

Malachi 1:1-5 "Awakening from Disenchantment"

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[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

We're beginning, finishing up this series of the Minor Prophets by going through the last of the prophets, the last book of the Old Testament.

And I get the privilege of introducing us to this prophecy. Follow with me as we read from Malachi 1, verses 1 through 5.

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.

[1 : 08] 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. Let's pray together as we enter into this study.

Father, would you grant us grace that we might hear your voice by the working of your Holy Spirit. That we might comprehend what you would say to us. Father, would you make something weak and very ordinary like this sermon into something marvelous and supernatural.

Would you visit us and draw us to you in a new and fresh way. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

[2 : 25] Amen. You know, I've said before, I love the prophets. I love the minor prophets. And I know that too often we think we avoid the minor prophets or even the major prophets.

Because we think maybe that these messages are for times past. For people who were still bowing in temples with pagan idols.

And they were offering goats and sheep on altars to foreign gods. And God was angry with them because of that.

And besides, Jesus has come. We're now in the age of grace. And so God's anger is spent. And we just don't need to hear that much about this anymore.

Well, if that's what we think, we're missing something of very high value for us.

[3 : 27] Because the times might change. And the outward expressions of things might change. But God does not change. And the heart of man does not change.

We might dress differently. We might do things that look a little differently. But we are still the same today in this room as the Israelites were back then.

We're still wrestling with the same issues, the same idolatries, the same unbelief. And so what the prophets spoke to Israel, they speak to us.

So as we get into this prophecy of Malachi, which I hope is going to be very valuable for us. Let's get a look at the historical context.

Malachi was, well, let's back up. Israel had been, because of their idolatry, their unbelief, their disobedience, in God's anger and judgment, sent them off into exile in Babylon for 70 years.

[4 : 44] But now they've returned. And there were probably about three, two or three waves of returnees coming back from Babylon to Jerusalem to restart their life there.

Ezra led a group back. And under his leadership, they rebuilt the temple that the Babylonians had torn down to the ground.

And then a little bit later, Nehemiah comes to a city that's wall was still torn down, every stone torn away.

And so he led them in rebuilding the wall around the city. And Nehemiah probably spent about 13 years there with the Israelites in Jerusalem, not only leading the construction of this wall, but also leading a whole series of reforms, of spiritual reforms.

Because one of the things that we find is that you would think that after the exile and all that Israel had been through, they would have gotten clued in to what was going on.

[6 : 09] But they didn't. And so as soon as they come back, they are reverting to some of their lifestyle of unbelief, of neglect, and so forth.

So Nehemiah is bringing a bunch of reforms that have to do with the Sabbath, with intermarriage, with a lot of things. Well, but Nehemiah's got a day job back in Susa, the capital of the Persian Empire.

And so he has to return. And he does return and goes back for several years, quite a few years.

Well, while he's gone, all of those important critical reforms begin to fade away.

And so now, what we have in Jerusalem is, again, the people falling back into deep-seated unbelief. Because you see, in Jerusalem, during that time, life was hard. It was not what they thought it was going to be. They had heard all these promises about the kingdom coming.

[7 : 33] They had heard all of these promises about Messiah and all that God was going to do. But yet, they were still under the strong thumb of a pagan ruler.

The city, the glorious temple that used to be under Solomon, was now, though it was rebuilt, it's just a shadow of what it used to be.

Economically, it was still hard. Life was not what they expected. And so their religious fervor that they had initially, where they stood and declared again their allegiance to the covenant, it was just kind of fading away.

And what we see happening in Jerusalem was that the people just got disenchanted. All they saw was hardness.

And then that disenchantment turned to cynicism. So what about all these promises? What about this covenant? What about all that you said that you were going to do?

[8 : 53] What about these prophecies of glory? What about... They didn't think they saw any of it. And so their hope just faded away.

And enter Malachi. He comes at this point to again call them back to hope.

We don't know that the writer of this prophecy, we don't know if his name was Malachi. That name was not known really before then.

But Malachi means my messenger. So this may be more of just a description of this messenger that has come to once again call Israel back to their covenant God.

But he comes to awaken God's people out of their disenchantment and their cynicism.

[10 : 05] So I want us to look here at the struggle of disenchantment. Let me explain what I mean by disenchantment.

Disenchantment happens when the wonder and the mystery, the mystery of God, it just fades into normalcy.

The normal state of life, in that normal state of life, is simply what I see, what I can touch, what I feel, what is confronting me, this is life, this is normal, and this is all there is.

This moment, and a lot of times it's difficulty that leads us into such disenchantment, because difficulty kind of focuses our attention and our eyes on the here and now.

Because this is where we struggle, this is where we hurt, this is where we're frustrated. And so all that we see is all there is.

[11 : 20] So how many of us this morning live in this kind of world? You know, with struggles at work, we've got struggles with our families, we've got struggles with financial stress, we've got struggles with chronic illness.

All of these things can contribute to this sense of disenchantment, because we get overwhelmed with life. This life, what we see, what we're facing.

And it can consume us. And I actually think in our modern culture, we are even far more susceptible to disenchantment, because we are led to believe, and we think, that through science or through technology, we can come up with a solution to answer and take care of all of those problems.

We are enough. All it takes is a new technological advance, a new app on the phone. All it takes is something like that, and we can fix whatever is ailing us.

And so we are, our whole culture helps us or pushes us to focus on just what's here now. What is material?

[12:47] What can be felt? What can be tasted? What can be touched? Just give us enough time, and we can fix it. And so with that kind of approach to life, the mystery and the wonder of all that God is, and all that he has said, this kind of fades away into the normal of life.

But with this disenchantment can often come cynicism. And what cynicism is, is just that belief that because I have all this struggle, and I've struggled for so long, that I just start losing hope that anything could ever be different.

And we just give up hoping. Don't hang on to promises because, well, I mean, if they're true, and maybe they are, but they're probably true for somebody else, but I haven't seen it.

And I might profess belief in the promise, but down inside, there is just not much hope.

And so in that cynicism, I turn to that which I can trust, and that's me.

[14:21] I will make things work. I will make things happen. I will. I will. I will. And so forget the commands of God.

I got to do what works. Why bother with what he says? This is where Israel is.

And you can see it in the very first question, the way that Malachi introduces this prophecy, and this is kind of the formula he's going to use all the way through.

He says, the Lord says, I have loved you. But you say, how have you loved us? Hear the voice of cynicism?

If God loves us, then why are we where we are? If God loves us, why are his promises still not fulfilled?

[15:30] If God loved us, why are we still enslaved to these pagans? Cynicism.

The problem with cynicism is really rooted in a very deep-seated unbelief. That unbelief begins with this determination that we are going to design life.

We are going to determine what is valuable, what is good, what is right. We are going to say how life should go. My life should be happy.

My kids should be beautiful and successful. You know, all of these things, we determine how life is supposed to be. And when God doesn't work according to the plan, we immediately turn on him and say, you have been unfaithful.

You have not fulfilled your promise. You are not good. Because if you were, life would be different.

[16:52] And so when our picture does not align with God's design, we turn on him all this abundant life stuff that he has promised in our mind is just a crock.

We basically end up then calling God a liar. because what he said, obviously, just look at our life, is not true.

I don't know if you are cynical this morning. I don't know if you've ever been that way. This is, in a lot of ways, in so many ways, a description of the way I approach life.

I go so easily here because, honestly, I think I have good plans for my life.

I think I know how to make it work. I think I know what is good. I think I know the way it should be.

And very often, the way I think it should be and the way God thinks it should be collide.

[18:08] And so, I have a hard time when finances are threatened, life struggles just become long and persistent.

My immediate reaction is not to run to God to ask him for help. My immediate reaction can be, I run at God and say, what are you doing?

And then I run away because he's no help at all. If he was help, he would have fixed this a lot better than he did. Instead of running to the scriptures to see what is true, I often just read the scriptures and laugh and say, that's not true.

Instead of running to God in prayer or asking him for help, I turn away from him because I said, what good is it going to do? cynicism. What? Cynicism.

The problem is not with God, if that's where you find yourself. it's not him. It's us.

[19:33] Because we have taken on, we have taken this approach to life that is built on our own arrogance where we think we can determine everything on our own.

when I think that God has failed and I'm tempted to run away in anger at what he has done instead of judging him for injustice and his unfaithfulness, what I really should do is run to him and get a readjustment.

He's not the one that needs a readjustment. I am. I need to get a heart adjustment.

And when we become, when we feel ourselves getting into the cynicism, we need to be very careful that this self-determined, self-centered view of reality and the way it should be becomes the reason why we would reject God and say he's not worth following.

Because the problem is not his faithfulness to his promise. The problem is we have a very distorted view of what life is supposed to be.

[21 : 08] And we need to, instead of running away from him, to run to him and let him readjust our perspective.

And here in Malachi, that's exactly what he does. He is giving them a heart readjustment. Because what he does here in these verses, before he calls them to task on anything that they, else that they have been doing wrong, look at what he gives them.

He gives them the gospel. He gives them a reminder.

He said, wait a minute. I've loved you. What you think is evidence to the contrary, you have grossly misinterpreted.

Because actually that evidence should say to you how much I love you. He said, you're not abandoned.

[22 : 23] Far from it. Let's look at the evidence. Let's compare you and your cousin Esau. Let's compare the two. Where is Esau?

Where are the Edomites? Are they here? Are they still around? Try to find them. They're gone. They've been wiped out.

Now they might say, oh, we'll rebuild. But as you watch, they are not there. They will not be there.

And where are you? You are back in your home.

Right in the place where I promised I would be with you. You have, you have not deserved anything more than the Edomites. Maybe less because you had the law.

You had all this stuff. And look at what you did. Look at what you really deserve. And what if you get? I brought you home. I put you back in your city.

[23 : 29] I put, the temple is here. My presence is here. I haven't abandoned you. I've loved you.

And it's on the basis of this evidence of God's love for his covenant people. and the evidence that backs it up.

He will now call them to a new obedience. He doesn't call them to an obedience to gain love from him.

He says, I want you to obey because I love you. And here is probably one of the most basic truths that we have to be clear on is that all of our obedience before God and his word, all of our faithful waiting until his promise is fulfilled, all of our resistance to temptations, all of that stands or falls on our believing at a functional level of two truths.

That God is and that he loves. Everything flows out of that.

[25 : 11] That God is there and God loves me. It's not that he is this great authority that commands my obedience. I mean, that's true. It's the fact that I'm loved.

Because I will never trust someone if I don't think they love me. I will never put myself in the hands of someone that I don't think is working for my good.

All the Christian life is built on that belief that I am loved. look how the writer of Hebrews puts it.

He puts it in Hebrews 11 6. He says, without faith it is impossible to please him for everyone who would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

do you hear the old traditional table blessing that is full of rich good theology?

[26 : 40] God is great. God is good. That's it. If you learn nothing else that is it.

God is capable of fulfilling his love and he desires to fulfill his love. Because I'm only going to trust somebody who's working for my good.

Imagine you are a little kid and you've been left at let's say daycare. You're only about five or six years old but your mom has promised you that she would come and get you.

And you are convinced that your mom loves you and your mom hey your mom is big and strong and she is going to be able to come back and get you.

And so every other offer for someone to take you home with them or every other suggestion that maybe she's not coming or whatever you just say no. I believe that my mom loves me.

[27 : 58] And I'm waiting. If you didn't believe that. If you weren't sure that she loved you.

If you weren't sure that she was capable of even getting back or if once she came back if you would be ill-treated or abused if another better opportunity came along you might take it.

Because hey you need help you got to get help somehow. But her willingness to wait your willingness to wait on mom is all based on if she loves you.

love you. So in my life you know my sexual purity my financial integrity my willingness to worship regularly and faithfully all of that rests on this truth if I am loved.

So sin issues temptation issues they're really not based upon how disciplined we are they're not really based on our behavior at all they're faith issues what do I believe because what I really believe is going to drive what I do and if I don't believe that I'm loved and I then who have I got to trust I've got to make things happen on my own this is what orphans do orphans are fiercely independent self dependent because they have nobody else they don't have anybody they can trust they don't have anybody that cares for them and so if it's going to happen they've got to make it happen we're not orphans we're sons we're daughters what do

[30 : 31] I believe what do I believe about his love and do I believe it to the point that I will say no to all other offers or that I will say no to all other temptations or I will say no to cynicism do I believe it enough to rest and wait in his coming for me so what evidence do you have what evidence do we have that this love is going to be fulfilled well Israel was shown right there before their eyes what happened to Edom and where God says you know I have hated Esau and that phrase is basically saying them and it says look what I've done with you compared to what I've done with them what I did with them appears to be hate because you

I should have hated but I didn't I've loved but for us the evidence is even greater because it's not Esau that we see God hated it was Jesus his own son his own beloved Isaiah said it pleased him to crush him he poured out his unmitigated hatred of sin in our idolatry in our unbelief all of that he poured out on

Jesus not you not us instead he brought us home we don't receive that judgment instead we because he treated Jesus this way instead we get his smile look how Paul put it in Romans 8 32 he who did not spare his own son that gave him up for us all how will he not now with him graciously give us all things does God love you here's the evidence if he wasn't willing to stop there why would he stop anywhere the

Christian life is a radical life we are called to a strict obedience we are called to wait and say no to all this world offers and that evidence we're given he will encourage us to do that so we have a savior who was hated and given what you deserve and in turn we were loved and given what he deserved and this is the evidence as we come here to the table this morning this is why we do this it is to remind you that you are loved to this degree so as we celebrate the sacrament we come and remember we look at the evidence we look at what he was willing to do and once again say I've seen your love for me I believe it I have tasted it and I will stand on it let's pray together father why is it so difficult for us to grasp this but maybe it's just the hardness of our own hearts father would you melt that hardness and would you again make this a fresh feeding a feast of your love and grace we come in the name of Jesus amen for for more information visit us online at southwood.org