

Malachi 1

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[0 : 00] Malachi chapter 1. The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, how have you loved us? Is not Esau Jacob's brother, declares the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If Edom says we are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins, the Lord of hosts says they may build, but I will tear down and they will be called the wicked country and the people with whom the Lord is angry forever. Your own eyes shall see this and you shall say great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. A son honors his father and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?

And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise my name. But you say, how have we despised your name? By offering polluted food among upon my altar. But you say, how have we polluted you? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?

Present that to your governor. Will he accept you or show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts. And now entreat the favor of God that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand will he show favor to any of you? Says the Lord of hosts.

Oh, that there were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain. I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts. And I will not accept an offering from your hand. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations. And in every place incense will be offered to my name and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted and its fruit, that is, its food, may be despised. But you say, what a weariness this is, and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering.

Shall I accept that from your hand, says the Lord? Cursed be the cheat who is a male in his flock and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts. And my name will be feared among the nations. This is the word of the Lord.

[2 : 54] Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning if you're visiting us this morning, the warmest, figuratively, the warmest of greetings. I know literally it's a little colder outside. But if you're visiting loved ones, thank you for spending this morning with us. Let me pray, and we'll turn to Malachi again.

Father, we give thanks because you're good and your love endures forever. And in these next moments, our desire is that we would hear from God, that we would see Jesus, and that we would be met by your Holy Spirit. And so would you take hold of us and make us a people into the likeness of your Son, for Jesus' sake. Amen. Well, this morning we enter another Advent season. It's a season of expectation.

We look outwards, we look upwards, anticipating the coming of Jesus. As one waits with anticipation for maybe a loved one's arrival during the holiday season, the Christian is one who waits for the arrival of the Lord Jesus. It is Charles Wesley, the hymn writer, who pens this, Come, thou long-expected Jesus. The Christian life is a waiting game. The Christian person is in waiting. The Christian is a longing person. And this is the shared experience that you and I have, the modern reader, have with the ancient words of the prophet Malachi. Because Malachi prophesied during a waiting period. Historically speaking, the people of God lived kind of in an uneventful period.

There's a 400-year gap before the arrival of Jesus for the first time. In Malachi, it appears that the temple had already been reconstructed. The people have returned from exile in Babylon. They

were displaced. Sacrifices were being offered. The people had returned to the land of promise. And though the buildings stood, the blessings were never restored. And though the sacrifices were being offered, the success of the nation was never once again experienced. Malachi lived in a day when the religious way of life was present. But the generations, the emerging generations, were disinterested, half-hearted, turning away from the Lord. As the people walked through life, they probably could not anticipate what 400 years of silence would do. Life would become monotonous, boring. Past glories would fade. Present hardships would persist. The future promise is invisible. Had God forgotten about his people?

[6 : 16] And this morning, I want to ask this question to you, to myself. What happens to a people when faith begins to fade? What happens to a people when faith begins to fade? When the days of spiritual enthusiasm are long gone, when our present days are occupied with busyness, concerns, new priorities, the finish line we can't even see? Sure, God is out there somewhere, but he seems to be idle and inactive. And here we are in a spiritual state of waiting. Is he coming back? Where is the promise of his coming?

You see, the series speaks to us as well. In a renewed period that has exceeded 400 years, we have been waiting 2,000 years, not for Jesus' initial arrival, but his second appearing. And we'll find these to be pertinent words as we title this series God's Last Words Before Christmas. What does God want to say to a people who are waiting for promises to be fulfilled? We see in verse 1, the words come from the Lord through Malachi. Malachi's name simply means the messenger. And from his lips comes an oracle, a pronouncement, a declarative utterance. It was a charge from one party to another. You find it throughout the Bible. There's oracles all over the place. It largely usually takes place when it's judgment pronounced on foreign nations. Every now and then it's directed to God's people directly. For example, Habakkuk 1-1, Isaiah 22. It really is a word, a divine word to people. And whether it be a foreign nation or his chosen people, biblical oracles are God exercising his sovereign reign through his word.

It's the Lord saying, let me tell you how it is. Well, the divine oracle becomes the prophet's burden. And his message, a burdensome message really, because it carries heaven's weight on his shoulders and it needs to be delivered to God's people. And our text this morning, I want to put it this way, it gives us two hazards that we must avoid as we wait. Two temptations that will draw us, lure us, trip us up as we wait for the Lord's return. Two pitfalls that will ensnare your faith. And the first is this, as you wait, as I wait, you'll be tempted to doubt God's love. You'll be tempted to doubt God's love.

And the second, as you wait, you'll be tempted to dishonor God's name. Two temptations, to doubt his love and to dishonor his name. See, the form of the message or the form of the book people have categorized as a disputation. It's a back and forth banter between God and his people. Besides the book of Job, there is probably no other book in our English Bibles that has as many question marks. And as we make our way through this book in four weeks, you'll see that the people have questions and they want answers. God has questions and he wants answers. If you're an attorney in training or already an attorney, you'll love this because God is calling his people to the stand and they are to give an account. The people are calling God to the stand and saying, you give an account. We see two disputed conversations in our text this morning. They're both saddening to hear and maddening to see. The people have gotten to a place in their spirituality that we'll find later on, chapter 2, verse 17, that God is tired of them. They're wearying God with their words. Their words have become meaningless, empty. I haven't, I mean, the best title I could have come up with this sermon is shut the doors. And it's taken from chapter 1, verse 10.

[10 : 50] The entire book pours forth from the opening verse. You can underline it there. You could circle it. Chapter 1, verse 2. I have loved you, says the Lord. I have loved you.

Chapter 1, verse 10. The response of the people is saddening. Really? How have you loved us? They are demanding proof from the one who loves them the most. Now, I don't know if you've ever been in love.

I don't know if you're seeking love. I don't know if you've given up on love. But if you ever, if there is ever a person who is the object of all your love and affection, you've poured yourself into them, whether they be a child, a friend, a relative, and they come to you, you tell them, you know, I love you. I have loved you. And their response is, really, how have you loved me? Imagine, the people have confronted God in such an offensive ways, in such an offensive manner. God, have you really

loved us?

God, have you loved us? And it's to this attitude that God responds. God reminds them that he's a covenant maker. He's a promise maker, that he made a covenant with his people. And I'll just, he calls them to remember his electing love.

I just, it's a phrase I took from a few commentators, but an electing love. It's a choosing love. His divine choice was Jacob. A misreading is to think that, oh, this is some emotional love and hate. No, this is not that.

[12:47] What God is declaring is that I have loved Jacob rather than Esau. That I have picked Jacob rather than Esau. That all of my covenantal favor falls on Jacob rather than Esau. Now, that's strange, because if you're a student of the Bible, you want to know Jacob didn't really have a right to this. He possessed no birthright. He was the younger of two brothers. On the outside, he appeared less desirable. The writer of Genesis said Esau was a skillful, skillful hunter, a man of the field. Jacob was quiet, introverted, dwelling in tents.

If you read further along, Jacob is a scheming brother, a deceitful brother, a cheat. He is so stubborn that he wrestles with God himself. And there are many reasons why he shouldn't have been chosen. Yet, it was upon Jacob that God's love and choice fell. There's an element of mystery to it.

There is certainly an element of sovereignty in it. And there's a whole lot of grace about it. These are undoubtedly the most powerful words any person can hear.

I have loved you. It's a declaration about the past and it's a pronouncement about the present. It's the words of a covenant keeping and promise making God to his people. We learn that it's an unconditional love sourced from his very nature. It's not an earned love. It's not a reciprocated love. It's not a transactional love. It's an unmerited and undeserved love. It's an electing love, chosen and favored out of all the nations of the world. It was a love that overlooked their shortcomings, their weaknesses, their blemishes. It was a divine love. I have loved you.

[14:59] It is the strongest love you will ever experience in your life. Seems like a distant while ago, but I was on sabbatical earlier this year. And while I was away, I made a decision to write, let's just say, called them love letters to my children and my wife.

So I started with the simplest one, the youngest. And he can read. And I remember I started the letter and I said, I need him to know how much I love him.

And I forgot the opening paragraph. And then I wrote the sentence, I love you because. And then I paused. And I thought to myself, what am I going to communicate to my son that my love is a contingent love? That I love you because you listen? Or I love you because you're well behaved. Or I love you because you're obedient and compliant and good looking and handsome and cute. But I said, no, I can't do that. That's awful. Because it becomes a contingent love. It's a transactional love, right? And so there I sat. How do I communicate a love that isn't contingent on anything? And I actually sat there for a couple hours and I was stuck.

And the place I was at is this Christian community and every meal we share together and we have these theological questions that we share over lunch. And you're probably like, that place sounds crazy.

[16:44] And it's crazy great. And I sat there with 15 other people and I said, hey, I have this challenge. How do I express love that isn't contingent on a person? And we talked about it and we discussed it.

And there I accessed the library and I said, you know what's striking? I think all human love is contingent in some way. I love you because of maybe a covenant I make with you. I love you because of this reciprocal benefit that I receive. I love you because of this relationship. We love in that way.

But not God. God is love. And it struck me that I actually love because God loves me first. And I become this vessel and this channel that the only thing I could tell my son is the love that you experience, however fallible, fallen, incomplete, terrible it is, the best parts of it I am able to express because God sends it my way. The greatest thing that you can ever experience is divine love. I have love you, says the Lord. Well, there's a flip side to that electing love because those on whom the Lord's electing love does not fall, find themselves to be his very enemies. Here we see it fall upon the Edomites, the descendants of Esau. They were notorious for their neglect against the people of Israel,

Israel, the descendants of Jacob. Jacob and Esau were brothers. And early in their relationship, if you go back to Genesis, they're already fighting. There's already great fear between them. And though they were siblings, even in Israel's distress, Edom did not offer any relief. As they fled Egypt, they went to the king of Edom and said, hey, can we get through, can we go through your land? It would just be easier. It would be helpful.

Numbers 20, and they're denied. As Judah suffered at the hands of Babylonian invaders and ultimately captivity, the Edomites plundered and looted their property. They were Israel's enemies. [19:17] To Edom was emblematic of the enemies of Israel, but also the enemies of God. And these enemies would therefore fall under God's judgment. And their eventual downfall would demonstrate God's love towards Jacob. One day your own eyes, verse 5, will see this. Their country, their land, though they desire to build it up, will forever be desolate. How is this a demonstration of love for Jacob?

Well, for Jacob, Israel, the people of God, what they're going to discover is God's love is a liberating love. Israel had been freed from bondage and enslavement in Egypt. God's love is a liberating love. It freed his people from Egypt. It will again free his people from Edom. And when they witness this, they will erupt and declare that great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel.

In other words, you will experience, God's people will experience God's love and the whole world will witness it. His liberating love will be attested to even beyond the boundaries of the country. To be frank, it will have no boundaries. He will be known as great in all the world when he preserves his people, Israel, and judges her enemies. God's love will keep Israel and condemn her enemies. God's love will hold Israel and eradicate evil. And while they wait there to hold on to this reality, God will continue to demonstrate his love towards you. And one day he will eradicate the evil that befalls you. He will take the sin that is within and the evil that is without and the devil that is all around and extinguish them forever. Whether they be Egypt's, Edom's, or evils, they will all perish. And we'll declare great is the Lord. It will be a universal declaration.

But in the meantime, the temptation as we wait for the Lord's return is to doubt his love for us. And being beneficiaries of his electing love, we are tempted to doubt his love, to grow lukewarm, to allow our love towards God to grow cold. And what is the remedy? How do we endure as we wait? Well, the remedy, I think the writer of Hebrews got it right. How do we stir one another up to love and good works, not neglecting meeting together, all the more as we see the day approaching, as he is coming back. As if to say, as you wait, remind one another of the great electing love that has fallen upon you. As you wait, as you gather, sing the words of love, his love towards you. As you gather, sit on the words that tell of his great love towards you.

And as you meet, encourage one another with the words of divine love. And as you do it more and more, in an increasing manner, you do it more and more in an increasing manner, implying that it's almost going to get harder as we wait longer and longer. We need to meditate and dwell on the words of the Lord to us. I have loved you with an everlasting love. The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases.

[22:58] His mercies never come to an end. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. But God, being rich in mercy because of his great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses and sins, made us alive together in Christ. By grace you have been saved.

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, angels nor rulers, powers, 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 that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We declare these things to one another because as we wait, the temptation is to doubt his love for us. Secondly, as we wait, we may be confronted with the peril of dishonoring God's name. Dishonoring God's name. The disputation begins in chapter 1, verse 6, and it continues all the way through chapter 2, verse 9. God summons his people for their dishonorable actions towards him. Verse 6, a son honors his father, a servant honors his master, but Israel has failed to show me honor. It's noteworthy because he's explicitly calling out the priests, the spiritual leaders over the people. It makes sense because how the leaders go, so will the nation. It was obvious in our Titus series.

Poor spiritual leadership will result in spiritually impoverished congregations. The priests boldly respond and say, hey, how, Lord, how have we dishonored your name? The Lord indicts them on their failure to bring what was requested when performing sacrifices to God. The priests were bringing the blemished for sacrifices. Animals that were lame. Animals that were sick. Animals that

were blind. Animals that were blemished. When the sacrificial system was established, God made it very clear, and I'll just, you could write a note. It's taken from Leviticus 22. We'll spend a lot of time in Leviticus next year. Leviticus chapter 22, verses 20 to 22. These are the instructions given to the priests. You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted, it must be perfect. There shall be no blemish in it. Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having discharge or an itch or scab, you shall not offer to the Lord. They were unacceptable. Instead of bringing the best, the priests would bring the blemished. What they were doing were approaching the Lord on their own terms.

You know, when you go see someone, a neighbor, or you go to someone's house, or you visit a friend, or you maybe visit someone at work or wherever, there's always protocol. Right? It's very strange if I were to go to someone's house and just invite myself in, right, without an invitation. It would be very strange to go visit, um, maybe someone who works at the federal courthouse downtown. If you were to go, you would have to go walk through the metal detectors, the security there. They would have to see your name on a checklist. We just don't show up to these things. And yet the priests are saying, hey, we're just going to show up. Who cares what God said? We're just going to do it our way. We're going to enter, uh, we're going to worship in the way that we want to worship. And what we find is when they approached the Lord, when there was supposed to be a prioritization, there was actually a relegation.

See, God demanded the best in worship. Why? Because the quality of your worship reflects the greatness of the recipient. We know this. Have you ever given a gift?

[27 : 40] Have you ever given a gift to someone? Perhaps maybe it's an insignificant gift, a small gift, a little token of appreciation. But if there is someone we want to honor, someone great, someone you love, someone endearing to you, you buy the greatest, the grandest of gifts.

Because the value of the gift reflects the value of the recipient. But the priests were bringing the worst to the Lord. They were giving God their second best, their third best, their leftovers. And as they did so, they demean God's worth and value and glory. See, the heart-probing question is this. And since it's directed to the priests, I'll ask it to myself, being as a modern-day priest, the rest of the priest, why am I inclined to always give God the leftovers?

Why? The leftover time. If there's extra time, Lord, I'll get to it for you. I'll read my Bible, if there's a little extra time. If I'm not exhausted, if there's a little energy, at the end of the day, maybe I'll bow the knee and pray. If there's money left over after I buy this for myself and give this gift and pay this bill, whatever is left, whatever remains, I'll give it to you.

Why is my heart like that? Why am I tempted in the same way these priests were? Why? I don't think highly of God enough.

[29 : 39] I don't value Him enough. I don't cherish Him enough. I don't esteem Him highly enough. Is it not my own selfish heart?

God, I won't give you the best time, just a little time. I'll give you the leftovers, not my first fruits. I'll give you the, when I'm on empty, when my gas tank is on empty, I'll give you that instead of when I'm at a full tank.

And in so doing, the king that I say I have enthroned in my life is actually dethroned. You see, there's a quality control issue in our worship, in their worship, in my worship.

When they're being examined, they're actually shown to be failing. For Israel's sacrificial system was organized and run by the priests.

And after they had been examined, the verse right there, verse 10, it so just jumped out at me. Oh, that there was someone among you that would just shut the doors.

[30 : 51] Close the shop. It's like the Food and Safety Inspection Service or the FDA. After they do this huge recall of maybe a food that is diseased.

If it's, if they're able to recall the food and destroy it, that's great. But sometimes there's factories that are just gross. And they need to shut the doors. And what God is saying here is, I'd rather you shut the doors.

Close the doors. The priests have failed to come to God in God's way, bringing lackluster sacrifices and cheap worship. Furthermore, they even snort at it.

They sniff at it in disdain. And they complain about the weariness of it all. There in verse 13. They grumble at worship. Instead of inviting God's blessing, they find themselves receiving God's curse.

And you see, while we wait, this will be our temptation. Dishonoring God by giving what is second best.

[32 : 03] You see, the Lord's name is at stake. You might have caught it as Marjorie read it. It's his reputation. It's his manifestation in all the world.

How does the world know the worth and the value and the glory of God? It will be demonstrated by the honor given to him by his people. How does the world know that God is great and greatly to be praised?

It will be demonstrated by the honor given to him by you. By me. By us.

By us. So when the time comes, I've shared this story. And I'll share it again because there's young people in this room. When I was in high school, my parents probably helped me make this obligation.

Being you cannot, though you have no curfew. I know that was crazy back then. We lived in the old times. I had no curfew. You can come back whenever you want. But you need to be in the car with us Sunday morning.

[33 : 22] And so I said, oh, that's great. But I found out that if I got home at 2 in the morning, it made it really hard to get to church Sunday morning.

And so I just started telling my friends, my unbelieving friends, because I hung out with a lot of them. And I said, hey, I just got to get to, I got to get home by 10. They said, why?

You have no curfew. And I said, I have no curfew. But I want to be, I need to be at church the next morning. And so it happened over and over. We would go to pool halls late at night. We would go to wherever teenagers hang out late at night.

And 10 o'clock would come around. And I would get in my car and go home. And I remember one day, you know, we're sitting there. We're deciding, hey, let's go watch a movie.

The movie starts at 930. And I said, well, before I could say what I wanted to say, I can't make it because I need to be home. One of my unbelieving friends just said, hey, Bing can't make that movie.

[34 : 25] He probably shouldn't go see it. And I said that, I said, wow. Because over time, what it communicates to our neighbors, our classmates, our colleagues, is when you prioritize God, his value actually increases in the eyes of the world, right?

Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. Great among the nations. My name will be great among the nations. And so may that be us.

A people who live honorable lives. That demonstrate the worth, value, and glory of God. That his name will be exalted. And at Christmas, this month, I'll close in this way.

The Lord, he has an eternal name. We call him the Son. But he's given a human name. The prophets called him Emmanuel, God with us.

Gospel writers called him Jesus. Why? Because he will save them from their sins. And though born in a lowly manger, his name would be equated with greatness.

[35 : 44] His great name would be tethered to a great work. He is intrinsically great in who he is as the Son of God. But he is extrinsically great by what he has done in saving a people for God.

By his nature, he is great. By his actions, he is great. It is a universal name, the name of Jesus. And many have come under his reign.

His name is great among the nations. Why? Because he demonstrated his love by obedience to death, even death on a cross.

And out of his obedience, God exalted him and bestowed upon him the name that is above every name. So that at the name of Jesus, every knee shall bow.

In heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord.

Lord, to the glory of God the Father. So this morning, we assemble as awaiting people, tempted to doubt his love.

[37 : 05] Tempted to dishonor his name. And yet his name is an exalted name. His name is a great name.

Not only intrinsically, but extrinsically by what he did. And in a moment, we're going to celebrate what he did on our behalf. That his body is given to us.

His blood poured out for us. And so we wait. We wait. And as we receive the meal, we proclaim the Lord's death.

And the second half of that sentence is until he returns. Until he comes back. Well, let me pray for us. And then I'll give us instructions on the Lord's table.

Father, we come to you this morning. We are awaiting people. Waiting in a world that seems to have completely gone wrong.

[38 : 09] And as we wait, we are those, we admit that we wonder if you really do love us. Seems like so much has gone wrong in life and all around.

And yet your electing love has found us. And while we wait, we bring you our second best. We dishonor you in so many ways.

But you remind us that you have loved us. And as we take this meal together, we pray that the love of God will be shed in the hearts of people.

We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.