreat the favor of the LORD and to seek the LORD of hosts; I myself am going.' 22 Many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem and to entreat the favor of the LORD. 23 Thus says the LORD of hosts: In those days ten men from the nations of every tongue shall take hold of the robe of a Jew, saying, 'Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.'"

They have not experienced any of these things. The promises of God have not been realized in the time or way that they expected, therefore, God does not love them (in their eyes). Their families are suffering, they are surrounded by their enemies, they are barely paying their bills, and they are mocked by the surrounding nations. Worship has been restored, but they are under the rule of a foreign king, so they begin to believe that God does not love them.

## II. We need to **Remember** God's Love from our past (Mal 1:2b-3).

**Malachi 1:2b-3**, "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."

Now Jacob and Esau were not only brothers they were twin brothers. Esau was born first and customs dictated that Esau would be the heir of the father's blessings. But that is not what happened.

<sup>1</sup> Ellsworth, R. (2007). *Opening up Malachi* (p. 20). Leominster: Day One Publications.

Genesis 25 records how **Jacob tricked Esau** into selling him his birthright for a bowl of soup. Through deception, Jacob receives his father's blessing. And that is not the last time Jacob swindles someone. He proves himself to be a pretty rotten guy. Yet, God blessed Him. God was not manipulated into blessing as a result of Jacob's deception. On the contrary, the Bible says:

**Rom 9:9-13**, "For this is what the promise said: 'About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.' 10 And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, 11 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls— 12 she was told, 'The older will serve the younger.' 13 As it is written, 'Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.'"

### God's Love is Not Fair

It doesn't seem fair! That's right!

The fact that they were God's people was proof enough of his love! For them to be his people, they had to be chosen from among others and those others had to be rejected.

The Lord reminds them of this by calling them to think about their father Jacob and his brother Esau.

How is it that Israel was in a special covenant relationship with God? It was because the Lord had made a choice. He chose Jacob and rejected Esau!<sup>2</sup>

The Lord's statement that he 'hated' Esau has caused no small amount of consternation among Bible students. What does it mean?

### Spurgeon

A woman once said to Mr. Spurgeon, 'I cannot understand why God should say that He hated Esau.' 'That,' Spurgeon replied, 'is not my difficulty, madam. My trouble is to understand how God could love Jacob.'"<sup>3</sup>

**Mal. 1:3**, "Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." God's love for Jacob (Israel) in the past had also been borne out by his providential care of her. While he had blessed her with the land of Canaan—'flowing with milk and honey'—the descendants of Esau (Edom) had been left without such a land.<sup>4</sup>

### God's Sovereign Grace

We are loved by God's sovereign choice. He could just as easily have chosen Esau—their twin brother who has more "right" than they do. But God says, "I chose you, and passed him by". How has God loved Israel? God's answer is not what we expect. God says, He has lovingly shown mercy. He has loved them unconditionally (based on God's choice), undeservedly (sinful and disobedient), and in a way that is unfailing and unrelenting (assured but not yet).

God loves us and saved us not based on anything in us!

## Why Don't I Feel Loved?

Why don't I feel loved? What does this mean for us? As yourself, not if, but *when* you don't feel/felt loved by God? When do we begin to doubt the promises of the Lord? We may not say it

<sup>2</sup> Ellsworth, R. (2007). Opening up Malachi (pp. 20–21). Leominster: Day One Publications.

<sup>3</sup> William Newell in his commentary on Romans.

<sup>4</sup> Ellsworth, 21.

out loud, but perhaps that is really how we feel expectations of about what we thought God was going to do are not met. When do we read verses like Romans 8.28 which declare that God purposes all things for good and think, "whatever!?" The better question is: What could happen to cause you to doubt God's love?

### **Suffering and Sin**

Suffering and sin. Israel is hurting physically, emotionally, financially, materially, and in many other ways. Life is hard and somewhat hopeless—we will see that this doesn't result in anger but apathy in their relationship with God. Suffering, whether it is a major devastation or a minor disillusionment, has the power to lead us to doubt God's love. How do I know when I am doubting God's love? Generally, I believe we begin to disbelieve three things:

1. We falsely believe that God is not *present* in our pain—He is not personally involved, does not care.
2. We do not believe that God is in *control* of our pain – He is not strong enough to stop it.
3. We do not believe He is *good* (esp. if He is present and in control)—He is not loving enough to give us something better.
4. We try to *control our pain* outside the will of God (sin).

### **Apathetic Worship**

All of this leads to apathetic worship. Everyone has personal thresholds, some spoken and others unspoken, that lead to disbelief in God's love. Sometimes it is learning about thousands gassed in Syria, or 13 people getting shot at a Navy base, or a faithful friend dying of cancer, or not having money to pay your bills, or losing your job, or a miscarriage, or some other event that leaves us in state of hopelessness. We find it difficult to find God, difficult trust God, and almost impossible to worship God in our despair.

### **The Cross of Jesus**

Instead, look to the cross of Jesus. How has God demonstrated his love? He has done so by setting his heart on all believers before the world began. He chose them to be his own (Eph. 1:4–6).

But we cannot peer into the misty councils of eternity to see the electing love of God. So where do we look? To the cross of Jesus Christ! As we look there, we must each exclaim: God loved me so much that he nailed his Son to that cross to bear the penalty for my sins.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Cross Proves God's Love**

Sometimes our circumstances are such that we find ourselves wondering if God truly loves us, and the devil is ever eager to tell us that he does not. Our circumstances prove it! But the wise believer points the devil to the cross and says, 'There is where God proved his love for me, and my circumstances, whatever they mean, can never mean that God does not love me.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

### Seeing the Suffering of Christ

Until we can see the love of God in the suffering of Christ, we will continue to doubt God's presence, power, and love when we suffer.

1. **In Christ we see that God is present in our sufferings.** God is not distant from our human experience—which is full of suffering. He enters into our suffering and lives for 33 years as a man, experiencing the hardship of life. And even though he was sinless, obeying and worshipping perfectly, He experienced temptation, sorrow, disrespect, poverty, rejection, mockery, abuse, and death. Jesus dwells with sinners.

2. **In Christ we see that God is in control of our suffering.** What we have, and what we don't have, is from God. The hard life and the tragic death of Jesus did not surprise God, it was his plan. **Acts 2:23**, "This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men." Though Jesus suffered at the hands of Romans, Jews, even family and friends, God was always in control. Jesus willingly suffered for sinners. God was in control of Jesus' suffering, and He's in control of yours.

3. **In the cross of Christ, we see that God is good in our suffering.** You will never believe that God loves you until you see the mercy that God has shown you through love of Jesus Christ. God doesn't give us what we deserve, but **he does give what we deserve to someone else**—His own Son. To preserve His pure justice, sin must be punished. But to proclaim His love, sinners must be forgiven. God shows us mercy by sending His Son to die in our place. Until you can see that there is one who proved eternally loving—you'll always question God's love. Jesus dies for sinners.

### III. We need to **Rejoice** in God's Love in the present (Mal 1:3-4).

**Mal 1:3-4**, "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.'"

Both the descendants of Jacob (Israel) and Esau (Edom) had experienced tough times. Israel had spent seventy years in captivity in Babylon, and Edom had been invaded by the Nabateans and forced from their land to take refuge south of Judah.

But while God, in his love for Israel, was in the process of enabling Israel to rebuild her nation, he was doing no such thing for Edom. God's judgement was continuing to rest on Edom because of her refusal to see his grace at work in the life of Israel and to submit to it. That refusal revealed Edom to be a very wicked nation and caused the Lord to have indignation against her.

While God's love is most definitely a thing He demonstrated in the past, it is not only in the past. Every child of God drinks from the fountain of his love every day.

Ephesians 1:3 says we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in heavenly places in Christ. What are some of those blessings in the present that cannot be undone by the trials of the present?

- The truths of his Word, the joys of fellowship with his people
- The beauties of his worship

- The assurance of his presence
- Daily expressions of his ongoing love
- His continuing willingness to forgive
- His guidance
- His readiness to hear our prayers
- His sustaining care.

These things, richly enjoyed by the people of God, are not experienced by those who do not share their faith.<sup>7</sup>

#### IV. We need to **Trust** God's Love for the future (Mal 1:5).

**Mal 1:5**, "Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!""

This verse holds before Israel the coming of a better day. When would this better day come? Some think it refers to the time of the **Maccabean dynasty** when the Jews would successfully resist the power of the **Grecian Empire** and regain some of their former glory.

But the ultimate fulfilment of this promise must be found in the Lord Jesus Christ. Through his redeeming work, he has caused us to say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!""

The very fact that millions attend church each week to honor Christ constitutes proof that this promise has been and is being fulfilled. But the promise is going to reach its final fulfilment when the heavenly host and the redeemed of all ages gather round the throne of God in praise for Christ's redemption (Rev. 5). That will be as far beyond the borders of Israel as one can get! That will also be a day when the people of God 'shall see' and 'shall say.' A day of seeing and saying! What will they see? There will be so much to see in eternal glory, but the most impressive of all is the seeing of the face of Christ (Rev. 22:4). And the seeing of our Redeemer will surely cause the redeemed to say:

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches  
and wisdom,  
And strength, and honor and  
glory and blessing!"  
(Rev. 5:12).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ellsworth, 22-23.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 23-24.