

Malachi God loves us? You've got to be joking!

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 October 2012

Preacher: Steve Jeffrey

[0 : 00] Friends, today we begin our commitment, our annual commitment series since 2009. We have set aside time to reflect on our individual and corporate commitment to our purpose here at St. Paul's.

Our corporate purpose is there in our mission statement to know Jesus, treasure Jesus, and represent Jesus for God's glory and the joy of all people.

At the heart of that purpose is to make Jesus look great in our world. And we do that when Jesus is our greatest treasure.

He is our joy, our love, our satisfaction, our hope, our life. And what Malachi will do for us in the next five weeks, it will push us to treasure Jesus in every area of our life.

And so let me pray that that might indeed be our end as we look through this book. Our Father God, we commit this commitment series to you and ask that by your spirit you would speak through your words so clearly and powerfully to us.

[1 : 10] Father, we pray that you would take us from a shallow level of understanding your love of who you are and take us to higher heights of adoration of you.

That we might adore you for who you truly are and treasure you as you have called us to be your treasured possession. And so Father, we'll do that work in us individually and corporately we pray in the next number of weeks.

We ask it for your sake. Amen. God's relationship with his people Israel began when God set his affection on them.

Here is how Deuteronomy 7 describes it. It says, And so there in Deuteronomy 7, we are told that Israel is God's treasured possession.

But history tells us that Israel did not make God or relationship with God their treasured possession. Israel was God's treasured possession.

[2 : 56] He loved them and yet they did not love him back. How did you answer that question just a moment ago? Speak about a time when you were loved or felt loved.

I felt loved yesterday. Natalie sent me this just wonderful text message just affirming me who I was and beautiful, beautiful text message. It was fantastic.

And I read it and I just jumped with joy. And then last night as we went to bed, she said, Did you get my text message? Oh, yes.

It was wonderful. It was wonderful. It was wonderful. Sorry. I forgot to say thanks. And so she didn't feel so loved.

The people of Israel disobeyed God. They ignored God. They did not love him back. They eventually ended up in exile in a foreign land as God had warned them.

[3 : 58] But God did not forget his covenant of love with them. He restored his people to their place after 70 years in Babylon. And Malachi wrote in the 5th century BC to the Jewish people who had been restored to their land after exile in Babylon.

And on one level, you could say the exiled people are back in their land. The temple's being rebuilt and everything's looking good. Malachi, however, speaks to an inglorious Israel.

They are a long way from their former glory. And being an outsider looking in on the returned people of God, you could easily conclude that the God of Israel was not so impressive.

It appears that the lessons of the exile had not been learned. The people of God had grown sceptical of God's love for them in chapter 1 verse 2. They had become careless in worship in verse 7 of chapter 1.

Indifferent to the truth in chapter 2 verses 6 and 7. Disobedient to the covenant in chapter 2 verse 10. Faithless in their marriages in chapter 2 verse 15 through to 3 verse 5.

[5 : 14] And stingy in their offerings in chapter 3 verse 8. And so Malachi is a passionate prophecy where God confronts his people for their half-hearted devotion and love of him.

God desires for his treasured possessions to treasure him. And so right at the beginning of Malachi, God takes his people right back to the very foundation of their relationship.

And in doing this, he reminds them of his character. And there are two things here in these first five verses that God says about himself. The first is a tender reminder that they are God's people because of God's attitude towards them.

I have loved you, says the Lord in verse 2. And the second is a reminder that this is not just some kind of weak, soft love.

It's a reminder in verse 5 of his universal greatness. Great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel.

[6 : 35] At the very start, we are taken back to two very essential truths. God is a God of mercy and love and grace. And he is a God of absolute universal control.

And both of those things need to be held together in balance. The very foundation of their relationship with God is that statement, I have loved you.

Those four beautiful words. And this statement actually means that he has loved them in the past with clear action and that he is still loving them now with clear action.

God's blessing and faithfulness to his people were not the result of their faithfulness to him. They are the product of his love.

It was his initiative to love. We heard it a moment ago in Deuteronomy 7. The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples of the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession.

[7 : 38] The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were numerous than other peoples. For you were the fewest of all.

But it was because the Lord loved you. You weren't chosen because you were the most impressive of all the nations. And God went, well, if I've got to pick someone, I'll go for the good guys.

But the skeptical response of these people reveals a lot about their condition, does it not, in verse 2? But you ask, well, how have you loved us?

We don't feel loved by you. How would you answer that question? Is your life in such a shambles right now that you feel skeptical about God's love as Israel did here?

No doubt I would say that there is a little bit of that in all of us. And so it would do us really good to listen to God's answer to their question.

[8 : 45] It's not the sort of answer I think that we'd give. Verse 2 again. Was not Esau Jacob's brother? The Lord says. Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated.

We need to unpack that because in that short answer we get to the very essence of God's love. Malachi is written to Israel, the descendants of Jacob, and their next door neighbours Edom are the descendants of Esau.

And Edom have been fairly nasty to Israel. In the exile, Edom joined brothers instead of with their half-brothers. They joined forces with the enemies of Israel to cut down anyone who was escaping from the invaders.

They plotted against their brothers. And so the question is, was not Esau Jacob's brother? And the answer is yes. Of course he was his brother.

In fact, let me say, he wasn't just his brother. He was his twin brother. And not only were they twins, but Esau was the older brother.

[10 : 01] And by customary rights and privileges, Esau would be the main heir of the father's blessing. That is, Edom ought to be the ones with the promised land and all the blessings.

Not Israel. And so why mention this here? The point is, that based on what Jacob and Esau were in themselves, God could have just as easily have chosen Esau.

Aren't you brothers? Weren't you twins? Weren't you both formed in your mother's womb at the same time? Isn't Esau, in fact, your older brother? But I passed him by and I chose to set my love and affection on you.

And so when these loved people skeptically say, well, how have you loved us? The answer is, I have loved you with free, sovereign, unconditional, electing love.

That is how I've loved you. Straight up, God sets the very foundation, the basis of his relationship with these people. He says, my love for you is electing love because I chose you for myself above your older brother Esau.

[11 : 31] My love for you is unconditional because I chose you before you had done anything good or evil, before you had met any conditions, or had any applause for doing anything impressive and good.

In fact, I chose you before you were even born. My love for you is a sovereign love because I was under no constraint whatsoever to love you. I wasn't forced to love you.

I was not tricked into loving you. I wasn't manipulated to love you. I was totally in charge, totally clear-headed, and I chose to love you. And my love for you is free because it is the abundant overflow of my immeasurable grace that can never be bought, it can never be repaid, it can never be earned in any way.

Is that not the glorious center of the Christian faith? No other religion in this world dares to speak of God's relationship with his people in that way.

Free, unconditional, sovereign, electing love. It is the grace of God which sets it apart. Is that not the glorious center of the Christian faith?

[12 : 52] Romans 3, All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. Romans 5, 6, At just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

Romans 5, 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this. That while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Ephesians 1, Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ.

In accordance with his pleasure and will, to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the one he loves. 2 Timothy 1, God who has saved us and called us to a holy life, not because of anything that we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace.

And this grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. We don't earn acceptance with God.

[14 : 06] We don't make ourselves lovable to God. He loves the unlovable. It is his free choice. A moment ago, we were asked the question, when have you ever felt loved?

Let me tell you that when I understood that for the very first time was the first time when I felt loved. As a man 23 years of age, questionable you man, I felt loved.

And for weeks I cried like a baby. I still remember it. The electing, unconditional, sovereign, free love of God just come, bam, into my heart and turned my life upside down and inside out.

I remember trembling with fearful joy that of all the people that on the face of this earth I was not passed by.

[15 : 29] That the sovereign creator God would set his affection on a young punk like me. before the beginning of time.

For the first time in my life, I saw clearly what it was to be totally loved, completely, unconditionally loved. God in Jesus embraced me forever and I have never, ever felt so secure.

Ever felt so secure in any relationship. God in Jesus and no new piece of information somehow making its way to God through the great accuser is going to ever overturn his love for me.

No one loves like that. No one. Everywhere you turn in this world, love is conditional. I will love you if you change, if you do better, if you put more effort in.

Expectations wherever you turn. Do you know what it is to be loved like this unconditionally in spite of your failings with all the imperfection, the sin?

[17 : 02] Do you know what it is to still feel secure in a relationship? It would be great if I could end it just there.

Of course, the brilliance and beauty of God's love in these verses becomes so clear because it's set against the darkness of Esau. What about Esau?

Verse 3, God says, Esau, I have hated. It would have been so much nicer if that wasn't included. What does it mean? I think it's actually spelled out for us in the rest of verses 3 and 4.

Follow it with me. I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals. Edom, remember they're the descendants of Esau. Edom may say, though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.

But this is what the Lord Almighty says, they may rebuild, but I will demolish. They will be called the wicked land of people under the wrath of the Lord.

[18 : 06] Notice in those four very quick words, Esau I have hated, there are four aspects in those next few verses, aspects of God's rejection of Esau.

Firstly, God opposes their prosperity and brings their land under his judgment. Secondly, it means that God will continue to oppose them when he resists their judgment of his judgment of them. He will continue to demolish. Third, they will by and large be given over to wickedness. And this is possibly the most devastating of the judgments and the one that makes all the other judgments just. You see, they are not an innocent people. God is just in all his dealings with people. And when God decides to pass by Esau and choose Jacob, there is no decree here anywhere, anywhere in the Bible to say that Esau was innocent and would be judged harshly as an innocent man. That is, neither Jacob nor Esau actually deserve love. Neither of them deserve love.

[19 : 22] Neither of them deserve grace. Now, of course, there's a great mystery here and I don't claim to solve all the problems that we have in our finite minds in a text like this, but this is sure from this text.

God passes by the descendants of Esau and withheld his electing love and as a result, Esau gave way to wickedness and deserved the indignation of God.

And that takes me to the fourth point from the end of verse four is that God is angry with them forever. In verse two, God declares his love and the people of God are skeptical.

And having heard God describe his love in such a stark way here, we might be tempted to be skeptical too.

We might be tempted just to cut the second four verses off and just keep the first four. And what you do at that point is you diminish and demolish the love of God.

[20 : 33] You have a simple view of the love of God. You see, to our minds, we look at these verses and we go, it seems insufficient, it seems unjust, it seems callous.

Our problem is most likely that, well, if one gets love, then why not both? I suppose, I suppose, but if two criminals were before a judge guilty of exactly the same crime and the judge chooses to let one off and punish the other one justly according to their crimes, I don't think either criminal can say to the judge, that's unfair.

Neither deserves mercy and I think that's one of the points that Paul makes in Romans 9. Who are we to question the infinitely wise God with our small minds?

there is a mystery here. There is a mystery. But at the very least, let me hammer this home.

It is meant to cause those in Christ to reach to higher levels of gratitude and affection for God that he should set his affection on anyone.

[22 : 02] It ought to take our love of God beyond a shallow confidence to a deep joyful trembling. And I want to include the word trembling.

I think that's why Malachi begins his message in this way to these apathetic Israelites. I think that these words are meant to humble them, to take away their presumption, to remove every ground of their boasting, to cut the nerve of pride that possibly rejoiced in the downfall of Edom, as if their salvation, Israel's salvation, were owing to something that they had done.

To grind away their cavalier sense of self-reliance that made them think that they were equal partners with their God within this relationship.

To make their tremble with tears of joy that they belong to God. and they don't deserve it. And I want to keep throwing the word tremble in there.

Because as we see, this God is not simply to be admired with joyful songs of praise. He is to be feared. God's love is not soft and it's not simple.

[23 : 23] So the second purpose of revealing his electing love of Jacob and his judgment of Esau helps us to see that he's to be feared. Verse 5, you will see it with your own eyes and say great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel.

You see, part of what it means to be loved by God is to know that this God sovereignly reigns. That he is awesome and mighty over everything above the earth, on the earth, and below the earth.

And Malachi here is not speaking of some kind of village God or tribal spirit. this is the universal sovereign Lord over all that is. He is mighty in Israel.

He is mighty in Edom, next door. He is mighty in Sudan and the US and in Chatswood. He great is the Lord even beyond the walls of this church.

And so friends, right at the very beginning, Malachi is calling the people of God back into covenant relationship and devotion with their God who has loved them, who has said his affection towards

them.

[24 : 37] And the way he does that is by reminding them of this great God. And what we discover in the first few verses are deep things that are very hard to get our minds and our hearts around.

But they are beautiful truths that ought to cause us to tremble. tears of joy. Let me say that normally these things that I've only touched them very lightly, they are so much deeper than what I can give them justice to here.

We normally only touch these sort of deep truths, sort of think, well these are for the mature Christians, for Bible study classes, for the keen ones to dig a little bit deeper and understand some big concepts.

But that's not Malachi's purpose here. Malachi is not speaking to a bunch of mature Christians locked up in some theological college, he is speaking to a bunch, a worldly bunch of half-hearted followers of their God.

They are sceptical, they are careless, they are indifferent, they are disobedient, they are adulterous, they are stingy. And these deep and difficult truths are here designed to shock the presumption and the flippancy of the careless children of God.

[26 : 04] You could say these words are good for Christians whose grasp of the love of God is so shallow that it never makes them tremble but instead it makes them careless and casual and presumptuous in their relationship with God where they take him for granted.

Where these truths of the sovereign, electing, unconditional purposes of God, love of God, where it should take us is commitment and zeal and earnestness for the things of God whereas often we take the grace of God and interpret it as I've got a license.

I'm not under law anymore, I'm free in grace, I can do what I like. Hoop-dee-doo-dah. And the apostle Paul says in chapter 9 of Romans, how dare you take the love of God that way?

Do you think God's an idiot? That's kind of how I interpret Romans 9. Unfortunately, when we reduce the love and grace of God down so that it sits so easy with our finite minds, then we, as a result, become careless, apathetic, flippant, followers of the Lord Jesus and God's grace in the Bible never, ever excuses disobedience and apathy and carelessness.

It motivates obedience and zeal. And that's what we're going to see as we go through Malachi. We'll see that as we go through Malachi, that the love of God is the very foundation of calling his people back to faithfulness in their marriage, faithfulness in their worship, faithfulness in their giving, and faithfulness in their treatment of one another.

[28 : 06] And so as we commence our commitment series, I want to call you to make a commitment to go deeper in knowing this God. We cannot worship and treasure and adore what we do not understand.

Don't be content with just a simple view of God. God. I recall a true story of a minister sitting on a plane. Many, many years ago, he was working on his sermon for the next Sunday when the person sitting beside him was quite interested in what he was doing.

And so he says to him, you know, what are you doing? And the answer he gets was, I'm working on my sermon. And the guy said to the minister, oh, religion. He said, I don't get caught up in all the ins and outs, the complexities of religion.

He said, I like to keep it real simple. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. That's my golden rule and that's my religion. And the minister working on his sermon said, I see, what do you do?

And he says, I'm an astronomer. I teach at university. And the minister replied, oh, astronomy. I don't like to get caught up in all the ins and outs and complexities of astronomy. Twinkle, twinkle, little star.

[29 : 15] That's my astronomy. My friends, go deeper. Go deeper. The opening verses of Malachi reveal to us a God much bigger than we can fully grasp.

And the burden of this text is that the glorious truth about this God will for some be dark and foreboding and unapproachable.

And so this God will be ignored and he'll be ridiculed and he will be scorned. But for others here, the mere glimpse that we've received this morning of an awesome God will bring a real sense of joyful trembling and security in this relationship.

And so may God give us the grace to see the glory and move us to greater levels in adoration and love and awe and joyfully trembling as we seek to commit to this great God.

Amen.