

Text: Malachi 1:1-5

Title: God's Electing Love for His People

Truth: God treated Israel much differently than He did Edom—and God is free to do how He pleases!

Date/Location: Sunday March 31, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

The time of writing is sometime in the 400s B.C. and as such can roughly be correlated to the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The second temple is in operation, so he must have written after 516 B.C. (Ezra 6:13-15). It appears that some time has passed since then, because the temple functions have become a “drag” to the priests.

But it must have been written before Nehemiah's reforms with respect to marriage (Ezra 9-10, Nehemiah 13:23-27). Malachi 3 shows that there are some serious problems developing with idolatry and marriage outside of the faith. This appears to have happened after Nehemiah's absence back in Persia from 433 B.C. until some years later. So it is sometime between 500 and 420 that Malachi wrote, perhaps as late as 433-420 while Nehemiah was gone. This would put Malachi as the very last book of the Old Testament era, after Haggai and Zechariah.

Remember the larger historical context. The northern 10 tribes had been largely destroyed and deported nearly 300 years earlier. The southern kingdom had been defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and many captives taken to Babylon over a century before Malachi. All of this was God's punishment for the nation's idolatry and general sins. The prophet Daniel was active from 605 B.C. until 536 B.C. During that time, the Medo-Persian empire became dominant. Thousands of Jews then returned to Israel, rebuilt the temple (Ezra 1-6, Haggai, Zechariah), the wall (Nehemiah), and the priesthood and operation of the law (Ezra 7-10).

God uses Malachi to call the people back, once again, to covenant faithfulness. Centuries earlier they were punished for idolatry. They were falling back into it with pagan marriages. They were not worshipping the Lord with faith, but instead out of mere ritual. God graciously calls them to repent, and promises that there will be a time when His Messenger (notice the capital 'm') will come, the Messiah, who will bless the people.

I. Announcement, v. 1

A very literal translation of verse 1 is: “An oracle: The word of the LORD to Israel by the hand of Malachi.”

- A. The word for *oracle* is translated by the NET as “What follows is divine revelation.” That is an extended paraphrase, but it is accurate. An oracle generally refers to a revelation that is given to and spoken by a prophet. The modern English “burden” doesn’t capture the idea very well, except if you understand that the prophecy is a load or burden for the prophet to bear from God to the people. Particularly if the prophecy is full of words of judgment, then it is a difficult message to carry to the people.
- B. The prophecy is written to the nation of Israel and the man who is to bring it is named “my messenger.” Malachi’s name is the word for messenger/angel, with the suffix “I” indicating “my.” His name is fitting as a messenger for God.

II. The Lord’s Love Stated but Then Doubted, v. 2a

- A. God makes a categorical statement: I have loved you, Israel (*categorical*: unambiguous, explicit, direct). It is not just that Israel was required to love God (Deut. 6:5). In fact, God loved Israel (Deut. 4:37, 7:7-8, Jer. 31:3)! We see this from a thousand years earlier—and in the next verses God demonstrates that He still loves them.
- B. God then acknowledges an objection or doubt in the minds of His people: “How have you loved us?” Undoubtedly, they looked around them, and saw nothing of the former glory of the kingdom under David and Solomon. The temple was pitiful compared to its original construction. The land was not prosperous. The people were few.

This is the first of several statements in the book of Malachi that indicate that the people of Israel were not on good spiritual footing with the Lord. We can see these by looking at all the “you say” passages in Malachi: 1:6, 1:7, 1:12, 1:13, 2:14, 2:17, 3:7-8, and 3:13. The context indicates that the people are completely dull of spiritual understanding. They did not see plain truth.

- C. So the issue is that there is a true fact—God loved Israel—but there was doubt and denial of that fact by the people. Who was right? Of course, God was right. But the people were focused on something else and missed the truth. Today, because of the sameness of human nature over the centuries, we are made of the same stuff as the Jewish person back in that day. We also can deny plain facts. Who are we going to believe: ourselves, or God’s Word? The choice should be obvious, but we miss it for a couple of reasons. **First**, we don’t know the Bible very well. **Second**, we get distracted by the supposed enormity of our situation and lose

sight of the big picture and what we have learned. **Third**, we tend to look at what we *do not have* instead of what we *do have*.

So, can behave in similar ways as these Jewish folk, whether the truth we deny has to do with God's love for the believer, or any other truth stated in Scripture.

Let's illustrate it this way: suppose you are a believer in Christ, and there is no doubt about that. You are sick with cancer. In a moment of desperation, you ask, "God, do you really love me?" You know the answer is YES, but it doesn't feel like it. You might be in such a bad mindset that you really doubt God's love. But you have only temporarily forgotten all that God has done for you in giving you life and salvation and blessings beyond measure.

- D. About that application, notice that I did not pull the verse out of its context and say, "God here tells you in this audience today that He loves you." I can't do that because the text doesn't do it. The text is directed toward Israel, not Gentiles, not the church, not to people of this world 2500 years later, and certainly not to unbelievers. In fact, if I had preached that verse out of its context to an audience of Esau's descendants shortly after the prophecy was written, I would be lying to them all, because it was evident that Esau was not loved in the way that is spoken of here.
- E. So, you wonder, does God actually love me? Does He love everyone in this room, or in this city, or in this country or world? Can I tell any random person on the street, "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life?" According to this passage, I can't jump to that conclusion because it says something different about God's disposition toward Esau! We have to look a little more deeply in the passage before we can make any conclusion. And if you have been trained in the world's version of Christian theology, the true answer to this question will surprise you.

III. The Lord's Love Proven by Contrast, v. 2b-5

- A. Israel, Esau, and Jacob. We have been speaking about Israel, because that is the recipient of the prophecy (1:1). But now Malachi switches to Esau and Jacob. What do they have to do with it? It is the fact that they are the progenitors of the Edomite and Hebrew peoples, respectively. God is not speaking *in this context* about loving an individual, Jacob, and hating an individual, Esau. He is speaking about national entities, namely, the people groups that descended from these two individuals.

- B. Jacob and Esau are a potent pair to use as an example in this context because they were twins (Gen. 25:21-26). Although not identical twins, there was no difference between them in the womb in terms of themselves. Yet God promised the older would serve the younger. God had made His choice of how things would be before they were born. His choice was unmerited, undeserved, and unconditional. Israel was not better than Edom by any stretch. They were just chosen.
- C. The contrast between the Lord's disposition toward Jacob and Esau is clarified in the next verses.
1. God hated Esau, that is, his Edomite descendants. He did not love them. Inasmuch as love is the opposite of hate, I don't see any way around this conclusion. God did not love them, but He loved Israel. And I don't take hate to be equivalent to "loved less." That is not in accord with the literal meaning of the words; the distance between hate and love is a lot, not a little.
 2. God laid waste Edom's territory (see the short prophecy of Obadiah).
 3. Despite Edom's proud response that they would return and rebuild, God promised to throw down.
 4. People would know the land of Edom as a territory of wickedness and a place where God was angry with the people.
 5. The people of Israel will see this and will acknowledge that the Lord is glorified outside of the boundaries of Israel—in Edom and everywhere else, for that matter.
- D. In other words, the extent of the Lord's love for Israel is shown in what He has done for Israel compared to what He did to Edom. Look at your near-of-kin, dear Jewish friends, and see what God has done with them over the centuries. Has he blessed them with an adoption as a son as He has you? With the covenants of promise as He has you? With the law? With the temple worship? With wonderful national promises? With the patriarchs? With the parentage of the Messiah? (Romans 9:4-5). Has God blessed them by being "their God" (Gen. 17:8, Exodus 29:45, etc.)?
- Although many of these blessings are not yours if you are a church-age believer in Christ, there are many other blessings than these. So if God's word says that God loves you, would you believe it? Would you talk back and say, "In what way have you loved me?" I trust not!
- E. See Romans 9:10-24, esp. 9:13. This passage makes a contemporary application of the teaching of this passage. The apostle Paul is defending

the sovereignty of God in salvation—whether construed in an individual sense (Pharaoh, for example) or a national sense (Israel and Edom). No one can validly question God as to what He is doing, because it is His creation and His decision as to how, when, and where to show mercy. The very act of second-guessing God shows the questioner is in a bad spiritual place, a place of haughtiness instead of humility.

- F. Love and hate. Blanket statements like “God loves all people equally and unconditionally” are not correct. Granted, we should agree that God has a certain kind of fatherly compassion for His entire world and its inhabitants. After all, He created everything. He sustains everything with rain and sunshine and the like (Matt. 5:45). This is called *common grace*, because it is favor that God distributes commonly to all of creation.

God doesn’t despise anyone in a vengeful or sinful way. But the text of the Bible is also clear that His love for His chosen ones is much different than the disposition He has toward the ones who are being passed over. He can do that, because He is God.

Examples: Romans 9:22-24; 1 Timothy 4:10.

Furthermore, God hates sin. Because of the intimate connection between sin and sinner, He also is upset with the sinner who does the sin. This is why the unrepentant *sinner* is cast into Hell, not just the sin done by that sinner. God has to be a just judge to be a good judge, so He cannot acquit the guilty.

Examples: Psalm 7:11; Numbers 11:1, 25:3; Deut. 12:31, 16:22; Nahum 1:2; Psalm 80:4, 139:21-22.

Conclusion

Does this make God subject to a less stringent requirement than He requires of us (Matt. 5:44)? That is, if God wants us to love our enemies, are we required to do more than God does, because He does not love His enemies in that He sends them to eternal punishment? Romans 5:8-10 teach us God does in fact love His enemies, in a very specific way. That is the John 3:16 way: love that sends a sacrificial Lamb that, provisionally takes the place of any enemy that wants to be reconciled to God.

But the hard reality is that an enemy of God who does not want to be reconciled to God is still an enemy of God. Although God demonstrated love toward all mankind, including that person, it is also the case that God and that person are not reconciled; they are still enemies. God must

be a just judge and punish that person and his sin. Yes, God loves in one sense, but is angry with the wicked in another and very real sense.

Because of the world's overuse of the term "love" today and the connotation that it washes out any holy requirement of God and implies universal salvation, I want us to be very cautious about throwing the term around. We have to recognize that God has displayed His love toward humanity, and especially toward those who are saved. In the Bible way we can say God *loved* any random person—by means of common grace and the cross—but we cannot say that with the world's meaning of *love*. God's program for Edom was simply not a favorable one, and that from the very beginning, without regard for Esau's personal holiness or later repentance. God's ultimate plan for any individual remains unknown until that individual repents or perishes without repentance.

I hasten to add that though God did not favor the *nation* Edom like He did Israel, an *individual* Edomite could come into a right relationship with God. Just because God favored the Jewish nation, this did not mean that every individual in the nation was saved. Today, even though God has partially hardened the Jewish *nation* (Romans 11:25), He does save *individual* Jews (like the apostle Paul).

On the other hand, the common understanding of the word *hate* doesn't make it effectual to run around all the time saying "God hates sinners." Yes, there is a Bible sense in which that is true. We saw the verses. But this too can be misused like it is in some cults. God's hate is not the vengeful, emotional, out-of-control sinful kind of hate that humans think of. It is not even an attribute of God. It is His calm, settled displeasure against sin and sinners. Their conduct is wicked and unacceptable and the Judge has to be just in His evaluation of it.

So, does God love everyone? **Yes**, in the provision of common grace and in the provision of the Lord Jesus Christ by means of death and resurrection. **No**, in the sense that the future of the unsaved sinner is eternal destruction. God loves in choosing a person or nation for favor with himself; and He hates when He does not so choose. That is the sense of love and hate in Malachi 1.

Let us acknowledge that it is a holy calling—both privilege and responsibility—to be loved by God. We shall see more about that in the upcoming messages on Malachi.