

Malachi: An Introduction

Father we are in need, this people, this morning. They are in need of You meeting us. Just like we were in need in the first service. Lord You deserve glory and honor in this service. To I pray that as we open up Your Word, the word that you gave Malachi – that the never changing God, the glory of who You are would rest on these words and on this time. I pray that You would minister Your Word. There are so many different situations, troubles, trials, that are represented here this morning. May You by Your Spirit minister to Your people this morning through Your Word. May You speak to them. May you touch them this morning. May Your Spirit have freedom to work. And we ask these things and expect an answer to these things because of Jesus Christ, who is our Savior, who is our High Priest, who lives forever to make intercession for us. We ask this in His name. Amen.

Well we have spent months, year, almost a year and a half in the book of Hebrews. This morning we are starting a new study in a different book, the book of Malachi. If you have your Bibles I'd like you to turn to the book of Malachi. It might be easier to say turn to the gospel of Matthew and then go back one book. We're not very proficient in the Old Testament, but Malachi is one of the easier ones to find because it is the last book in the Old Testament. There's a lot I want to do this morning, and I've kind of divided it up into three ways.

I think it is important that we, first of all, set up a context to understand the message of Malachi. Context is so important. When we understand the background of what is going on in the land of Israel and the situation I think it will help us to understand the message of the Lord. Words have meaning and they derive their meaning from sentences. Sentences have meanings and that meaning comes from paragraphs and this whole discourse has meaning that comes from a context. And that's how you determine what Scripture says. And so we're going to look at the background first of all this morning. It might seem a bit pedantic, but I do believe it is necessary for us to understand the message.

The second thing that I want to do though is address a topic, a question, why preach from the Old Testament at all? Why are you preaching from the Old Testament? And I think that is very important and so I want to address it specifically this morning.

And then lastly, the third thing I hope to do is just scratch the surface, to look at the text itself and begin to look at the message of this oracle of the Word of the Lord to Israel from the hand of Malachi.

So let's first of all this morning just kind of set the background, look at the context of the book of Malachi. The author is said to be Malachi. There's some debate over whether Malachi is a proper name or simply just a designation. The name means, "My messenger," and there are those that propose that Malachi is really just a title, not a name, and they even reference that title refers to Ezra the scribe, so that the real author of Malachi is Ezra. The same name sake of the book we have, the book of Ezra. Others say that Malachi or Mike Coleman is sitting here, he started this whole thing of *Malachee*. I don't like that, it kind of messes me up, so if I say "*Malachee*" it's going to be Mike's fault. There are others that say no, Malachi is a personal name: My messenger, the messenger of the Lord. This is the prophet Malachi, and I tend to think the simplest way to understand this is that this was an individual prophet whose name was Malachi. To me there's an indication of the personality, the individuality of this person. It says in the first verse, "The oracle of the Word of the Lord to Israel." And the Hebrew literally says, "by the hand of Malachi." There was a man. His name is Malachi, and he was the instrument God used to bring a message to His people Israel.

You know the question is, why does God even use messengers at all? Why doesn't He just speak from heaven? Why didn't He just speak from heaven to us? Wouldn't it be amazing, let's come together Sunday morning, we all sit in the pew and God speaks. But that's not how He's ordained it. He's ordained messengers and Malachi brings a message of Yahweh to Israel.

Whether Malachi is Malachi, or whether Malachi is a title for someone like Ezra is really irrelevant because we know this, that by the New Testament period Malachi is clearly recognized as Scripture, as the Word of God. There is at least 5 different quotations in the New Testament from Malachi. The gospels quote Malachi. Jesus Himself quotes Malachi. Paul the

apostle quotes from Malachi. So there is no question in the early church about the inspiration of Malachi and its inclusion in the canon of God's Word.

The date is pretty important. When was Malachi written? It's fairly settled; there's not a whole lot of debate that Malachi was probably written around 450 BC. When we think of dates getting older, the numbers go up. But when you're talking BC, the older the date the numbers go down. So 450...449...430, it goes all the way down to 0, to the coming of Jesus Christ. So the date of Malachi is supposed to be, presumed to be around 450 BC, and there's a couple of reasons for that.

First of all to understand that date let me give a little bit of perspective. We have to go a little bit earlier, back to 586 BC, what happened in 586 BC? Babylon destroyed Judah. The Babylonian army under Nebuchadnezzar comes into Judah, they decimate Jerusalem, they destroy the temple, and the people are led into exile. They're scattered throughout the Babylonian empire. The prophet Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel, they all prophesied of that coming judgment. But Israel with Judah was going to fall, the temple was going to be destroyed. And indeed it happened in 586 BC. For 70 years the people of Israel, the land of Judah, they are in exile. They are scattered all abroad. During that period of time there are prophets like Isaiah who rose up and said, "But God is not done with His people. God is going to gather His people again. He's going to bring them back." And after 70 years in exile, indeed they begin to come back into the land. Remember in Isaiah God raises up Cyrus, and Cyrus is going to bring back his people into the land. And then God promises that they're going to rebuild the temple, and they do that, so they begin to head back. We know that in 515 BC many Jews had come back into the land, they began to rebuild the walls under Ezra and Nehemiah, and then they began to rebuild the temple.

Then you have the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, while they're rebuilding the temple they're growing kind of tired rebuilding, the works going kind of slow, God sends Haggai, God sends Zechariah, and He says, "You've got to rebuild, re-double your efforts. It will not be by your might, not by your power, but by My Spirit." And so they re-double their efforts to rebuild the temple, and sure enough by 515 BC the temple has been restored.

Now the time that Malachi writes we know that the temple has not only been restored, sacrifices are being made, and it's gone on long enough that the people are beginning to grow weary of the sacrifices. That's what verse 13 says in Malachi chapter 1. ""But you say, 'What a weariness this is.'" You know when the temple was rebuilt and sacrifices were once again being made, that would have been a joyous time. "Wow." But as it went on and on, people were kind of growing tired of it. They were growing weary of it.

It's very interesting in the book of Malachi. There is a distinct attitude among the Israelites. If you have children – have you ever had a kid that had an attitude? You've got an attitude. Israel has an attitude here. It has a problem. And this whole book is built around six disputations. God makes an assertion and Israel argues against it. Israel questions it. God says something, and almost 6 times Israel goes, "Well how's that true? Why?" It's like a parent and kid arguing. There's an attitude in Israel. And this book is divided up, in chapter 1 we're going to look at the first disputation. The second disputation will start in verse 6 of chapter 1, the third disputation is in chapter 2 verse 10, the fourth disputation is in chapter 2 verse 17 and follows, fifth chapter 3 verse 6, and the last is chapter 3 verse 13. Six arguments.

I think this book, although it was written 2,500 years ago, is going to be amazingly relevant. Relevant in a number of ways. It's going to be relevant to people who've ever argued with God. Have you ever argued with God before? Have you ever said, "God, I really don't like what you're doing. You say this God in Your Word, but it's not measuring up, it's not adding up." It's going to be relevant to people that have ever wanted to or have argued with God. I've argued with God before.

But I think it's also going to be specially relevant and written for a people in a very unique situation. I'm going to contemporize the situation to our day, but I think that Malachi is writing to a people who are what I call a "Christian mid-life crisis." What do I mean by a Christian mid-life crisis? Many of you can remember the day when you got saved. Some of you were saved out of darkness and sin. We were all saved out of darkness and sin, but some of you more apparently, you know. And there was a big change in your life. There was joy, there was happiness, there was this new-found communion with God. His Word was precious. You come to church, "Oh, I love these people. This is wonderful." But then in a matter of time, might be

six months, might be a year, might be years, reality hits. Life hits. And it's not quite so glorious; certainly not romantic. It's not idealistic as you thought it was.

That really is the situation that you have going on in Malachi's day. Frankly, Malachi is writing to people who are disappointed with God. God has let them down. God's Word has let them down. The whole newness, all the glory, all these great promises, they're just not measuring up to what they thought it was going to be like. Just like Christians who get saved you think, "Oh this is wonderful. My life's going..." and then, smack, you lose your job. "Wow...what's this about?" Or your wife leaves you. That is exactly the situation that Malachi is writing.

I want to give you a little bit of perspective where this attitude in Israel's coming from. Remember God raised up prophets and told Israel, "I'm not done with you, even in your exile, I'm not done with you. I'm going to bring you back into the land. You're going to rebuild your temple." If you want you can turn there, Isaiah 49, God promises these exiles, "You're going to come back. You're going to come back to the land." In Isaiah 49 God speaks of the restoration of Israel, how He has a servant that's going to restore Israel. Literally verse 8 says, "To establish the land, to apportion out the desolate heritages." The land of Israel was a mess. It was demolished. It was destroyed. It was the dwelling place of jackals and wild animals. And yet the prophet Isaiah says, the Lord is going to restore the land; He's going to bring you back.

And as Isaiah 49 unfolds, the Lord pictures a mass of Israelites coming back; the remnant coming back. They're going to come from the north, they're going to come from the west, they're going to come from afar. Verse 12, "Sing O heavens, shout for joy." They're going to, verse 18 says, "Lift up your eyes, look around. They all gather. They're all coming back." Verse 21 says there's going to be so many people that you're going to say, "Where did all these people come from. I didn't even know there were this many Jews. Who has born all these? I was bereaved (verse 21) and barren. I was exiled. I was put away, but who has brought up these? Behold I was left alone. From where have these come from?" And here these Israelites under the ministry to Malachi, and guess what? There's not that many people around. No, they're back, but it's not great. It's not glorious by any stretch of the imagination.

Then you have Haggai. You're probably going to have to have your concordance handy, or your index, because we're not really familiar. But if you want to turn to Haggai, it might take you awhile, but Haggai – remember, Haggai's the one that prophesied about the rebuilding of the temple. "Keep building, keep building." Listen to what Haggai says about the temple. In Haggai chapter 2, "I will shake the nations so that the treasures of all nations shall come in. And I will fill this house with glory, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is Mine, the gold is Mine, declares the Lord of hosts. The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." What house? He's talking about the temple. "The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former." What's the former glory? It's Solomon's temple. You talk about glory. God says, "You see this one. The glory's going to be greater." By the time of Malachi they see the temple rebuilt and guess what they're saying, "It's not a lot of glory. It's smaller. Where's the glory, Lord?" There's disappointment. Disappointment has set in, disappointment with God's words. They have these high expectations of what they thought God was going to do, and in reality it didn't measure up. That's why I'm telling you – this is for people in mid-life crisis, people who are, they are out of the newness and the reality of life has set in. They begin to question the promises of God.

That's exactly what's happened. You look at Malachi and they've developed somewhat of an attitude against God. The glory is not as bright as they thought it was going to be. The glorious promises that they were expecting from God, it didn't really meet their expectations. It's kind of like going to church and I hope you hear messages that encourage you, I hope you hear great things about God that stir your heart, and you get all excited, and you get, "OK, I'm all excited." And then Monday morning comes and slaps you. It's just like, "Uh, that's kind of a let-down. Where's the glory? Where's all this power that we were talking about in church? Where's all this life? That's the situation in Malachi. That's kind of the background that we have.

Before we look at the text itself though, let's ask the question. Why, why preach the Old Testament? Why is it important for me to preach from the Old Testament? For many people the Old Testament is an enigma. "I don't know what to do with it." It's a very difficult book. It's written for very specific people, very specific situations, for very specific purposes. And if you don't fit those specific purposes, you say, "Well, what does it mean?" I think a lot of people in the pews in churches don't know how to use the Old Testament because they're sitting under pastors who don't know how to use the Old Testament.

I've been to Bible college, been to seminary and post graduate work. I've had a lot of Christian education. And I'm a bit...I'm not real excited about professional education. I've been through all this education. I had to get my Master's degree, I had to have a personality test. I had to take all these courses about this – just stuff you twiddle your thumbs and say, "Good grief." You know that in all this education I have never had one course, here and I'm trained to be a pastor, I never had one course, "How do you use the Old Testament." Now is that sad? Here you're going to be a preacher, we're going to train you with all this stuff, but you're on your own about the Old Testament.

It's no wonder that preachers are preaching from the Old Testament. And it's really a change, if you read our puritan forefathers. You read Charles Spurgeon, you look at all his sermons, well over 50% of his sermons are from the Old Testament. Preaching from the Old Testament is so rare today. I would imagine on this day you would have to scour many a churches to find a church that is systematically preaching through an Old Testament book. We just don't do it. And I would tell you this, that I believe one of the most significant problems in American evangelicalism today is a neglect of the Old Testament. As a matter of fact, I would say, it is fashionable to criticize the church, but unfortunately there's many in the church, professing church, that needs to be criticized. But when you look at all the stuff in the church and all that's going wrong, I really believe that if you could sum up all that, most of the problems that we are seeing today in preaching, in evangelism, in weak worship, most of that is due to the fact that we have neglected the Old Testament. We don't understand the Old Testament.

Let me explain. If I were to describe theology in the church today, people's just understanding of God, I would describe it as shallow, trite. People just talk about the love of God and God is just this mushy, lovesick being that just wants to have a relationship with everybody. It's just shallow. And one of the reasons we have that characterization of God and of theology, in the church when you listen to most sermons today, you listen to a lot of songs, and I love Christian radio but, you hear this shallowness. Even in our evangelism, I'm telling you the reason we have such shallowness in our church today is, people are trying to understand and teach about God without reckoning with the full revelation that He has given us of Himself in the Old Testament. We're trying to understand God based on the New Testament revelation alone, and we have

neglected the Old Testament. And you cannot get a proper understanding of God only from the New Testament. It's impossible. And we get distorted views of who God is.

This isn't new; 1,800 years ago the church was faced with a heretic, his name was Marcion. He was very blatant. He read the Bible, he had the Bible, he had the Old Testament, he had the New Testament. And you know what he said? "I don't like the God of the Old Testament. I don't like Yahweh. He's mean, He's wrathful, He's vengeful, He has people killed. I like the God of the New Testament." Marcion said, "The God of the Old Testament is a false God. Yahweh is false. The God of Jesus, He's the good God, He's the right God." Of course the church roundly condemned him as a heretic. But I would tell you today, people don't blatantly say what Marcion said, but basically we're practicing it. We don't like the Old Testament God; we stay away from the Old Testament God. We like this New Testament God much better.

Let me tell you why I think it's important that I preach from the Old Testament. Several reasons here.

1) There is only one God. There is only one God, and He is the same God in the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. As a matter of fact you cannot understand God without understanding Him from the Old Testament and the New Testament. You just do with that. If you try to understand God from the New Testament, you will have a sentimental, shallow, loving God bereft of holiness and wrath and anger. And you really cannot understand the love of God apart from His holiness and apart from His righteousness and justice. So there's only one God, and that God is unchanging which is a theme we will learn in Malachi. We only have one Bible.

2) We only have one Bible. We don't have two Bibles. We have one canon of Scripture. We call this our Bible. This is the Word of God. I don't even like to speak of the Old Testament as the Hebrew Scriptures. I may do that occasionally, but the implication is, the Old Testament is for the Hebrews, the New Testament – that's Christian Scripture. That's not true. We have one canon. This is the Word of God. God has spoken. It is one Bible. Did you know that literally 77% of our Bible is Old Testament? 77%. If you neglect 77% of this book, you are missing out on a lot of who God is. So we have one God, one Bible.

3) The third reason why it's important that we preach from the Old Testament is that the Old Testament reveals truths that are not found in the New Testament. There are things about God, about creation, about man that are revealed to us in the Old Testament and are not revealed to us in the New Testament. The New Testament does restate some things from the Old Testament, but not everything. That's because the New Testament simply assumes that you already know the Old Testament. It doesn't have to restate everything in the Old Testament. The New Testament does not try to create a new biblical world view. It simply assumes you have the world view of the Old Testament.

So there are truths in the Old Testament that are not found in the New Testament. Where in the New Testament can you find the truth that man was created in the image of God? Can you imagine? Where would we have an explanation of the fall? Genesis. That God is transcendent, that God is absolutely sovereign. There is no other places in Scripture that you can hear more forcefully the sovereignty of God than in the Old Testament. The New Testament simply assumes you understand that God.

4) The Old Testament unveils the history of redemption and God's plan of salvation. It's in the Old Testament we learn of the fall. We understand the concept of sacrifice. The need for holiness and separation and the Law, and the promise of a Messiah, a coming deliverer.

5) Another reason why we need to use the Old Testament. It was the Bible that Jesus used. When Jesus was tempted, He quoted Scripture didn't He. What did He quote? He quoted from the Old Testament. When Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God," what is Jesus referring to there? Clearly it's the Old Testament. It's the Word of God, and you're going to live on this Word. On the road to Emmaus when Jesus was talking to His disciples after His resurrection, He says at the end of Luke that, "Beginning with Moses and all the prophets, Jesus explained to them, His disciples, in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." What an opportunity that must have been. Jesus started with Moses and He through all the Pentateuch, and He went through all the prophets and He said, "See, this is about Me. This is not something we just throw away, this is preparation, this is speaking about Me."

6) The Old Testament was the authoritative Bible of the early church. You know we often go to Acts 17, because in Acts 17 we have the example of the Bereans, that when Paul was preaching, it says, "The Bereans were more noble-minded than the Jews in Thessalonica because they were searching the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so." Guess what Scriptures that way – it was the Old Testament. They heard Paul preach the gospel and so they're tearing through the Old Testament. "Can this be true? Will the Messiah really suffer?" And as they saw this unfold in the Old Testament they said, "That is true."

In (1 Timothy 4:13) Paul instructs Timothy, remember Timothy's an elder. He's an elder in the church. He's responsible for the worship service. Listen to what he says, "Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture." What Scripture? The New Testament hasn't even been completed yet. It was the Old Testament. Paul instructed Timothy, "Make sure the Old Testament is read in your worship services. Pay attention to the reading of Scripture, the Old Testament. Don't neglect it."

In his second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 3:15) Paul said to Timothy, "Remember how from a child you have been acquainted with the sacred writings which are able to make you wise unto salvation." What writings are the sacred writings? It's the Old Testament. Do we think of the Old Testament as making us wise unto salvation? Do we think of the Old Testament as being an evangelistic tract that led Timothy to trust in Jesus as his Savior, and yet that is exactly what it was. And then in the very next verse (2 Timothy 3:16) Paul says, "All Scripture is inspired of God." Let me tell you something, that was not a reference to the New Testament at that time. That was a reference to the Old Testament. It has application to the New Testament, but that was a reference to the Old Testament. All Scripture, all the sacred writings, they are inspired of God. And then Paul says this, "They are profitable." The Old Testament is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness. Do we think of the Old Testament as that, as profitable for teaching, as profitable for rebuke? Paul did.

7) Finally, the Old Testament contains a treasure trove of truth and promises for us. I like how Peter says (1 Peter 1:12), "It was revealed to them, that is the prophets. They were not serving themselves, but you." Peter's referring to the prophets, the prophets of the Old Testament. Peter tells us, the apostle of Jesus Christ says, "It was revealed to the prophets. They're not

serving themselves. They're serving a future generation. They're serving you." Malachi came to the realization that he's not just serving himself, but he's serving us. Wow, that's heavy. Paul says in (Romans 15:4), "Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction." What is he referring to? The Old Testament Scripture. The Old Testament was written for our instruction, "So that by the steadfastness and by the encouragement of the Scriptures, we might have hope." Have you received steadfastness and encouragement from the Old Testament? Paul thought that we as believers would be able to read the Old Testament, study the Old Testament and receive encouragement and steadfastness from it.

My favorite verse (2 Corinthians 1:20), "For as many as may be the promises of God, in Him, in Christ, they are yes." If you don't read the Old Testament, you are missing out on hundreds of promises that God has made to you. And Paul says in Christ, yes – is that for me? In Christ, yes. In Christ, yes. Oh there's such a warrant now to neglect the Old Testament. It is the Word of God. It is for our benefit. It has been written for our instruction. It is a treasure trove of promises, so we have strong warrant to love it, to teach it, and to use it. And so my prayer is that as we study Malachi, we'll find it will truly be profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.

Well let's look this morning at the text itself. We're going to just begin by looking at verse 1. "The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi." The older version, the King James, the RSV say, they translate it more literally, it says the "burden" of the Word of the Lord to Israel from the hand of Malachi. The "burden." They're translating the Hebrew word literally. The word there, oracle, literally means "a load," something heavy, something that you carry, a weight. And it was a word that the prophets began to use to designate the message that they had received from the Lord. It was heavy – it is a load – it is significant. Oftentimes the prophets brought a message of judgment and it weighed "heavy" on their heart, and this tells me something, that when God speaks, it is significant. It is powerful. It is heavy. If there is an indictment on the church in America, the church in the west today, the indictment is, we have Christianity-lite. You know like Miller Lite. Like Pepsi Light. We have Christianity...lite. Everything's fluff. I love Christian radio. I'm thankful for Christian radio but I get so tired of hearing Christian radio say, "We're positive. This is positive Christian radio. We don't want to be controversial. We can't say anything too...we keep things generic. We talk about God – love

God – and oh, isn't God good? We don't get into too much substance because we might offend people. We keep everything light and airy"...and shallow.

The prophets were different. When they brought a message from God, it was heavy, it was weighty, it was significant. And if there is a pressing need in the pulpit today, if there's a pressing need in the church today, it is for its preachers to once again feel the weight of the message of God. Feel its weight, and if they can't discern the heaviness of it, the significance of it, the glory of it, then shut up and don't say anything. And the pressing need is for preachers to feel the weight, the significance of the message of God and then, by God's Spirit, transmit that weight to you, the church, so the church feels the significance, the weight of the Word of God. It's not trite, it's not something we trifle about, it's not shallow, it's heavy. And that's one of things so lacking in the church today.

Well let's take just a few minutes and look at this first disputation. The Lord makes an assertion and Israel has an argument with Him. Notice verse 2, "I have loved you," says the Lord." That's His assertion. That's the weighty message. I have loved you. That's on the prophet. It's a heavy message. You bring this to the children of Israel. You say to them, "I love you," and I'm telling you, we people, we Christians today, very few have any idea of the weight, the heaviness, of what it means when God says to His people, "I love you." We have stripped the love of God for His people, just stripped it bare. It's just some generic concept that God loves everybody, He loves me, and He loves everybody else, too. Oh wonderful.

This starts out with God asserting to Israel, "I have loved you." But Israel argued, and you'll notice in their response it is a tone of skepticism. It is cynicism. It has a bite to it, "How, how have You loved us? You say You love us, how do You love us?" Now why would Israel have that cynicism? Why would they respond that way? The Lord says, "I love you." "How?" Well I think there is a very clear reason, and it goes back to the attitude, the disappointment that Israel had with God and with His Word and with His promises. Think for a moment about the reality of Israel. "We're God's people. He's the one ruler. Look at us! We're a third-rate nation. We are oppressed, poor. Militarily we are nothing. Politically we have no influence at all. Religiously, look at our temple. Look at these Persian temples, they're huge. How have You loved us?" I think they're cynical.

I was thinking of Israel and the situation of Israel to try to translate it today, and I was thinking. Think of the super powers today; you've got America the super power, China, you've got Russia, you've got a few other, you know big, significant players on the scene. What would Israel be equivalent to? I did a little searching. Israel would be equivalent to the country of Maldives. Any of you ever heard of Maldives? It is an insignificant nothing. They don't have anything to say about anything that goes on in the world today. If Maldives gets mad at us, we don't care. It's not going to bother us. It's 115 square miles, and it has 340,000 people. It is nothing. It is a joke. You can't even call that a country. We have cities bigger than that. That would have been Israel. Compared to the Persian Empire, compared to their religious system, compared to their wealth, Israel was nothing. So here they are, "We're God's people. You love us, wow. We're oppressed, we're bankrupt, we are poor, we are few in number. You said You were going to do all these great things. Look at us. How have You loved us, Lord?"

Israel was looking at their circumstances. "Huh, that's a funny way to show Your love Lord." We'll notice God's answer. "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" Of course, they would know that immediately, "Yes." Jacob and Esau, they were not only brothers. They were twins. They were in the same womb together. They were both fathers of nations; Jacob of Israel, Esau of the Edomites. They were brothers. Then look what God answered, "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated." That's heavy. "Jacob, I love you. Esau, I hate you." That was God's answer. "How have you loved us? Look at our nation, look at our temple. What do You mean You loved us?" "Do you see Esau? I rejected Esau, but I chose you."

You see God asserted His love for His people. Israel looked at their circumstances. They questioned it. And God says, "Don't look at your circumstances. You look at your salvation. I chose you for salvation. That's how I've loved you." Jacob was the second-born, he was the youngest, he shouldn't have gotten the promise anyway in the first place. If God was going to choose, He should have chose Esau the first-born but He doesn't. He chooses Jacob, and He hates Esau. This is huge. God's love for His people is not based on their circumstances, but it's based on their election to salvation. That's not a message that we're hearing very often in the church today.

There's a very interesting corollary to this in the book of Ephesians in the New Testament, and I wouldn't mind if you'd turn there for a moment, Ephesians chapter 3. While you're turning to Ephesians chapter 3 let me tell you the interesting corollary. Paul is writing this book to a group of believers in the city Ephesus, which is roughly modern-day Turkey. It is an area that was a part of the Persian Empire during the time that Malachi writes his letter. It's part of this Medo-Persian Empire. In the city of Ephesus by the time that Paul writes there is one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World, the Temple of Artemis. It was one of the most glorious structures in the world at that time. It was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Beautiful temple, huge, ornate, glorious. And it was the religion of the day, and it was actually a bank where people brought all their gold and money and kept it there, because it was the safest place to keep it. So you had this incredibly beautiful temple right in the heart of Ephesus. Ornate, rich, everybody's going there. It's the "in" thing to do.

Paul writes to this group of believers in Ephesus, probably just a little house church, maybe sitting under the shadow of the Temple of Artemis. Look what Paul says to them in verse 18. "I hope that you have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge." Oh I wish you had the strength, little church, to understand how deep and wide and high is the love of God for you. Now do you see any interesting corollary's as they're huddled up in a little house, probably being persecuted, sitting under the shadow of the Temple of Artemis, saying, "Really, you love us? It doesn't look like it." And yet you find the same foundation in the letter to the Ephesians in Ephesians chapter 1, verse 4. "He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world."

I wish you Ephesians could understand the magnitude, the glory of what it means when the love of Christ is on you. I wish you could understand the depth of it. Do you see some of the weight that Malachi's talking about? "I wish you could understand how heavy this is. God loves you, and you know what means? It means before He even created world, He chose you to salvation. That's how God loves you."

Now, I'm just talking to you. Some of you are going through trials; some of you are in difficult relationships, unemployment, financial hardships, cancer. And you, like me at times say, "God, is this how You love me? You love me like this?" The message is clear. You don't look at your

circumstances to discern whether God loves you, you look at your salvation. That's the whole message of the New Testament. "How do I love you? I chose you for salvation, that's how much I love you." Now you think about this for a minute. "Jacob I loved, Esau I've hated." I haven't even been able to scratch the surface. We're going to deal with this next week. They're brothers. Blood brothers. But God chose Jacob and He didn't choose Esau.

There are many of you in this room who you are the only believer in your family. Only believer. You have brothers and sisters and you love them to death, but they are as lost as can possibly be. We have couples in our church, married couples, who both parents are as lost as can possibly be. How has God loved you? "I chose you for salvation. I chose you. I set My love on you." When I think of that kind of sovereign love of God, I think of my wife. I told her I was going to do this. Many of you know Lori was adopted. When her mother was 16 years of age, her biological mother got pregnant, took a trip across country. She came from, lived in California, made it to St. Joe, had Lori, turned around and left. Lori's in this little podunk town, infant, a ward of the state, up for grabs. And in God's mercy a Christian couple adopted Lori, and from a very early age she heard about the gospel and came to trust Jesus as her Savior, and has grown up knowing Jesus, trusting Him.

About 18 years ago, Caleb was just born, he was just a baby, Lori had a real desire as long as I had know her, she wanted to meet her birth mother. I can't even fathom not knowing your birth mother; many of you know that, or your father. Lori had this desire to want to meet her mother and through providence, God allowed that to happen. And I can still remember it was in our first house and they met for the first time. And it was amazing for Lori to see the woman that gave birth. There's so many resemblances, it's almost scary to see her mother. Then she found out she had she a brother, a half brother and a half sister, and there were cousins, this whole new family. And it didn't take us long to realize, that Lori's biological family is so lost, I mean utterly lost. But God loved my wife. How did he love her? I mean He left a little baby alone in St. Joe, how is that love? "I loved you as I have chosen you for salvation."

You may not be adopted and you may have brothers and sisters who know the Lord, but it's not less true about you. If you know Christ, it's because He has loved you first. It is because He has chose to set His love on you and draw you to Himself. That's the expression of the love of God.

That's the message of Malachi. He brings to a people, "God loves you. Do not look at your circumstances right now. Do not look at the hardships. You look at your salvation. I have loved Jacob. I have hated Esau."

So the message of Yahweh is clear. If you're going to understand, if you're going to know the love of God you don't look to your circumstances right now. You look to your election, to your salvation. Now we've only scratched the surface here, and I know some of you have never heard anything like this before in your life. What? God hates someone? Your circuits start frying out, "I've never...God hates someone, what does that mean?" Many of you probably assume that you've been a willing and eager participant in your salvation and you and God have kind of just worked together. Malachi has a weighty message for you, the sovereign love of God.

And next week we'll look deeper into, "Jacob have I love, and Esau have I hated." But I want to take this opportunity to tell you that on Wednesday, I'm going to start a new series, and I've entitled the series, "Foundations of Love," because we're going to look at God's foundations of love of us. When the Bible says God loves as His people, we're going to look at the foundations of that love, and the foundation of God's love for us is not in our circumstances, it's not in our vocation, it's not in our health, it's not in our relationships, it's in our salvation. It is in the doctrines of our salvation, what we call the Doctrines of Grace. And I will tell you this, unless you come to understand the Doctrines of Grace, the doctrines of your salvation, you will never be able to even come close to comprehending God's love for you. So we'll begin Wednesday night looking at these Foundations of Love that Malachi has set before us.

But the message is clear. We are tempted to look at our circumstances – you lose a job, you're unemployed and on and on, and things are looking weary, things are looking discouraging. You're kind of in the middle. All the new things have wore off. "God, how have you loved me?" "I have loved you by choosing you to salvation." May that be a great encouragement to you this morning. Let's pray.

Father I pray that the message of Malachi will be profitable for teaching, for reproof when we get an attitude, for correction, for training in righteousness. I pray, Lord, that You will receive

the honor and the glory that you deserve. And I pray that we will come to see even in a new, refreshing way, the foundations of the love that You have for us, Your people. If you know Christ, it's because God chose you. It's because God chose to have mercy on you, and to set His on you. May that be a great encouragement to you today. *We pray this in Jesus' name.*

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