

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 1:1-5 - God's Great Love for Apostate People

This morning we begin our study through the book of Malachi and I think you're going to love this little book. It is a treasure of the OT that I think you'll find extremely practical and helpful.

Let me give you some information by way of background and then we'll dive in.

Malachi is one of the 12 minor prophets in the OT. The last 12 books of the OT - Joel through Malachi - are called minor prophets because of their size. They are generally smaller books. The 5 major prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel - are called major prophets because they are simply larger in size. There's no difference in authority or importance. They are all the Word of God.

To be fair some of the prophets are difficult to wade through. If you've read Hosea lately or Amos that language can be confusing or even apocalyptic. We usually stick to Jonah because it's basically a story. Malachi is another easy-to-digest minor prophet.

These OT prophets were raised up by God to warn Israel. And actually, God would occasionally warn the surrounding nations through the prophets. Jonah warned which country to repent? Nineveh, Assyria. Same with Nahum.

The prophets often address Israel, but many times the surrounding countries are indicted for their sin as well. They are called to repent and follow the Lord. By the way they still are. God commands all men everywhere, and nations every to repent and follow Jesus. God will hold every leader and every nation accountable.

So Malachi is a minor prophet, and he's preaching to Israel. Now a little bit of a timeline here I think will help you out.

Moses leads Israel out of Egypt around 1450 BC. The judges ruled from 1400-1050BC. David becomes king around 1000BC - these are round numbers.

Then it's David and Solomon. They ruled over the United Kingdom of Israel. It was united because all 12 tribes of Israel were one country. After Solomon died, Rehoboam became king and the Kingdom was divided. 10 tribes went to the north, Judah stayed in the south. So you had the country of Israel in the north and the country of Judah in the south.

And sometimes this is confusing because Israel is the name of the whole collective people of God in the OT, but it's also sometimes referring to just the northern nation. You have to be aware of the context.

All of the kings in northern Israel were wicked. There never was a godly king. In the south, there were a handful of godly kings but most were wicked. And so God would raise up prophets to call his people to repentance.

Eventually around 600BC both Israel and Judah had become so apostate and pagan that God used pagan nations to judge them. He brought Assyria to destroy the northern Kingdom of Israel and take away captives to Assyria. The northern Kingdom was completely wiped out.

And he brought Babylon to come destroy the Kingdom of Judah. Judah was taken into exile to Babylon for 70 years. That's what the book of Daniel and Esther are all about.

After 70 years the Jews were allowed to return to Israel, to repopulate the Promised Land. That's what Ezra and Nehemiah are all about. And at first it seemed as though things were going well. The Temple was being rebuilt, the city walls were restored, Jerusalem was slowly returning to its former glory. The problem was that the people were returning to their former apostasy.

And so God began sending prophets again. Malachi is the last prophet that God raised up in the OT. The Jews were back in the land, the Jerusalem was rebuilt and yet they were doing the very same things that got them hauled off into exile to begin with. And after Malachi there were 400 silent years where God said nothing to his people. The next prophet on the scene is John the Baptist.

By Malachi's time the Temple operation was completely corrupted. The priests were all frauds, divorce was rampant in Israel, the people were intermarrying with pagans. They had learned nothing from the exile.

Really, the OT is the history of God's patience and grace with his wayward people. God shows himself patient, and loving, and kind to a rebellious and stiff necked people over and over again.

You know what we see in the NT? God's patience and grace with his wayward people. Why does God put up with this foolishness and sin?

And the answer to that is the opening section of the book of Malachi. Here's the big picture: God loves his wayward people.

Listen, if you don't get anything else out of this sermon, remember this: if you are a Christian God loves you infinitely. If you're slipping in life, if you're not where you want to be. If you sinned big time this week, if you're at your end: God loves you.

He sent his only Son because he loved you. **John 3:16**

God demonstrates his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us. **Rom. 5:8** And if God loved us that much before we were saved, how much more now that we're in his family?

Eph. 1:4 God predestined you for adoption before the world began because of his love for you.

Jesus says to his disciples The night before he died that he loved them. "As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you." **John 15:9**. That's infinite, divine love. These were all the guys who in just a few hours would abandon him. He knew that. He still loved them.

Rom. 8 says there is absolutely nothing that can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. **Rom. 8:38-39**: For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Brother or sister, if you are a Christian God loves you more than you can ever know. He loves you more than you love anyone in your life. You love you your spouse, parent, kid, best friend, your sister the smallest fraction of how much God loves you.

And he doesn't have to. It's not like when your parent tells you to tell your brother you love him and you begrudgingly do it because you have to. It's not telling your annoying aunt Sally you love her because it would be impolite to not respond.

No, God actually genuinely loves us. God isn't bound to love us because he has to. God **chose** to place his eternal love on you. Warts and all. Sin and all. Failures and all.

That's what we see here. God loves his people. How? Four ways.

1) God warns us in love. Read 1

This whole book of warning from God is an act of love. God didn't actually have to speak. Israel knew the Old Covenant had blessings for obedience and cursing for disobedience. God didn't need to say more. But because he loved his people he warned them.

Imagine a parent who never warns their child. Doesn't warn them about the danger of hot stoves or traffic in the street or playing with dangerous objects. That's not love.

The heart of a parent is to plead with our kids and to warn them. God sent prophets because he loved them, not because he's an old mean guy telling Israel to get off his lawn. He's not cold and callous or uncaring. He loves them through warning them.

And he speaks through an oracle. It's an official pronouncement. When the President wishes to say something official, he writes it on official White House letterhead and sends it out with his seal and authority for all to see and hear.

That's what an oracle is: It's an official word from the throne room of God our King. As we'll see, this isn't a tender and happy letter. This is a solemn letter. But even in solemnness it is loving.

And it is a Word from the Lord. This is Yahweh's Word. Yahweh, the triune God of the universe, is speaking in an official, kingly capacity through Malachi to Israel. It's God speaking through those who wrote it down.

So this is an official pronouncement. It's God's Word. And it's from Malachi. We don't know anything else about Malachi except his name. His name means "messenger" or "angel." It's where we get the actual word for angel in Hebrew. So Malachi could be his actual name or it could be his job as a prophet: He is a messenger for God to warn Israel. We don't know for sure. But whoever he is he was used of God to give Israel his word.

So God loves his people simply by warning us. And just a small point, it is loving to warn others about their sin and to be warned about our sin. Sometimes it's gentle, sometimes it's severe - but warnings are good.

And I feel compelled to say, brother or sister, if you're dabbling in sin be sure your sin will find you out. What you reap you will sow. So turn from it quickly.

2) The second way we know God loves us: He simply tell us. **Read 2**

This point will be short but I think it's important. God simply tells his people that he loves us. I read a bunch of verses earlier and I could read a whole bunch more.

But the reality is that for a Christian you either believe that God loves you or you don't. God says he loves you, do you believe what he says? He is speaking truth or lying? It's true.

But listen, if God says he loves Israel - that apostate, wicked, rebellious nation - then how much more the bride of Christ, the Church whom his Son laid down his life to save?

There are some people who really struggle to understand how God can love them. They've sinned so much, their hearts are wayward.

"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it, prone to leave the God I love."

God knows that. He knows your thoughts and mind and actions. He knew all of the sin you would ever commit. Ever dark and secret thing you would ever do from all eternity past. And he nailed all of that in the person of Jesus to the cross 2,000 years ago.

It's not like God is going to find something out about you and change his mind. "Oh, wait, you're a gossip? Man, I didn't know that when I saved you. We're going to have to reevaluate the terms of our agreement here."

"You cheated on your taxes? I'm going to have to rethink this relationship." "You blew through the speed limit?" God knew all that. It doesn't excuse it, but he knew it when he saved you.

Imagine for a moment that you could be transported to the throne room of God. You, God, the holy angels. All the glory and brightness of the majesty of God. You can't even look up because you are so overwhelmed at it all. Awesome power like you can't describe. And from the midst of the power and glory comes words from God: Child, I have loved you.

Wouldn't you want to hear that? Wouldn't that give you comfort and relief and assurance and joy? I know it would for me. You guys, that's what we have right here. **Read 2**

Let me quote you the words of famous theologian, George Straight.

“Last night I dreamed I died and stood outside those pearly gates,
When suddenly I realized there must be some mistake.
If they know half the things I’ve done they’ll never let me in.
And then somewhere from the other side, I heard these words again:

Let me tell you a secret about a Father’s love.
A secret that my daddy said was just between us.
Daddies don’t just love their children every now and then.
It’s a love without end. Amen.”

I can’t speak for the rest of George’s theology, but I think he has that right: God loves us without end. Amen.
And we know because he said so.

So God loves us by warning us, by telling us.

3) God pours out wrath on those he doesn’t love. **Read 2-4**
Hoo boy. God does not love everyone equally.

There is a sense in which God does love all people. Jesus says in **Matt 5** that God sends rain on the just and unjust and sun on the just and unjust. There is a common grace that God has toward all people made in his image. God loves all people in a generic sense.

But there is also a distinctive love that God has only toward his elect. His people. True, believing Israel in the OT and Christians in the NT. It is a specific and discriminating love.

And the example we have of that is in the family. I strive to love all women but I have a special covenant love for my wife. I love all your alls kids, but I have a special familial love for my own children.

I think you know that and understand that. That’s right and good that we love our own in a special way. It doesn’t deny love for others, but the love toward your family is strong and unique.

Well, that’s also true with God. God does love all people generically. And even blesses unbelievers in many ways. But he has a special covenant love with Christians. And we see this played out in the lives of Jacob and Esau.

In Genesis we read about Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob was a twin brother with Esau. But it was through Jacob that God’s covenant blessings and promise would go. Esau would not inherit the land or the blessings. Why? Because God didn’t choose to bless him.

So here, in a back and forth style, it’s as though Israel is asking God? How have you loved us? What proof do you have?

And God says the proof is that I loved Jacob and hated Esau. **Read 2-3**

Now, I don’t know about you, but the first time I read that verse I sort of did a double take. God hates? How can God hate someone? Isn’t God love? Doesn’t he exude goodness and righteousness? How can God hate?

Well, mark it down: God hates wickedness and he hates wicked people. Even as he loves them generically by giving them common grace, he hates. The word does not mean to “love less.” Look at the description - the description isn’t just a little less love. It’s active destruction of Edom. Active opposition.

Turn to Psalm 5:4-6. This is a hard pill to swallow if this is new. But it's all through the Bible. God is not some jolly old grandpa who just lets bygones be bygones. God is holy and righteous and awesome in power and glory. And because he is good he must hate that which is wicked. **Read 4-6**

Think about that for a minute. We've heard the old saying "God loves the sinner but hates the sin." According to this verse, is that true? No.

We humans are called to love sinners and hate sin. But God altogether different than us. He hates all evildoers. He abhors the bloodthirsty.

Look at Psalm 11:4-7. We see the same kind of thing. Like I said last week, the psalter is something we are to be singing as Christians. These are not passages of Scripture we should be ashamed of. God wants us to sing these passages. **Read 4-7**

Again, the wicked person, the one who loves violence, God hates the wicked. This is the dire situation for all those who are not Christian. God is not indifferent to them. He's not passive or uninterested. They have violated his law just like we did.

Psalm 7:11 says God feels indignation every day. Why? Because he is a righteous judge. If you're concerned at all about righteousness then it grieves you when unrighteousness happens. And not just in a generic sense, but in a very personal sense against those who commit it.

Turn to Prov. 6:16-19. Again we have a passage that makes it clear that God isn't just mad at sin in some generic way. He is angry at the sinner. **Read**

We could spend a lot of time on each of these but I think you get the idea. These are people with whom the Lord hates. These are all people who are unregenerate.

By the way, this is the miracle of our salvation in Jesus. While we were God's enemies - enemies he hated because we were wicked and deserving of damnation - God loved us.

That's why Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God depicts God holding us like we are spiders over a flaming fire pit. Imagine you were holding a black widow by the web over camp fire. What would you do. Violently shake it off into the fire. That's what we are to God outside of Jesus. We are detestable to him. This is why the gospel is so scandalous.

How did we go from being a detestable spider to a beloved son? God loved us.

Turn to Rom 9:6-13. So Malachi is using the life of Jacob and Esau as an illustration of how God loves some and hates others. Romans takes Malachi and adds more color even to that.

This whole passage is about predestination and election. That God chose some people for salvation in eternity past. And he did so without any regard for their actions. God didn't choose based on our choice. He didn't choose because we were smart or rich. He just chose.

And Paul quotes our passage in Malachi. Why did God choose Jacob and not Esau? Was it something Jacob did? Was it something in Esau? **Read 6-14**

So the bigger question being asked here is: why aren't all the Jews saved? Because not all who are Israel - Jewish - are true Israel: truly God's people. Because God didn't choose them all for salvation. And we see that clearly in when Jacob and Esau were born. God chose Jacob over Esau before they were even born.

Why did God choose Jacob rather than Esau? **Vs. 11:** So that God's purpose in election might continue. God never planned to save absolutely all people only some. God doesn't owe anyone salvation, what he owes us all is eternal wrath in hell. But in eternity past God in his love made a choice to save some and not others just like he chose to bless Isaac and not Ishmael, and bless Jacob and not Esau.

How can God do that? Because if God didn't choose anyone for salvation, we'd all be cursed forever. We're all wicked sinners and the only way out of that is for God to lovingly and mercifully plan to save us.

That's the amazing grace of the gospel. We don't deserve the love and grace of God. We deserve the same wrath and hatred from God that pagans deserve. But God lavishly pours out his grace despite that.

RC Sproul once said of this passage: "What should surprise us is not 'Esau I hated.' What should surprise us is Jacob I loved." Jacob was a horrible guy and God loved him anyway. We were horrible before being born again. God loved us anyway. **Turn back to Malachi**

So God loves us by warning us, by telling us, by pouring out wrath on those he doesn't love.

What does that wrath look like? **Read 2-4**

How does God show his wrath toward his enemies? He plagues them with destruction. Edom - another name for the the descendants of Esau - will always be plagued by God. Even if they try to rebuild God will destroy over and over.

And again, that shows the love of God toward Israel because that's what they deserve and yet God blesses Jacob - Israel - instead. He reestablished his covenant with them, blessed them, sent the Messiah through them, and still offers salvation through faith in Jesus.

You guys, sometimes we forget just how much God has blessed us. Just how much mercy and kindness and love he's shown to us. And the way to cure that is to stop looking at our own situation having a pity party and look around. Look around at people who aren't believers and don't love God or follow his ways and see what their lives are like. See the tragedy and heartache and pointlessness of their lives. Then we get a clearer picture.

Fourth way God's love is shown:

4) His glory is shown to all the nations. **Read 5**

Ancient pagans believed their gods were confined to a location - usually their general area. The people of God in the OT knew that God was great beyond the borders of Israel.

Look what he did in Egypt or Babylon or Syria or Nineveh. Remember when the spies came to Rahab in Jericho? And Rahab said the whole city was in a panic because they had seen what God had done to the Egyptians and to the kings of the Amorites? He destroyed the most powerful nations on the planet. And they stood in awe of God.

That's true now. One way God shows his love is that we get to be part proclaiming the glory of God in Jesus Christ. And I don't know if you've looked at a map recently but we are way beyond the border of Israel. Every time we proclaim that God is great we fulfill this passage.

God's love has been poured out not just to believing Jews, but believing Gentiles all around the world. We take part in the gracious blessings of God far beyond the borders.

So does God love us? Yes. Do we deserve it? No. And because of those two truths we give him all our praise.

Pray