

The Love that Breaks the Silence

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[0 : 00] Christians Reformed Church sends you greetings and a Merry Christmas.! My name is Young Kwon Kim and I just want to thank you for having me and! giving me this opportunity to bring God's word to you this morning.

On this fourth Sunday of Advent, we are going to be reading from the book of Malachi. Chapter one, verses one through five. If you look at your pew bibles, it's page one or seven, twelve in your pew bibles.

Malachi one, one through five. Oh, you guys do this. That's great. Okay. We don't do that at Fruit Field. Okay.

An Oracle, the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi. I have loved you, says the Lord, but you ask, how have you loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? The Lord says, Yet I had loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.

And I have turned his mountains into a wasteland that and left his inheritance to the desert jackals. Edom may say, though we may have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.

[1 : 09] But this is what the Lord Almighty says. They may build, but I will demolish. They'll be called the wicked land of people always under the wrath of the Lord.

You will see it with your own eyes and say, great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel. This is what the Lord. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we open your word, we ask that you would send us to your Holy Spirit. Open my mouth to speak your word and open all of our ears to hear your word.

Amen. Amen. They say, on average, Americans can last about 6.3 seconds before they feel awkward in silence.

We are a people who are just uncomfortable with silence. You may have heard of this thing called the chamber challenge, where individuals walk into an echoic chamber, an echoic room, where 99.9% of all sound is just absorbed.

[2 : 44] So it's just silent. Most people cannot last 45 minutes in that room. They report a sense of losing orientation.

They're not going to be able to hear your ear, right? They give you the sense of balance. They give you the sense of balance. And they do that by listening to external sounds.

So when you don't have that, you begin to lose a sense of direction, sense of balance. And in a prolonged silence, actually, people begin to lose a sense of self.

Because studies have shown that silence, when we are internalizing it, it becomes a sense of threat.

Silence threatens us. Silence makes us feel like we are being isolated, abandoned. Silence makes us feel like we are being isolated, abandoned, and that can lead us to all kinds of disorientations.

[3 : 51] We all handle silence differently. We do. But what is clear to us, and science has shown us, is that silence disorients all of us.

Even in a relationship, silence is disorienting. And we have a word for that now. It's called ghosting. And for those of us who are over 45, ghosting is when people stop responding to your emails, your texts, your calls, your DMs.

It's silence in a relationship. Imagine you texting somebody at 8.30 in the morning. You say, hey, good morning.

Give me a call back when you get a chance. And as soon as you hit that send button, you see that red receipt, indicating that the other person has read it.

[4 : 52] And suddenly you see the three bubbles pop up. And that indicates that the other person is typing, and then suddenly the bubbles disappear. You wait for a few minutes, nothing, an hour, a

day, three days, a week.

In that silence, the stories that you tell yourself are never good. In fact, you don't even need days. You just need 30 minutes. And then you begin to tell all kinds of stories to yourself.

Are we done? Did I just get dumped? Does that person still love me? What did I do to deserve this silent treatment?

That's exactly where the people of God are at in the book of Malachi. Malachi is a unique book. It stands at a unique and terrifying spot in the Bible. He's the last prophetic voice of the Old Testament.

[6 : 02] So historically speaking, he marks the edge of a cliff. After Malachi, the lights go out, and this silent period begins and lasts about 400 years.

Four centuries where no prophetic voice is heard, no new scripture is written, and God seems to be ghosting his people.

There is only this disorienting silence. The omniscient God certainly foreknew not only about this 400 years of silence, but also how disorienting this silence would be for his people.

He knew that Malachi was going to be his final prophetic message before this darkness, this silence fell upon his people. So hopefully you're seeing the importance of this message that we find in Malachi.

Hopefully this is setting the scene for you. The final words of God. The final words of God. This is important. So what is the message? What does God actually say to his people before this silence begins?

[7 : 22] God says, I have loved you. God says, I have loved you. In the Hebrew context, there is a sense of ongoing action here. So a better translation may be, I have always loved you.

It's meant to be a comfort. A foundational truth that people can hold on to in this dark, silent period. But look at the response.

They don't see it as a comfort. They see it as a contradiction. So they snap back.

How have you loved us? Notice the tone. This is not a theological inquiry. No. It's a cynical accusation. As if to say, it sure doesn't look like you love us.

So how have you loved us? Why are they so bitter? They are bitter because they find themselves living in the gap between expectation and reality.

[8 : 27] You see, they had high expectations for God. The earlier prophets like Haggai and Zechariah had promised that the glory of the temple would return to the people of God.

That the nations would just flow to Zion and the prosperity just would overflow all over the land. But after decades, their circumstances, their reality was a contradiction.

Instead of glory, they were scraping by as a small, insignificant ethnic group.

Instead of nations flowing to Zion, they were still under Persian rule. Instead of overflowing prosperity, their harvests were failing, their economy was in ruins, and their borders were shrinking. Even before the 400 years' silence would begin, they were already disoriented. So when God says to them, I have always loved you, they're like, that's a joke.

[9 : 44] They look at their empty tables. They look at their overlords. How? How have you loved us? Prove it.

But here's the issue. The root of their disorientation is this. They believed that they deserved God's love.

I'm going to say that again. They believed that they deserved God's love. More significantly, they felt entitled to a certain type of love.

Love that was characterized by political power, economic success, and national glory.

So when their reality didn't meet the expectations, that began to disorient them and cause them to question whether or not God's love for them was real.

[10 : 49] And the thing is, you and I often find ourselves in that same gap. The gap between our expectation and our reality.

We know theologically that God loves us. And we know theologically that God's love is a little different than the love that the world talks about.

When Mariah Carey says, all I want for Christmas is you, we are thinking this romantic love. But when we say, you know, holy night, that love that was born in a manger, that is a different type of love.

We know that theologically, but subconsciously, we have a list of expectations. We have this expectation that this love has to manifest in a certain way.

And when that doesn't happen, it begins to disorient us. Here's the reality.

[11 : 58] When we talk about God's love, we often want that love to function like an insurance policy against suffering. So when life doesn't go as planned, when we face chronic illness, sudden job loss, or painful estrangement, we don't just feel hurt.

We feel betrayed, abandoned, and loved, unloved. What makes that even worse is this disorienting silence.

You've been there before. And some of you may be right there right now. We cry out to God for help. We pray. We spend days, weeks, months praying.

We plead for a sign. But nothing. We hear nothing.

Silence is the only thing you get. In that quiet, you begin to question. If you're Gen Z, you're asking, am I being ghosted?

[13 : 19] If you're a millennial, like me, your question has to be a little more mature, right? Is God even there?

Is God there? Does he love me still? And this disorientation can show up in different ways in our lives.

First, it can show up as simple discouragement. You're jaundiced by this reality because the salvation that you expected has not shown up.

You prayed for healing. You prayed for healing for months. But in the end, you lost your loved one. You worked for that promotion. But in the end, you were laid off. So if you're in that space, to you, the phrase, I have always loved you, feels like a hollow cliché.

[14 : 22] And you find yourself bitter because God's love hasn't changed your circumstances. That same disorientation can also turn you into a skeptic.

You look at the suffering in the world, the brokenness and injustice in your own life, and you scoff at the word love.

For you, today, the fourth Sunday of Advent, this Sunday of love, is a forced performance.

You come here and sing about love, but in reality, you don't feel loved. You're skeptical about God's love.

After this service, when you go out, what you see is the world moving on without God. So, you feel fatigued spiritually.

[15 : 32] You have done your best to keep up. You have evangelized. You have encouraged people. You have encouraged your family, your loved ones, your friends.

You've been the faithful one. You've stayed in the word of God. But you're tired. You're wondering if your faithfulness actually matters at all.

You're tired. You feel tired of feeling small. Feeling forgotten. And sometimes a little foolish for waiting in this period of silence.

No matter how this disorientation shows up in our lives, there is a common theme. We have all bought into a broken definition of love.

Love as circumstantial affirmation. Like those living in the days of Malachi, we believe that the equation is quite simple. If our life is going well, God is love.

[16 : 44] If our life is not going well, God is silent. We have made the mistake of measuring God's love, his eternal love, by our circumstantial, our temporal circumstances.

That is the tension in the text. So how does God respond to that tension? He gives a new definition of love that is categorically different.

In verses 2 through 4, God recatechizes his people. He reframs the whole conversation and redefines love as something that is rooted in his covenant, not in circumstances.

And he does that by stating or giving us this challenging statement. He says, Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob and Esau I have hated.

So let's pause for a second and think about what God may be saying here. By pointing to Jacob and Esau, God reminds his people of how they got to be loved by God in the first place.

[18 : 02] He's reminding his people, you didn't deserve this. You didn't deserve my love in the first place. So remember the story, the story of Jacob and Esau?

By rights. This blessing, this love belonged to Esau because he was the firstborn. He was the stronger hunter.

He was actually the one that their father Isaac preferred. See, by rights, this blessing, this love belonged to Esau. What about by a moral standard?

Let's look at morality or ethics for a second. When you come from that perspective, Jacob wasn't exactly a standout either.

He was a schemer. He was a liar. A man who tricked his brother. Right? And he was a man who lied to his blind father.

[19 : 00] Lying is one thing. Lying to his blind father. Come on now. Right? So from that point of view, he didn't deserve that love either. If God's love was based on merit, Jacob would not have stood.

Like, no, he didn't stand a chance. But that's precisely the point. Even though he didn't deserve that love, for some reason, God chose to enter into this covenant relationship with Jacob over Esau. Why Jacob over Esau, we don't know. That remains a mystery to all of us. If I had the answer, I would write a book about it and I would become a millionaire in a day.

But nobody has cracked that code just yet. But here's what we do know. We know that God chose Jacob not because of what he did or who he was, but because of God's will and his sovereignty. He did that because God was free to do so. The fact that God hated Jacob sounds jarring to our modern ears.

[20 : 22] Right? We're so used to the phrase God is love when we associate God with hatred. It feels a little icky. It sounds like an emotional tantrum, too, to a degree.

But now we can see that this loving Jacob and hating Esau is not an emotional vitriol, but this is a covenant language. Love here means election.

God choosing somebody for that special relationship. And hating here then means rejection. God passing over someone and leaving them to their own devices and their sin.

And God says all this knowing that the 400 years of silence are coming. God is telling his people when that silence comes.

God fades. When you cannot see me, when you cannot hear my voice, when you cannot notice my hand at work, hold on to this covenant.

[21 : 38] Hold on to the fact that I have chosen you over other people. Circumstances change, feelings fade, but my covenant remains.

This specific type of love, this sovereign, this electing covenant love is the only thing that will sustain hope when all seems hopeless.

And God doesn't just do this with his new definition, with his new abstract theology. No, he shows us this love.

In fact, he gives us this love in a person. And that's exactly what we are celebrating in this avid season. The birth of this person, Jesus Christ.

And this is exactly what God was hinting at in verse 5. Your own eyes will see, and you will say, great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel.

[22 : 39] This is a prophecy about this covenant love that is coming to the world and spilling over the fences of Israel.

Malachi didn't know how. God's people certainly didn't understand how this was going to happen, but God knew. God knew that at the right time, after this silence, he will break that silence.

Not with an army, but with a cry of a baby born in the manger. And because of what this baby would do on that cross, taking that rejection and hatred that his people deserve for their sinfulness, this covenant love of God spilled over the fences of Israel to reach people like you and me, people who did not belong to the bloodline of Jacob.

God, this tangible love, the love made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, speaks directly to all of our disorientations that we have today.

You may feel discouraged and unloved in your relationship with God. But perhaps we need to rethink how we understand that term love.

[24 : 00] Maybe that disorientation is coming from the common misguided definition of God's love as something that you deserve. A transaction where your faithfulness buys his blessings.

But Malachi shatters that definition, that understanding. It tells you you never deserved that blessing in the first place. While that may sound harsh, it is the greatest assurance.

Because if you didn't deserve it, if you didn't earn it, you cannot lose it either. This depends solely on God's will and sovereignty.

It does not depend on your performance or your circumstances. You are loved because of that covenant. You may feel a little skeptical about how valid God's love is after all.

Because you look at the church failures. You look at the scandals. You look at your own shortcomings in your life. And you see a lack of fruit.

[25 : 17] And you begin to doubt whether or not this love is real. But the covenant love of God answers such doubt with this teaching.

The teaching that tells us that we are flawed. If we are flawed, of course we are going to expect shortcomings, failures, and continued struggles.

That is the reality. But then, this teaching also points us to the perfect one. To Jesus Christ.

And says, this is not, this covenant love is not about how perfect you will become. No, no, no. This covenant love is about how this perfect one makes you perfect.

Clothes you with his perfection. His perfect righteousness. And it points to the cross. And look at that cross. Yep, there is a cross right there. Look at that cross.

[26 : 15] That's God proving his love to his people. Even when they failed. Even when they fell short. Even when they sinned. None of that matters.

Because right here is the proof that God still loved them. Jesus came to show that God's covenant love. God remains the same no matter what happens.

No matter what we do or what we don't do. But at the same time, that doesn't mean that we are not called to faithful obedience.

After all, the church is the body of Christ. And we are witnesses of Christ in this world. So we are supposed to grow into him.

And we are supposed to be more like him daily. So sometimes we feel exhausted. We feel exhausted because we do our best to be like Christ and edify this body.

[27 : 15] But as we do that, we notice that the world is drifting away. None of this is changing anything in our mind. And to make things worse, with the world, many Christians are drifting away.

You hear that the church is in decline. You hear that our denomination is going through another split. You hear that 70% of our children will leave faith after high school.

So you do your best. But this battle feels much bigger than you. So you wonder if all of this is a lost cause after all.

You wonder if your faithful obedience matters at all. Because nothing seems to be changing. To such faithful yet tired Christians, the covenant love of God comes as a word of comfort.

Because it's a reminder. A reminder that God doesn't just start his church. But he also grows it. And he perfects it. He sustains it until the end.

[28 : 29] And to be frank, this community is a testimony to that faithfulness.

You've been vacant for the last two years. But God has sustained you. God has kept you going. Because it's not about us.

It's not about what you do or what I do. It's about what God does through us. And he's been faithful in that. And that's, we can see that in the history of the church as well.

God has always preserved his people throughout history. When his people were disobedient. When his people were exiled.

When his people, when his remnant struggled. In that dark silence for 400 years. God's covenant love. God's covenant love sustained him.

[29 : 34] Kept his people going. And even now. God is doing the same thing. He's sustaining his church. Look at the manger. And listen to the cry of that baby.

That's God's love validating those who waited. And look at the cross. And listen to the cry of that savior.

Not just my God, my God. But also it is finished. That's God's love. Saving. Those who did not deserve such grace.

And that same king. That same savior. Is coming back in glory. To finish what he started. So on this Sunday.

Of Advent. We find ourselves. Waiting. In the period of waiting again. We're waiting for another sound.

[30 : 35] The sound of trumpets. Announcing the arrival. Of King Jesus. And his kingdom. While this period of waiting.

May be disorienting. This period is fundamentally different. Than the period of the old.

Because Jesus Christ. Has already broken. That silence. He was already born. And he. Lives with us.

In his spirit. So our waiting. Is fundamentally different today. We do not wait. In desperate. Silence. Or. I should say. Quiet desperation. I think that's a better phrase. Do not wait. In quiet desperation. Instead. God calls us. He calls us.

[31 : 34] To break the silence. This disorienting silence. With our lives. We do this. And we do this. By proclaiming. Proclaiming the story. Of God's love made.

Flesh. In Jesus Christ. We proclaim. The baby. Born in the manger. That's how we break this silence. And we break the silence. By singing.

Christmas carols. With defiant joy. That's how we break this silence. And we. We break this silence. By sharing. By sharing. The covenant love of God. With one another.

With brothers and sisters in Christ. With our neighbors. And with. Those who have not. Heard about that love. That's how we break. The silence.

So you may be fatigued. You may be wondering. If your faithfulness matters at all. It does. Your faithfulness. Is not a waste.

[32 : 29] It's a witness. Witness to Jesus Christ. Who came to break. The silence. That disorientation. With his hope. With his peace. With his joy.

And finally. With his love. Let's go to God. Lord God. We thank you for your love. That has broken this silence.

First in the manger. Then on the cross. When we feel discouraged. Remind us that. We are chosen. And we are loved.

When we feel skeptical. Remind us. That you are always faithful. That your love is real. And when we feel tired. Remind us that.

You're finishing what you have started. And. Help us. Now. To be faithful witnesses. Who do not just remain.

[33 : 26] In quiet desperation. But who. Go out into the world. With this. Message. With this. Song. With our lives. Help us to break that silence.

That still. Overwhelms the world today. Let our lives be the song. That breaks the silence. As we wait for the final. Trumpet sound. Come Jesus.

Come soon. Amen. Thank you.