

The Faithful God Loves His Faithless People

Malachi 1:1-5

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INTRODUCTION

God's people are not immune to discouragement. I expect that I don't have to defend that statement to you. Despite all the blessings of salvation—all the privileges of fellowship and communion with God and His people—each one of us would acknowledge (if we've walked with Christ for any significant length of time) that there are times when disappointment and discouragement and sometimes even disillusionment get the better of us. This is not a perfect world. We still labor under the curse of sin—externally where sin has plagued the world with brokenness and futility, and internally, as the remaining sin in our flesh causes a perpetual war within. God's people are not immune to discouragement.

We're not even immune to discouragement with God Himself. As truly ludicrous as that is, it's true, isn't it? Because disappointment with our circumstances is disappointment with the God who is the author and governor of all our circumstances. No event, no circumstance, no aspect of our lives whatsoever falls outside the purview of God's absolute sovereignty and meticulous providence! And so in times of sustained disappointment, in seasons of discouragement—when it seems like you've ordered your own life according to God's commandments and yet the promises of blessing that attend obedience just simply don't seem to materialize—we can be tempted to become disillusioned—even with God Himself.

Maybe you've sought for many years to find a godly spouse. You've done all you can think of to ensure that you are the right person for another Christian, and yet the Lord hasn't yet given the gift of marriage. Maybe you've raised your kids in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and, despite training them up in the way they should go, now that they're adults they reject the Gospel and live in rebellion. Perhaps you've battled against a particular besetting sin, and you hoped, by now, after attending to all the means of grace, that there would be greater progress in sanctification. Or you look at the culture and you see it in absolute chaos. You may be old enough to remember a time when the church's influence on the world seemed strong, and now it seems it's virtually non-existent. In one way or another, you begin to doubt whether God really does keep His promises—whether His Word really is trustworthy. I mean, you know that He does keep His promises, but for some reason, it seems like that's not so in *your* case. And so you become disappointed with God. And you cry out to Him: “What are You doing, God? Where are You? Where is the fulfillment of Your promises?”

And when that happens, it's not like you renounce Christianity. You don't just throw your hands up and say, “That's it! I've had it! I'm going back to the world and living like a pagan!” You know better than that. But you begin to act like that, just a bit. You become a functional unbeliever. You still go through the motions—you come to church, you go to Bible study, you still read your Bible (maybe), you might even still pray. But in all the outward spiritual activity, there's an inward apathy—a lifelessness, a heartlessness—in all your acts of worship.

Well, a similar phenomenon was taking place in Israel in the day of the prophet Malachi. Malachi—along with Haggai and Zechariah—was one of the post-exilic prophets. They ministered after Judah's return from the Babylonian exile in 538

BC. Judah had indeed returned to the land—a remarkable providence of God’s grace and faithfulness. But things weren’t exactly glorious. The returning exiles had numbered only around 150,000 and they’d been reduced to a minor province of the Persian Empire on a strip of land about 20-by-25 miles. When they returned, the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, and the book of Ezra documents the well-organized opposition to rebuild both the temple and the city walls. Things were not easy.

But about twenty years after the return from Babylon, God sent Haggai and Zechariah to speak His word to His people Israel. And by and large their message was one of great promise and encouragement. In Haggai 1:8, the prophet commands Zerubbabel to rebuild Yahweh’s temple, in place of Solomon’s temple that Babylon destroyed. And so Israel went to work. And Ezra tells us, in Ezra chapter 3 verses 10 and 11, that when just the *foundation* of the temple was laid, “the priests stood in their apparel with trumpets, and the Levites, the sons of Asaph, with cymbals. ... They sang, praising and giving thanks to Yahweh, saying, ‘For He is good, for His lovingkindness is upon Israel forever.’ And all the people shouted with a great shout when they praised Yahweh....”

But in the very next verses, Ezra says, in chapter 3 verse 12, that “many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers’ households, the old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice.” Such a curious scene: fanfare and rejoicing and thanksgiving, on the one hand; and yet weeping and wailing and mourning, on the other—so much so that the people couldn’t distinguish the shouts of celebration from the cries of mourning. And Haggai explains why in chapter 2 verse 3. God says to the people, “Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? Does it not seem to you like nothing in

comparison?” It was plain that the temple of Zerubbabel paled in comparison to the splendor and the beauty of Solomon’s temple. And the evident difference between (a) the glory days of the united monarchy under David and Solomon and (b) the little rag-tag tribe of survivors from captivity reminded Judah that they certainly were not what they used to be.

But Yahweh went on to promise in Haggai 2:6 that He would once again **shake the heavens and the earth**, and that **all the nations** would come with their **wealth** and fill the temple of Yahweh with **glory**. And, in verse 9, that “**the latter glory of this house will be greater than the former, ... and in this place I will give**”—shalom, peace, wholeness, rest, security. God says, “You may be weeping for the glory of Solomon’s temple, but I tell you that a day is coming when the glory of the temple in this place will be greater even than Solomon’s!”

And the prophet Zechariah brings this same message of hope! Zechariah 8:2: “**Thus says Yahweh of hosts, I am exceedingly jealous for Zion.**” Verse 3: “**I will return to Zion and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem.**” It will be the City of Truth and the Holy Mountain! Verse 4: “**Old men and old women will again sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each man with his staff in his hand because of age. And the streets of the city will be filled with boys and girls playing in its streets.**” Verse 7: “**Behold, I am going to save My people from the land of the east and from the land of the west; and I will bring them back and they will live in the midst of Jerusalem; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God in truth and righteousness.**”

And in the final verses of Haggai, we find that God’s chosen Servant, the descendent of Zerubbabel, would come and be as Yahweh’s signet ring, in overthrowing the nations and bringing all these promises to pass. “The temple will be magnificent! The city that once lay in rubble and ruins will be filled with people

who survive to old age because of the security of the land! Children will play in the streets! Messiah will come! Israel will be My people, and I will be their God! My covenant promises *will* come to pass in all their glory!”

But Malachi prophesies in the mid- to late-400s BC—somewhere between 60 to 80 years after the rebuilding of the temple and all those glorious promises of God through Haggai and Zechariah. And Judah saw no such Messianic renovation. They were still under the thumb of the Persian empire, whose taxes and tributes kept Judah in economic depression. (Malachi 1:8 speaks of the people’s “**governor**,” a reference to the Persian provincial system.) The land was not yielding produce fruitfully. (Malachi 3:11 speaks of a “**devourer**” that was “**destroy[ing] the fruits of the ground**” as a result of God’s judgment for disobedience.) The shekinah glory of God had not yet filled Zerubbabel’s temple the way that it had in the Tabernacle in Exodus 40, or in Solomon’s temple in 1 Kings 8. Malachi 3:1 speaks of a day when the Lord *will* come to His temple, in the future. But that meant that, in spite of everything Haggai and Zechariah promised, He was not there yet.

The Messiah hadn’t come. Jerusalem hadn’t been restored. The temple wasn’t magnificent. And so on the heels of all of these glorious promises of restoration, Israel began to wonder where God was, and when He was going to fulfill all these great promises. And after years and years of waiting, and hoping, both the priests and the people became disillusioned. One commentator writes, God’s promises “**seemed a cruel mockery. Things had not improved since the final decades of the sixth century. The Messiah had not yet come, and the people had by and large given up trusting God to do anything**” (McComiskey, 1253, 54). We get a glimpse of their attitude in chapter 3 verses 14 and 15, where God gives voice to the

people's complaints: "You have said, 'It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept His charge, and that we have walked in mourning before Yahweh of hosts? So now we call the arrogant blessed; not only are the doers of wickedness built up but they also test God and escape.'" You can hear the disillusionment and disaffection, the jaded cynicism. "What's the point of all this? We rebuilt the city! We rebuilt the temple! We're offering the sacrifices! Where is this promised restoration? All we see are the pagans being built up and blessed!"

God had let them down. He hadn't kept His promises, so they thought. The enemies of righteousness prosper, while those who seek to follow God languish. And so they left off in their devotion to God and to obedience to His commandments. Right at the center of the book, in chapter 2 verse 10, we get a summary of the entire problem: "Why do we deal treacherously each against his brother so as to profane the covenant of our fathers?" Widespread covenant disobedience. The breaking of the covenant law of Moses. Betraying one another and dealing unjustly. The priests were just going through the motions while offering blemished sacrifices (1:6–2:9). In chapter 2:10–16, we learn the people had engaged in widespread divorce, and then intermarried with pagans. They had left off tithes and offerings (chapter 3:7–12). Times were tough, and so rather than giving to God of their firstfruits, they held back their money for themselves.

You see the attitude: Apathy. Indifference. Disillusionment. "God doesn't seem to care about us anymore. Why should we care about Him? If He doesn't keep His Word, why should we worry about keeping His Word?"

And so in this context, God sends the prophet Malachi to rebuke Israel for their faithlessness. And Malachi does this by means of **six disputations**. God comes to

argue with His disaffected people. And each of these disputations all have the same formula: (1) there is an assertion by God, like: “**I have loved you**”; (2) there is Israel’s insolent rejection of God’s declaration: “**But you say, ‘How have You loved us?’**”; and (3) there is God’s response or rebuttal to Israel’s rejection: “**Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?**” We see that formula all throughout the book, structured in six disputations (1:2–5; 1:6–2:9; 2:10–16; 2:17–3:6; 3:7–12; 3:13–4:3).

And so God has come to His disappointed, discouraged, disillusioned people to give voice to their complaints against Him, for what they believe is a failure to keep His promises, and to dispute with them—to engage them in debate, to test their accusations against sound argumentation, and to convict them of their disobedience and unfaithfulness, as well as to prove that His promises have not failed, and that He will keep His covenant unto the glory of His own name.

Dear Christian, if you have ever found yourself disappointed with the circumstances of your life, if you have ever doubted the faithfulness of God’s promises because of it, if you have ever been tempted to blame God because of it, and become lax and apathetic in your devotion to Him, then the message of Malachi is for you. God comes to reason with us, to dispute with us—to expose the wicked reasonings of our hearts, to call us to repentance and faithfulness. But He also comes to restore our souls, to encourage us, to convince us of His own unfailing faithfulness, as well as of His eternal, immutable covenant love for His people.

And as we come to the first five verses of God’s Word to Israel through Malachi this morning, we find that this book of argument and debate and rebuke begins in quite an unexpected way. It begins with a message of love. Let’s read the opening

five verses: “The oracle of the word of Yahweh to Israel through Malachi. ²‘I have loved you,’ says Yahweh. But you say, ‘How have You loved us?’ ‘Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?’ declares Yahweh. ‘Yet I have loved Jacob; ³but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.’ ⁴Though Edom says, ‘We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins’; thus says Yahweh of hosts, ‘They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom Yahweh is indignant forever.’ ⁵Your eyes will see this and you will say, ‘Yahweh be magnified beyond the border of Israel!’”

This introduction to Malachi’s prophecy basically breaks down into **four parts**, each around the theme of God’s faithful love for His faithless people.

I. THE DECLARATION OF GOD’S LOVE (V. 2A)

The first is the **declaration of God’s love**. Verse 2: “‘*I have loved you,*’ says **Yahweh.**” “*I have loved you.*” The verb is in the perfect tense, which speaks of an action that has taken place in the past whose results continue into the present. And the love of God consists in the determinative act of God’s will to benefit His beloved. And so God is not coming to His faithless, disobedient people and saying, “You know, I just think you’re great!” “I know you’re going through a tough time, but I *love* you.” No! It’s not so sentimental or saccharine as that. No, He’s drawing their minds to a very specific act of love, bestowed on them in the past, the results of which continue even into the present day.

And what act of love was that? It was God’s sovereign choice of Israel to be His covenant people—the unconditional election of the descendants of Abraham, Isaac,

and Jacob to be the undeserved heir of God's gracious promises. We can see that in two important passages in the book of Deuteronomy. Turn with me to Deuteronomy chapter 10. Moses is delivering the covenant law to the second generation of Israelites—those who are about to take possession of the land of Canaan. And he says in Deuteronomy 10:14–15: “Behold, to Yahweh your God belong heaven and the highest heavens, the earth and all that is in it. Yet on your fathers did Yahweh *set His affection to love* them, and He *chose* their descendants after them, even you above all peoples, as it is this day.” Notice how Moses uses all those terms synonymously: set affection on, love, and chose. And then turn back a few chapters to Deuteronomy 7, verses 7 and 8. There, Moses says, “Yahweh did not *set His love* on you nor *choose* you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because Yahweh *loved* you and *kept the oath* which He swore to your forefathers....” And you see it here again: “set His love,” “choose,” “loved,” “kept the oath.”

When God comes to Judah in the late 5th-century BC, calls them Jacob, and **declares** that He has loved them, He is referring to this: “I have *chosen* you out from among all the nations of the world! I have set My love on You! I have established My covenant with You! I have made You My people.” One commentator said, “The love of Yahweh is ‘an act of election which makes Israel Yahweh’s child’” (as in Hill, 165). And that’s exactly right. In Hosea chapter 11 and verse 1, God says, “When Israel was a youth I *loved* him, and out of Egypt I *have called My son*.” “I redeemed you out of slavery. I led you through the wilderness. I gave you the land I promised. I set My love upon you, made you My son, and swore on the honor of My own name to bless you forever! I chose you! “I *have loved* you.”

And this ought to move us to worship God for His grace. You see, God *will* rebuke His people for their covenant disobedience, for their divorce and intermarriage with pagans, for the corrupt priesthood and heartless worship, for their oppression of the poor and withholding offerings from God, and even for their insolent accusations against the justice of God. But before He does all that, He begins with a message of reassurance, with a message of Good News, with a **declaration** of His steadfast, loyal, unchanging covenant **love**.

Before He confronts them with holy standard of His law, He comforts them with the gracious promises of the Gospel. “I know you’re under the thumb of the Persians. I know you’re an insignificant province on a small strip of land. I know you think I’ve forgotten My promises to you. But I assure you: I have loved you! I have joined you to Myself! I have put My own name upon you!” Jeremiah 13:11: “**For as the waistband clings to the waist of a man, so I made the whole household of Israel and the whole household of Judah cling to Me, ... that they might be for Me a people, for renown, for praise and for glory.**” “You *will* receive covenant promises! You *will* be a blessing to the nations!” Hosea 11, verses 8 and 9: God says, “**How can I give you up, O Ephraim? How can I surrender you, O Israel? How can I make you like Admah? How can I treat you like Zeboiim? My heart is turned over within Me, All My compassions are kindled. I will not execute My fierce anger; I will not destroy Ephraim again. For I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, And I will not come in wrath.**” “Every rebuke that I will issue to you comes in the context of the truth that you are still My people, and I am still Your God!”

And dear Christian, you are no less covenant-bound to Yahweh than Judah was! In fact, we might say we are even more covenant-bound to Him, because we live in

the age of fulfillment. We partake of the New Covenant, and are united to Messiah the Mediator of that Covenant! And in your disappointment, in your discouragement, in your faithlessness and disobedience, God comes to you first with the Gospel assurance of His steadfast covenant love to you for Christ's sake. "I have loved you, dear people! I have chosen you, in Christ, before the foundation of the world! And My grace *will* bring My promises to pass!" How faithful He is, even to the faithless!

II. THE DISPUTATION OF GOD'S LOVE (V. 2B)

But how does Israel *respond* to this declaration of God's love? It is certainly *not* the response that such lavish grace deserves. That brings us, **secondly**, to the **disputation of God's love**. Look again at verse 2: "**I have loved you,' says Yahweh. But you say, 'How have You loved us?'**"

And that is every bit as disrespectful, insolent, ungrateful, and exasperated as it sounds. One commentator says, this response "**rings with petulance and perversity**" (Craigie, 227). Another says it "**measures the depth of despair, doubt, and cynicism in the restoration community**" (Hill, 163). It really is an astonishing response. It basically indicates that Israel is disputing every aspect of the covenant election that we've just surveyed. These people, who had been brought back from exile into the land, who had seen the temple rebuilt, who had seen the walls of Jerusalem be restored, all on the very *basis* of the covenant love and sovereign election of Yahweh, are *denying* the covenant love and sovereign election of Yahweh.

"*How* have you loved us? Look at us! We're nobodies! We're on a tiny strip of land! We're servants of the Persians! You've cursed our crops! The economy is

terrible! The temple can't compare to Solomon's! There's no glory cloud! No Ark of the Covenant! You've promised restoration and a kingdom but we don't see any of it! Where is this 'covenant love' of Yours?"

Now, be honest with yourselves. Does any of that sound familiar? Would any of you acknowledge that sometimes you are tempted to be so consumed with your circumstances, with the state of the world, with the state of the country, with the state of the church, that you begin to feel sorry for yourself? And all the glorious privileges of divine blessings in Christ just seem far away, to the point that you even begin to question the love and faithfulness of God, who is **abounding in lovingkindness and truth**? This passage counsels you to confess the "**petulance and perversity**" of such a thought—that those thoughts are sinful, that they're unworthy to be thought of such a God, as **the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction**. And if you're there this morning, let this text bring you to repentance.

III. THE DEMONSTRATION OF GOD'S LOVE (VV. 2C–4)

But how does God respond to His people's disputation of His love? Well, that brings us, **number three**, to the **demonstration of God's love**. Look again at verse 2: "**How have You loved us? 'Was not Esau Jacob's brother?' declares Yahweh. 'Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau.'**"

God **demonstrates** His assertion that He has loved the descendants of Jacob by drawing a contrast between the descendants of Jacob and the descendants of Jacob's brother, Esau. And you remember the story of Jacob and Esau. In Genesis 25, we learn that Isaac's wife, Rebekah, is pregnant with twins. And even from the

womb these two brothers struggled with one another. And God told Rachel that “two nations [were] in [her] womb,” and that “the older [would] serve the younger.” Esau was the firstborn, and so he should have inherited the patriarchal blessing from Isaac. But, before Isaac could have ever set his love upon Esau his firstborn, God set His love on Jacob. God chose the younger Jacob to inherit the blessings of the covenant, and his line, rather than Esau’s, to be the one from whom Messiah would come and bless the nations.

This is what God means when He says, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” “Loved” and “hated” here are covenantal terms. “Love” is not sentimental gushiness, and “hate” is not personal animosity in this text. As we saw before, God’s “love” of Jacob speaks of the Father’s sovereign election of Israel to be His covenant nation: “Yet on your fathers did Yahweh set His affection to love them, and He chose their descendants after them.” In Isaiah 41:8–9, God says, “But you, Israel, My servant, Jacob whom I have chosen, Descendant of Abraham My friend, You whom I have taken from the ends of the earth, And called from its remotest parts And said to you, ‘You are My servant, I have chosen you and not rejected you.’” And so, “to love,” here, speaks of covenantal choice, and “to hate” speaks of covenantal rejection. You see that dichotomy in Matthew 6:24, where Jesus says, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other.” Or in Luke 14:26, where Jesus says, “If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.” Now, surely Jesus isn’t saying that His disciples are supposed to walk around muttering, “Boy, I just can’t stand my parents, and my spouse, and my kids, and my siblings!” No, the point is: if it ever happens that you have to choose between faithfulness to Christ and faithfulness to family, you

reject your most treasured earthly relationships, and you love Christ by choosing Him.

And so: God is telling Israel that He has loved them by setting His unconditional covenant favor upon them, and that He has hated Edom by rejecting them from being His covenant nation. And this choice was entirely unconditional. God’s love is not bestowed on those He loves because of anything in them. We saw that in Deuteronomy 7:7–8, where Moses tells Israel, “**Yahweh did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were *more in number*.**” It was simply because Yahweh loved you. In Deuteronomy 9:4–5, he tells them, “**Do not say, ... ‘Because of *my righteousness* Yahweh has brought me in to possess this land. ... It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land.**” It’s because Yahweh is faithful to His covenant. And then, in Romans chapter 9, when the Apostle Paul is illustrating God’s sovereign freedom in His unconditional election of individual sinners to salvation, he uses this very discriminating choice between Jacob and Esau to substantiate his case. Romans 9:11: “**For though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God’s purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, ‘The older will serve the younger.’ Just as it is written**”—and then he quotes our passage in Malachi 1—“**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**”

This puts the lie to the notion that God chose Jacob because he was virtuous, and that God rejected Esau because he was wicked. Sure, Esau was no prize. Genesis 25 says he despised his birthright—that token of what would have been God’s covenantal love to him—he regarded it so lightly that he sold it for a bowl of soup. Genesis 26:34–35 says he married a Hittite and brought grief to Isaac and

Rebekah. During the Exodus, Numbers 20 says that Edom refused to grant Israel passage through the town of Kadesh, even withstanding them with military force. Psalm 137, along with the book of Obadiah, records how Edom came to the aid of Babylon as they destroyed Jerusalem and brought Israel into captivity. There was plenty not to like about Esau and his descendants, Edom! But God says Esau's sins were not the basis of His rejection of him. And at the same time, Jacob was no saint himself. He was a deceiver, a manipulator. God didn't choose Jacob because He foresaw that Jacob would be better than Esau. No, Romans 9 tells us that works have nothing to do with God's election: **“Not because of works, but because of Him who calls.”** The basis for God's election of some and His rejection of others is grounded entirely in Him who calls, not at all in the works of those who are called. Divine election is unconditional.

And yet how has that unconditional choice worked itself out? Look at verses 3 and 4 again: **“I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.”** ⁴Though Edom says, **‘We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins’**; thus says Yahweh of hosts, **‘They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom Yahweh is indignant forever.’**”

This is truly astonishing. This love of Jacob and hatred of Esau is not just some sort of esoteric, theoretical bookkeeping in God's mind. God's election of Israel and rejection of Edom has teeth! The mountains of Seir that protected the territory of Edom were no match for Yahweh's sovereign purpose to execute judgment. Obadiah prophesied this very thing in verses 3 and 4 of his prophecy. There, God says to Edom, **“The arrogance of your heart has deceived you, You who live in the clefts of the rock, In the loftiness of your dwelling place, Who say in your heart,**

‘Who will bring me down to earth?’ Though you build high like the eagle, Though you set your nest among the stars, From there I will bring you down.” And God says in our verse that He has done just that. He has made these lofty, impregnable mountains of Edom, a desolation. He has made the land of their inheritance the place where jackals abide. The jackal is a wilderness animal, and so God is saying, “I have made Edom into a wilderness.”

How did this happen? At the time of the Babylonian campaign against Israel in 600 to 586 BC, Edom is assisting Babylon in Judah’s destruction and conquering parts of their territory as they’re carried away into exile. What happened by the late 400s BC? Well, the historical record isn’t perfectly clear, but we know the Babylonian King Nabonidus conducted several military campaigns against Edom beginning in 552 BC. And by 312 BC, the Nabatean Arabs had totally overrun the Edomite territory. So, between the Babylonians and the Nabateans, God had kept His promise of Edom’s destruction. Esau’s land was a desolate wilderness, fit only for the jackals.

And that language wouldn’t have been lost on Judah in Malachi’s day. In Jeremiah 9:11, God makes that same promise of destruction upon Judah for her disobedience—a destruction which came in the form of the Babylonians. In Jeremiah 9:11 God says, “**I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, A haunt of jackals; And I will make the cities of Judah a desolation, without inhabitant.**” The same threat of judgment that came upon Jacob’s land for their disobedience did eventually come upon Esau’s for their disobedience.

But what’s the difference? The difference is: “**Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.**” The difference is: if *Edom* tries to rebuild, God is going to tear down. *Their* land will

henceforth be known as the Territory of Wickedness, not the City of Truth, like Zechariah says of Israel. Not the Holy Mountain. No, these mountains will be cast down. And Yahweh's indignation will abide on them forever. You've never met an Edomite, but here Israel was in her land, rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, rebuilding the temple, alive and breathing.

“*How* have I loved you? Wasn't Esau your brother? Weren't you twins? I could have just as easily set My electing love on him instead of you, couldn't I? I certainly didn't choose you over him because of anything in you. And in fact, since he was the oldest, it would have made more sense if I chose him, wouldn't it? *How* have I loved you? You deserve your land to be a desolation left to the jackals just as much as he does. And yet here you are, back in your land, while Edom lies in ruins. You couldn't have done a thing to free yourselves from Babylon! It took Me raising up Cyrus and delivering you. And do you know what? If Edom ever musters the strength to try to rebuild their land, with the same sovereignty with which I delivered you, by that very same sovereignty I will tear them down. *How* have I loved you? I haven't given you over to yourselves and left you in your state of deserved condemnation, the way I did to those who deserved that condemnation no less than you.”

How does God **demonstrate** His love to His people? He points to the judgment of those who are not His people, and says, “That could have been you.” And I wonder, friends, if you have ever considered the judgment of God that falls on those outside of Christ, and felt *loved* by God. Because we learn from this passage that at least one way that God demonstrates His love to His elect is by displaying to us His hatred for the reprobate.

That's not a truth you often hear about in contemporary evangelicalism, but will you deny that it is the teaching of this very text? "How have you loved us?" "Look at Esau!" In His inscrutable wisdom, God has chosen to set His saving love upon some, and not others. Those whom He passes by receive justice; they receive the just punishment for their sins. But those whom He chooses—those on whom He sets His covenant love—they receive grace. Nobody gets injustice. The reprobate get justice and the elect get grace.

And I wonder if you've considered, Christian, your unbelieving sibling, who grew up in the same home as you, who was evangelized by the same parents, who went to the same church, who heard the same sermons; and I wonder if you've considered the futility of the life that they're living, wasting their lives on the broken cisterns of alcohol and drugs, of casual sex and meaningless relationships, of money and fame here on this earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, which before long will perish with fire; and I wonder if you've considered your life in comparison—your quiet, hard-working, what-may-seem uneventful life; work, and church, and Bible study, and prayer; and I wonder if you've felt *loved* by God.

I wonder if you've trembled—if you've been moved to tears—that because of nothing at all that distinguished you from your unbelieving brother or sister or friend or co-worker, God chose you, and entered into covenant with you, and appointed such a one so lovely as Christ to be your Mediator, and to bear your sins in His own body on the cross. Who rescued you from a wasted life of what is ultimately joyless futility (no matter how many pasted smiles the world wears), and rescued you from an eternity of just punishment in hell.

Think of who you were before Christ. And think of all the fruitless, meaningless things you could be doing with your life right now. And yet here you sit, in the household of God, under the means of His grace, in fellowship with His people, with a clean conscience, with your sins forgiven, with Christ's righteousness draped across your shoulders, under the smile of Almighty God, and with an inheritance that is imperishable and undefiled and that will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you! Oh, friends: the circumstances of your life might be bad. The Lord of providence may be putting you through the crucible of a set of trials that I wouldn't wish on my enemies. But even in the midst of the deepest possible pain, this is an anchor of the soul! This is how He has loved you! "I've given you to My Son! I've given My Son for you! I've put the robe of His obedience upon you! I've adopted you as My own Son or daughter and welcomed you in to the household of God!"

Sure, as Job 24:24 says, the wicked "are exalted a little while, [but] then they are gone. They are brought low and like everything gathered up; even like the heads of grain they are cut off." But "the righteous man," Psalm 92:12, "will flourish like the palm tree, He will grow like a cedar in Lebanon. Planted in the house of Yahweh, they will flourish in the courts of our God." "I have loved you, and I have not loved them, because of nothing in you. Only because of My free, sovereign grace."

IV. THE DISPLAY OF GOD'S LOVE (v. 5)

But God isn't finished. We've seen the declaration of God's love, the disputation of God's love, and the demonstration of God's love. Let's consider, just briefly, the **display of God's love**. Look at verse 5: "Your eyes will see this and you will say,

‘Yahweh be *magnified beyond the border of Israel!*’” Judah was saying that they hadn’t seen any tangible evidence of Yahweh’s love for them? God says, “Oh, you’re going to see! You will watch as I destroy My enemies and exalt My people! You will search in vain for an Edomite! But the seed of Abraham will be as numerous as stars in the sky or sand on the seashore! And when you see it, there won’t be any of this, ‘But how have You loved us?’ You know what you’re going to say then? ‘*Yahweh be magnified! May God’s name be lifted up and exalted! May the name of the Lord be praised from the mountaintops! Glory be to God for His unwavering faithfulness and His steadfast love!*’” Look at Malachi 1:11: “*For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations.*”

“Among the nations”! “Beyond the border of Israel,” verse 5 says! You see, this glorious, faithful, covenant-keeping, **loving** God is not just King over the Levant! His domain is not merely some strip of land in the Middle East! He is the King of the nations! And God has magnified His name beyond the border of Israel, has He not? You and I sitting here today are evidence of that. There may be a few of us here who are descendants of Jacob, but I would guess that the overwhelming majority of us are Gentiles. What has happened? The name of Yahweh has been magnified beyond the border of Israel. Through Jesus Christ, descendant of David, the Seed of Abraham, **all the families of the earth have been blessed.**

In Galatians 3:8–9, Paul quotes that very promise that all the nations would be blessed in Abraham, and he calls that *the Gospel* that was preached beforehand to Abraham: that through Abraham’s seed God would justify the Gentiles by faith. And he goes on to preach that very Gospel. Galatians 3:10: “**For as many as are of**

the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the Law, to perform them.’” You want to get to heaven by your works? Fine. The standard is perfect obedience. Perfect adherence to every law that God has revealed in His Word. Otherwise, you’re under the curse of God. And that’s all of us. None of us has rendered perfect obedience to every commandment of God. Not for an hour of our lives have we done such a thing. And so we are cursed.

But, Galatians 3:13, “*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us.*” He bore our sins in His body on the cross. All the punishment for all the sins of all the people whom God has *loved*—whom He’s chosen and set His love on—every ounce of His just wrath against the sins of the elect broke over the head of Christ as He suffered on Calvary. And He died, and He was buried, but He rose in victory on the third day. And He promises that everyone who trusts in Him alone for righteousness will be saved! Friend, if you’re here this morning and you have not tasted the sweetness of knowing Christ, if you’ve not savored the grace of His forgiveness by faith alone, I call you to repent of your sins, to abandon all confidence in yourself to earn your way to heaven, and to put all your hope for righteousness squarely on the shoulders of this glorious Savior.

And to my brothers and sisters who have trusted Him: rejoice that this God is your God. This God who sets His love upon the undeserving, who comes to reassure even the faithless with His unchangeable love and covenant faithfulness, who says, in 2 Timothy 2:13, “*If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself.*” O, the grace in that verse! He has put His own name upon you, Christian! And He cannot deny Himself! And you didn’t do anything to convince

Him to put His name on you! He does it freely! out of pure grace! And because He does, He now pursues your good with all the zeal and the fervor with which He pursues the honor of His own name! And you heard it: “**My name will be great.**”

And when your heart grabs ahold of that—that free, sovereign, Gospel assurance—that we are loved, despite our faithlessness—you lay hold of a powerful motive for *faithfulness*. Just as no works of our own made God begin to love us, so also no works of our own can make God stop loving us. **The gifts and calling of God are irrevocable.** And to be assured of that is a powerful motive to make war against sin, and to run hard after holiness. It is not license to care nothing for holiness! Like, “I’m loved anyway! What does it matter if I fight sin?” No! If your heart apprehends this, that is not your response! Not ever! Your response is: “How could a God so great love me and I live out of accord with that grace that I’ve been shown? I will set my hand to the plow of Christian holiness! I will mortify that nagging sin! I will get up an hour earlier to open my Bible and get on my face before God, just to remind myself of this free justification that I enjoy by grace alone, so that I can set my feet upon the rock of a righteousness not my own, and press on to lay hold of that for which I have been laid hold of!”

We don’t do any of this *in order* to be loved. We do it because we *have* been loved. “**I have loved you,**” says Yahweh.