

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Sermon Texts: Malachi 1:1-5

Introduction.

I wondered if this would happen back when I started our series on the Minor Prophets. I wondered if I would feel compelled to preach more than one sermon on one of the Minor Prophets. I made it to Habakkuk before I did one extra sermon on one of the most important verses in the Bible, Habakkuk 2:4:

Habakkuk 2:4b “...the righteous shall live by his faith.”

When I got to Zechariah last week I thought long and hard about preaching on each of the eight visions, but decided to move on to the last Minor Prophet Malachi this week. The more I studied this week the more impossible it became to try to sum up this book in one sermon. Yes, it can certainly be done and with some justice, but there are just too many themes that are too important for our day and age.

So I decided what’s the hurry and where are we going anyway? Our goal is to preach the Word of God and the whole counsel of God’s Word. My calling is to feed you with the meat of God’s Word each week. Malachi is certainly meat, it’s timely, relevant, important, not just ancient history, but contemporary life.

And when was the last time you heard a sermon series on Malachi. It’s not just possible, but likely you have never heard a sermon series on this usually neglected last book of the OT.

Malachi 1:1.

The first verse of Malachi gives us an introduction into this prophecy.

The word *oracle* would be more accurately translated burden. What’s a burden? A burden is something weighty that’s difficult to bear. This word is not light and fluffy, it’s not easy and fun. This is a very serious word for serious times.

And it’s not easy to be the one to bear such news.

Jeremiah 23:29 Is not my word like fire, declares the Lord, and like a hammer that breaks the rock in pieces?

Amos 3:7-8 “For the Lord God does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the prophets. 8 The lion has roared; who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken; who can but prophesy?”

The greater burden is that not everyone will accept or believe this word and that means this word will become a judgment against them. They have heard the truth and not accepted it and that is to reject the truth and to reject God.

Word of the Lord. That phrase reminds us that this is not the word of Malachi, not the word of a man, but the Word of God.

II Peter 1:20-21 ... no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone's own interpretation. 21 For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

This Word of the Lord is given *to Israel* who was scattered throughout Babylon but is now back in the land of Israel.

After Malachi there is going to be 400 years of silence from heaven. What last message would God want His people to receive? What would be the most important things to say?

Outline of Malachi:

Malachi's prophecy is made up of a series of charges answered with *How* questions.

1:2: I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, How have You loved us?

1:6: O priests who despise My name. But you say, How have we despised Your name?

1:7: You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, How have we defiled You?

2:13-14: He no longer regards [your] offering. Yet you say, For what reason?

2:17: You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, How have we wearied Him?

3:7: Return to Me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, How shall we return?

3:8: Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, How have we robbed You?

3:13: Your words have been arrogant against me, says the Lord. Yet you say, What have we spoken against You?

Eight complaints in the form of a question are answered with eight responses from God. We will take the first one this evening.

God's love declared: "I have loved you," says the Lord.

Many of you are from an older generation that didn't say "I love you" very much. I know Phama grew up that way, and I didn't hear it much either. It was assumed or implied, but not said. And for a few of you there may not have been much love expressed at all. God isn't like that. He's our heavenly Father and He makes a point to say "I love you."

Isaiah 43:1, 4 But now thus says the Lord,

he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel:

"Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.

4 ... you are precious in my eyes, and honored, and *I love you*,

Jeremiah 31:3 *I have loved you* with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you.

Zephaniah 3:17 The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; *he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love;* he will exult over you with loud singing.

Is it hard for you to hear that? Is it hard for you to believe that? When I say to you that God loves you does it just bounce off you or does it get through to your heart? God loves you. God first loved you. God loved you before you ever loved Him.

If it is hard for you to receive this truth, one possible reason is because you didn't hear it from your own earthly father. Our relationships with our earthly fathers have a huge impact on our relationship with our heavenly Father. We learn from our fathers what God is like or what He is not like.

It's hard for us to think of a heavenly Father as loving if we have never experienced fatherly love from our earthly fathers. We had a friend years ago who said it was hard for her to think God loved her because she always was trying to earn her earthly father's love and favor. No matter what she did it wasn't good enough. So she also always felt like she was never good enough for God, she was always trying harder to be better and do better.

When God says I have loved you, that's not in the past tense, it's in the perfect tense, which means I have loved you and I am continuing to love you. My love is unchanging.

People who say that the God of the OT is not loving, don't know God and they don't know their OT. God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

God begins by declaring His love for Israel. And Israel responds with a how question.

God's love doubted: "How have you loved us?"

Malachi wrote several years after Haggai and Zechariah, after the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, after Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest. Many of the leaders of the restoration were dead. They had seen to the building of the temple and the wall around Jerusalem, but those great and challenging days of rebuilding and restoring life in Judah were past.

The two previous prophets of the restoration, Haggai and Zechariah, had prophesied of a glorious future for Israel. God was going to do some truly great things. But those things had not come to pass.

The priesthood was functioning, the sacrificial system was restored, life had settled into a normal routine. But the pastors and the people were beginning to question God, to question His love and integrity. They were beginning to lose faith and it showed in their lifestyle, their actions and attitudes.

If God wasn't going to remember them and honor them and keep His word, then what was the point of honoring God or keeping their word to Him.

John Piper sums up the prophecy of Malachi this way:

"The people had not learned their lesson from the exile. They had grown skeptical of God's love (1:2), careless in worship (1:7), indifferent to the truth (2:6-7), disobedient to the covenant (2:10), faithless in their marriages (2:15; 3:5), and stingy in their offerings (3:8). To this carnal and rebellious people God sent his messenger (Malachi means "my messenger"), and the first message he put on his lips was, "I have loved you, says the Lord!" (sermon on Malachi).

God's love demonstrated: Esau and Jacob.

So the question was asked of God, "How have you loved us?" How would you answer that question? How would you think God would answer that question? I bet you would never answer it the way God answered it in Malachi.

"Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob."

This is a difficult text for us to swallow, especially when God says things like "Jacob I loved and Esau I hated."

Divine love looks different than human love. And we should add that divine hatred looks different than human hatred. Both are pure, perfect, without sin.

When we talk about God and love we are bound by our own human, finite perspectives of love. We have a very hard time trying to think what a pure, holy, perfect love looks like.

God's love is sovereign, free, electing, unconditional and personal. God illustrated this kind of love with an example for their history.

Isaac and Rebecca had twins, Esau and Jacob. Here is what God told Rebecca about them:

Genesis 25:23 And the Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you shall be divided; the one shall be stronger than the other, the older shall serve the younger."

God had a choice. He could have chosen Esau. In fact there were good reasons for choosing Esau. He was born of Isaac and Rebecca. He was a twin in the same womb. He was born first. He had the rights and privileges of a first born and first claim to his father's blessing.

Is this fair that God chose Jacob and not Esau? Is it fair that God chose Israel and not Edom? It is fair that God chose one race over another? Or that He chooses this person and not that person?

It's the wrong question. It's isn't about fairness, it's about the sovereign purposes of a sovereign God. He didn't ask our opinion, it's not up for a vote. The clay can't say to the potter why did you do this?

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, 8 but it is because the Lord loves you.

Romans 9:10-15 ... 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."

14 What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! 15 For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion."

God's sovereign electing love exalts God as the sovereign God of the universe who is free to do as pleases Him.

God wanted Israel to see His love in terms of His free electing love for Israel and in His rejection of Edom. It could have gone the other way. He wants them to think hard about the option and weigh His love for them by contrasting it with His hatred for Edom. Except for the sovereign, free, unconditional, electing love of God that could have been them.

God's sovereign election is cause for trembling and humility.

Do you tremble at the sovereign, unconditional, electing, adopting, free, gracious love of God for you? You did not earn it, merit it, deserve it, ask for it, and you were and are not worthy of it.

It is a completely free gift out of the kindness and compassion of God who will have mercy on whom He has mercy and compassion on whom He has compassion.

Both Esau and Jacob were sinners. Both deserved judgment. God freely choose one.

God's love humbles us because it removes all possible reasons for boasting in ourselves or saying we were lovable or worthy. It humbles us because all we can do is accept it.

God's sovereign election is cause for worship, for giving Him glory.

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

God does what God does for the sake of His glory and for the sake of His name, that His name will be exalted and be made great in all the earth, beyond the borders of Israel.

We must humble ourselves under God's sovereign electing love and give Him all the glory for His salvation, for truly salvation belongs to the Lord.

The remedy to indifference toward God and toward worship is to meditate on and consider deeply how God proves His love for us.

How has God loved you? How would you answer that question? If things are generally good in your life then you would no doubt answer by listing the things God has done for you or given you. You might mention the relatively happy, comfortable life you have had. You might mention your spouse or your children. You might mention some answers to specific prayers you have prayed.

But what if your life hasn't been so good or easy? What if you have had trials and trouble, heartaches and headaches? What if you have all kinds of questions about God's love and whether He really does love you? What if you have a bunch of things in your life that suggest to you that maybe God doesn't love you?

How has God loved you? How would you answer that question?

Would you answer according to Romans or Ephesians?

Romans 5:6-11 For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— 8 but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:5 ... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

Ephesians 1:3-6 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, 4 even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love 5 he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, 6 to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved.

Ephesians 2:4-9 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.