

Return to Me

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[0 : 0 0] Hey you all, my name's Ross, as we said, I am from Musselboro Baptist Church, one of the pastors over there, been there for about five years now, previously of Charlotte Chapel, where I sort of came back to the faith a good few years ago now, and then was eventually trained up for ministry, went to the training program, and then was kicked out to go to Musselboro Baptist Church when I was finished, where I've been, and it's a delight to be there. I do come with warm greetings from the church at Musselboro, and they send their greetings to you at Westerhales, and it's a pleasure to be with you this morning. If you've got a Bible, why don't you reach to Malachi? Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, and we're going to be reading from Malachi chapter 1 in a moment or so's time. It's been good to come here this morning, first time in this church building. Obviously, I've heard of Westerhales Baptist Church, and it's been good just to share different links that we have between our churches, talking to a few people, and know some people at Musselboro, and those people here, it's good to make those connections. But whether or not you're here in Westerhales, or whether you're back in Musselboro, or St. Mungo's, or whatever church has been prayed for today, there's always going to be a mixed bag of people coming on a Sunday morning. We're all coming from different circumstances, we're all coming from different weeks, we're coming from different mornings as we gather here on a Sunday morning. And no doubt, there will be those who this morning could perhaps feel a bit discouraged. Those who need an encouragement as they come to hear from

God's Word. Discouraged perhaps because of unfulfilled expectations of what you thought a Christian was going to be like, and what we thought church was going to be like. Maybe this morning, and you're lukewarm in your worship, you're weary in your Christian walk. Maybe you have been so for a while. Prayer meetings and Bible studies are more of a duty than a chore, than a delight rather.

Quiet times, if you have any, feel more like a thing you have to do than a thing you want to do. Maybe you lack hunger for God's Word. Maybe you've asked this question either this morning, or at some point in your Christian walk, is there really any point in being part of God's people? Because when I look across the fence to those who don't love Jesus, to those who don't come out on Sunday morning at 10.30, they're doing all right. They're doing fine. Life is good for them. Things are going well. Is it really worth it? Well, Malachi is a book in which God speaks to a discouraged people.

A discouraged and disillusioned people who'd become cynical. As you look through the whole book of Malachi, you see this come up time and time again with the questions that they ask of God. Questions asked not to seek reassurance, but more to accuse God for not holding up his side of the deal. You see, a time when we come to Malachi, where the prophet Malachi speaks to God's people, is a time where they have now come back from the exile. A little bit of history for the people of Israel. They used to be this great nation. Right now in Musselboro, we're going through the story of David, King David. And it's almost the pinnacle of the history of Israel with David, then with Solomon. Great kings, great wealth, great temple, great name.

[4 : 0 3] But as you follow their story, you see they start to wander away from God. They wander away from God's word and his law. And eventually sin. And so God sends the great power of Babylon in who carries them off into exile, just as God said would happen. Well, exile's now come to an end. They're now back in the land.

They've now come back home. Crisis of the past is over. They're settling down. They've rebuilt the walls of the capital, Jerusalem. The temples rebuilt. It's time for their happily ever after. And yet things are meh. Underwhelming. Their life's not easy. They're a small nation. Nothing compared to what they once were. Surrounded by opposition, still under the sway of a foreign

power.

The promised land that was once flown with milk and honey is now flown with locusts and droughts. The temple is not as great as it used to be either. In fact, people who remembered the old temple, when they saw the new one built, they wept. Nothing compared to what was before.

For them, coming to church is burdensome, without any real spiritual benefit. And everywhere they look, the wicked prosper. So that leads them to being disillusioned.

[5 : 28] To being discouraged. Saying to God, we've done our part. Why are you not doing yours? Where is the fulfillment of all your promises, Lord? Why have you not made us greater than all the other nations, just like you said you would?

Well, the disillusionment, discouragement, then leads to disobedience. As you go through the book of Malachi, you see God showing them their sin. From priests that offer corrupt sacrifices, to the marrying foreign women, which was banned at that time, to adultery, to profaning the temple of the Lord, to weary them with these words and speaking harshly against them.

And all the while, they fail to see what they have done wrong. They have become so cold, so half-hearted, that they are oblivious to their disobedience.

And become a nation where it's normal and acceptable to doubt God's goodness and to sin against Him. And when challenged, they not only defend their own behavior, but dare to suggest the problem is with God.

And so it's into this, discouragement and disobedience that God speaks. Not the kind of conversation that gives you a warm hug, but the kind of conversation that says, we need to talk.

[6 : 50] God, Sir at Malachi, reminds them who He is, who they are, and all the goodness that He has shown them. So, we're going to read this now.

What does God have to say to people who are lukewarm in worship, who are discouraged, disillusioned, and even disobedient? What's the opening words of God to such a people?

Let's read Malachi, chapter 1. And we're going to go just the first five verses. Malachi 1. The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi.

I have loved you, says the Lord. I have loved you, says the Lord, but you say, how have you loved us? Well, 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.

[7 : 56] 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. 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 see, great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. Amen. This is God's words.

Well, what does God say to a discouraged, disillusioned, disobedient people? It's right there in verse 2. I have loved you.

It's astounding that God's opening words to a forgetful, disbelieving, disobedient people is I love you. In this sense, it's not I have loved you, but no longer anymore.

It's a sense of I have loved you, and I still love you. God says I love you. To people that are accusing God of not upholding His promises, to people who want to accuse God for all that's going wrong, He says I love you.

[9 : 10] Now, maybe you're here this morning, and you need to hear those words. Maybe you've been drifting in your walk with Christ. Maybe you're here this morning more out of a sense of duty and tradition rather than devotion and worship.

Faith is our formality rather than being grounded in fear of the Lord. Worship a ritual rather than a reverent delight. Maybe that's because you feel God's not been living up to His end of the bargain. You're doing all you can for God. You're on the stewarding road. You play the music. You serve here. You're doing well here. But what's God doing for you? You're left with a hard life, a hard marriage, tough kids.

Maybe you're not even married, but long to be. Maybe you've got poor health, low wealth, and church is tiresome. And you look across the other side of the fence, and you see people who don't love Jesus doing well.

You ever been there? It looks like the grass is greener on the other side. Well, how would you want God to show His love for you? What would you expect God to do for you?

[10:15] See, I think sometimes we fall into a trap of trying to tend to judge God's love for us based on what happens to us. So if my life is good, then therefore I'm blessed because God loves me.

If my life is terrible, I'm cursed. God hates me. You see that a lot in the theology of many churches in this land, and particularly in America as well, of God loves you when your life is good.

And if your life's not good, God can't love you. We want God to show His love for us by giving us a spouse, giving us good health, giving us children, success, money, a growing church, protected from drama, a quiet life.

Well, God says, I have loved you. I have loved you. Well, the people hear these words, and they go, How?

How have you loved us? Look at verse 2. That's what it says, isn't it? I've loved you, says the Lord, but they say, How? Quite Scottish, isn't it? How? How have you loved us? Here, they're not asking for reassurance.

[11:23] Here, they're accusing. Lord, it doesn't make a difference if you love us or not. Look where we are. Look at the nations around about us. They're doing so much better. It doesn't make a difference if you love us.

We hear the Israelites are judging reality based on their eyes, what they can see, rather than ears, what they can hear God say to them. They judge reality based on their eyes, rather than their ears. Based on their circumstances, rather than God's Word, and promises. They've lost any sense of wonder of God and all that He's done for them.

So religion becomes a formality, it becomes a duty, and as long as they go to church, offer their sacrifices, whatever poor that may be, say and do the right things, they're doing well, God's the one who's in the dock.

Here God says, I've loved you, and my love does make a difference. It's a story that God reminds us in Malachi of Jacob and Esau.

[12:31] See it there? So verse 3, and verse 2, how have you loved us? Where does God go? Is not Esau Jacob's brother? That's a random thing to say to someone who's asking, how do you love me?

Well let me tell you about two brothers. Many years ago, God says, Esau was the elder, and yet contrary to the accepted practice, it was Jacob, his younger brother, who received his father's inheritance.

And Jacob would become the father of God's people, one of the fathers. Remember Jacob, then it goes down to Joseph and all the brothers down there. This is Jacob. And we hear why Jacob received inheritance.

Look at verse 2. God said, I love Jacob. I hated Esau. One brother was loved, one brother was rejected.

God loved Jacob, he rejected Esau. This word hate is less to do with the emotion that we might understand the word hate to be, and more to do with just a rejection, a choice. God rejects Esau, but loves Jacob.

[13:37] And look at the consequences of one being rejected and one being loved. Well, verse 3. I hated Esau. God says, I've laid waste to his hill country, left his heritage to jackals of the desert.

Here God reminded them that in the absence of my love leads to a rejected wasteland, where I leave people to their own devices and they descend into wickedness.

Esau's land has been turned into a wasteland because of the sin of Esau and his people. This is an example of God's judgment. Loved Jacob, rejected Esau.

God says, look at Edom in verse 4. Now, Edom was a nation that kind of descended from Esau, from his people. They formed this land called Edom. And they were delighting in Israel being taken off into exile.

It reminded me of the time where Hebs got relegated from the league. And hearts were delighting about it. But then hearts got relegated from the league. And then Hebs were delighting in it.

[14:47] Well, that's what's happening here. The opposition, Esau, Edom, are delighting in Israel's downfall. Well, God promises that what has been done to Israel will be done to them.

We read in Obadiah later on that he writes, as you have done, it will be done to you. Your deeds will return upon your own head. God rejected them and they're never going to be able to rebuild.

And even if they do rebuild, God's going to demolish it again. Luke 1, chapter 3, 4, they say, they may be bold, but I will tear it down. They're always going to be under the wrath of God.

Without God's love, they're always doomed to failure and to destruction. But not so with Jacob. Not so with Jacob and then the nation of Israel that came from Jacob. God loves them. And they will experience God's love for them wherever they may be.

[15:51] Look at verse 5. Your own eyes, God says, will see what's going to happen to Edom. And you're going to say, great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel.

You're going to see my goodness to you. You're going to see the difference that my love has for you. You're going to know that I still love you and will always love you because I have chosen you to be my holy people.

Not because you've chosen me. That's not how this works. Israel. It's not because you have chosen me that I choose you. It's because I have chosen you that you're going to choose me.

How has God loved them? He chose them. They are in his community. In this messy remnant of a state that's left after the exile, God has chosen them to be his holy people.

his nation of priests. He has chosen them to be the salt and light to the nations round about them. It's extraordinary that after all they've gone through they're still here.

[17:10] Having been taken off into exile to Babylon, having had the temple destroyed, they're still here after years and years and years of being under the sway of a foreign power.

they're still here. Why? Because God loves them. God said, I know things don't look great just now but trust me that my love makes all the difference.

I've acted in my love in the past, brought you back from exile and I will act again and the nations are going to see my goodness and my greatness and my love.

If Israel had not become so self-centered they would have seen this, what God was doing. One day they are going to see it and they're going to confess the greatness of the Lord.

They're going to act in a way that displays His greatness beyond the borders where the whole world is going to see that He is faithful to His words and His promises will come to pass.

[18:17] Brothers and sisters, if you're here this morning feeling discouraged, disillusioned, perhaps even disobedience, how are you judging your reality?

How are you judging the reality of God's love for you? Is it based on what you can see? Your immediate circumstances that might not be that great?

Or are you listening with your ears to what God says? Things of this world are going to pass away and spoil and perish and fade, but God's Word stands forever.

What are you basing your reality upon? What are your grounds and your hope, your assurance upon? What you can see and what you hear?

Obviously, we are not Israel. We can't just draw a straight line from Israel to us in application when it comes to the Old Testament.

[19:23] Instead, we've got to ask the question, well, how does this find its fulfillment through Jesus Christ? We ask the question, how has God loved us? There's only one place we can go.

And that's Jesus. Jesus, who was sent by the Father to die for you.

Reading 1 John, chapter 4, kind of leading on from what Jared was sharing from Romans, chapter 5, as we opened our service together, that 1 John 4 says this, this is how God showed His love among us.

This is how God shows He loves us. He sent His one and only Son into the world that we might live. This is love.

Not that we love God. No, we're like there's going, how have you shown His love? But that He loved us, sent His Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins when Jesus died on the cross.

[20:28] You want to know God loves you? You look to the cross. Where there you see God's love displayed in full high definition.

Undeserved, everlasting, covenant love. You see, it may look like now and then that the grass is greener on the other side of the fence, but the truth is because God loves you, because God has chosen you, the grass is greener on our side and it always will be.

No matter what our eyes might tell us, we listen with our ears and we trust in the promises of God. And like Israel, we will declare how great the Lord is.

His greatness is going to be undisputed. That there is coming a time we read in Philippians chapter 2 where everyone is going to bow to Christ as Lord.

Everyone's going to acknowledge that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. How does God love you? Look to the cross. Look to the cross and you will see God's love and the massive

difference that anakes on your life even in the here and now.

[21 : 50] If you're loved by God, you've been chosen by God and therefore you're assured of eternal salvation.

You're assured of eternal life of which you can enjoy now. Not when you get to glory, but you enjoy it now. for those on the other side of the fence, well, there is a warning for us in the words of Jesus in Matthew 25.

It's a context where Jesus is talking about there's going to come a time where the people are going to be separated. You're going to have the sheep on the right, you're going to have the goats on the left and those on the right are going to be blessed, the sheep are going to be blessed, they're going to receive the inheritance, the kingdom prepared for them, but those on the left, the goats, depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

You think the grass is greener on the other side when you read passages like that? Of course, God's love makes a difference, makes an eternal difference.

You need to stop getting so focused on the temporary things that we see before us and listen with our ears to the glories that await. The reality is if you are not trusting in Jesus Christ and you are destined for destruction, no matter how good your life is now, the Lord's wrath will be poured out.

[23 : 30] So Malachi is a call to return, to return to the Lord before he remains angry with you forever.

It's a call to return to him. The whole book is a call again and again and again which says, return to me, my people. Return to me. If you lost any sense of wonder of God and all that he's done, God says, return to me.

If religion is more of a formality and a duty, God says, return to me. Remember and return.

Remember that God's love really does make all the difference.

That God has acted upon his love and he will act again. That one day all will declare his greatness. Remember the cross of Christ who we see God loves his people.

So where are you at this morning? Have you been judging your reality based on your eyes and what you can see or on your ears and what God has said and promised to you?

[24 : 45] How are you responding to God's great and unquestionable demonstration of his love for you? In repentance and faith? In trusting the word and promises of God no matter how bad things feel now?

How discouraging things can feel whether in your own life or indeed in the life of a church? Every church goes through seasons of discouragement. We know that in mercy. In those moments are you going to judge reality on your eyes what you can see or on your ears God's word and God's promises?

What is going to help remind you of God's love when things are not going well? What is going to help remind you when you're tempted to doubt God's love for you? Along with looking to the cross of Christ I encourage you also to look to past examples in your life.

Look back to how God has shown his goodness to you in many ways in ways you probably can't even count or don't even realize. Look back to how God has shown his love for you.

And as a church help one another to remind one another of the love of God. Church is a glorious thing.

[26 : 04] I mean when the world looks upon us here what do they see? Nothing spectacular whether it's here or whether it's in Mussey. Nothing that might cause them to go oh I want to be part of that.

But we know the difference don't we? We know the difference that when we're brought together as God's people who've been saved by the love of Christ for us. The love of God for us in Christ Jesus. When we're brought together we're assured of an eternal salvation and God has given us one another to help and to encourage and to support one another as we love each other by reminding them of God's love.

And brothers and sisters as you do that you then declare the greatness of God to Westerhailes and to Mussey and to the areas beyond the church. So that as people then start to look in they see something different.

They see a love that is real a love that is tangible a love that is everlasting and they go I want some of that. How are you going to declare the greatness of the Lord beyond these walls in Westerhailes?

That's a challenge for you here isn't it? That's a challenge for us in Musselboro. We've just been looking at sort of a new sort of vision for us and we've realized perhaps we've neglected the town of Musselboro a little bit.

[27 : 18] We've been convicted of that. And we're thinking through how are we going to declare the greatness of the Lord in Musselboro where God has placed us? And we're working through things of how we can do that. One of the ways that we do that is by loving one another well by reminding each other of the love that God has for them.

How can you do that this week? How can you love one another well by showing the love that God has for you? Because imagine being part of God's family where we all wonder at God's love. Isn't that church you want to be part of? Isn't that family you want to be part of? Where we wonder together at how much God loves us. That gets me excited for coming to church on a Sunday, coming to the prayer meeting on a Wednesday, the Bible studies, the house groups, meeting up with people as we share in the delight that God loves us.

I'm going to pray and then we're going to stand and we're going to sing. Father God, we thank you that you loved us so much.

You sent your son Jesus to die on the cross. that while we were still sinners, rebels to your will, Jesus died for us.

[28 : 55] That we might be forgiven of all our sins and receive life in his name. Oh Lord, forgive us for the times in which we doubt your love for us.

Forgive us for the times in which we become distracted by only the things that we can see with our eyes. We have neglected to listen to your words and to trust in your promises.

Lord, I pray for this church here, your family that you love so much that you've chosen, that you've placed in Western Hills here. Lord, I pray that you would daily remind them of how much you love them.

Equip them to remind one another to do so. that they may declare your goodness and your greatness to the area in which you've placed them.

The others right now who are in darkness and who are dying might see your goodness, might come to know your gracious love and delight in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

[30 : 14] Father, these are big things we pray for and we recognize our own inability in which to do that by ourselves and so we ask for your Holy Spirit to graciously be at work, equipping and empowering us that we may glorify you by making disciples of all nations.

and we pray this in Jesus' precious name. Amen. We're going to stand and we're going to sing a final song responding to God's words, a song that reminds us how much the Father loves us by sending His Son, Jesus, to die for us.

Let's stand together and let's sing. Amen. Do stick around for tea and coffee, sharing fellowship together afterwards, but for now, let's finish with the words from 1 John 4.

God's love has been revealed among us in this way. God sent His one and only Son into the world so that we might live through Him.

So, dear friends, let us love one another because love is from God and everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

[31 : 25] And God's love people said, Amen.