

GOD LOVES YOU
(God's Love; Evangelism)
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MALACHI 1:2-5
JERRY NELSON
www.soundliving.org

A little four-year old girl of our church was recently getting prepared to leave the house with her father to run an errand.

As little children are prone to do, she was dawdling and not getting ready as soon as she needed to.

Her mother in an attempt to get her to hurry said to her, "You had better hurry or your daddy will leave without you."

At that the little girl nonchalantly looked up and with complete sincerity and belief said, "He wouldn't leave me."

Her mother was caught up by the truth of the statement and said, "You're right, he wouldn't."

That little girl was absolutely secure in her father's love.

God comes through the prophet Malachi and says to us once again:

"I love you unconditionally!" And his love is even more certain and more secure than that little girl believed her father's love to be.

"God loves you unconditionally" is probably one of the hardest truths for you to accept. Why is it so hard? Because of bad theology. Most people are convinced that love is based on performance.

Our understanding of God's love ranges from:

"Of course God loves me, I'm lovable"

to: "I hope he loves me, I do the best I can usually"

to: "I know he doesn't love me, He couldn't possibly love me."

Today I want us to look once again at God's statement of unconditional love for you. We do so by looking to the book of Malachi.- The last book in the O.T.

The prophet Malachi lived and preached the messages contained in this book about 400 years before Christ was born in Bethlehem.

(On the back of your program is a list of dates which puts the book in chronological context.)

Less than a hundred years earlier the Jews had been allowed to leave Babylon where they had been virtual slaves for the previous seventy years.

They came "home" to Israel with great anticipation. Under their new governor's leadership and the spiritual guidance of Ezra they rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem and began celebrating God's grace to them in freeing them from tyranny and return them to their ancestral home.

Under the leadership of a new governor, Nehemiah, they rebuilt the walls of the city -indicating a measure of autonomy and security - these were heady days.

They were certain that all of God's predictions of their full freedom from foreign domination would now come to pass. They were certain the Messiah would come and Israel would return to her former strength and glory.

But months and then years went by with no Messiah, no freedom. Though there was relative peace, there was no real prosperity - life became dull, routine, hope faded, cynicism grew - it was if they had been forgotten by God. Have you ever been there?

To give you an idea of the doubt or cynicism of the people we need only see the response in vs 2 to God's statement that he loves them:

They respond: "How have you loved us?"

Things hadn't turned out as they had hoped. For all their attention to their religion, it hadn't worked. Maybe because they were afraid to quit their religion or just because it was habit now, they didn't stop being religious but it was hollow - they were making no investment in it.

In fact their question of God is so impudent that we are led to think that they were cynical at best and more than a little angry at God at worst.

They were no different than many of us are prone to be.

We experience some difficulty and we begin to doubt God's love for us. Then we move to assuming that he has something against us and doesn't love us.

Then we make another jump in our logic: "If God has no regard for me personally, why should I bother with him?"

Then we begin justifying our disregard for God and his will by accusing God. It's o.k. that I do these things, I have to watch out for myself - no one else is.

It is to these people that God through Malachi comes announcing his love and his concern for them.

If you have read Malachi you may remember that God has some hard things to say to these people but he starts by laying a very necessary foundation: I love you.

It is very hard to take constructive criticism from people who you believe don't like you. Unconditional acceptance forms the basis for real change. God begins his call to the people to repent by reminding them of his love.

But again, When God says "I love you" how do the people respond?
Their doubt or cynicism shows in their question: How have you loved us.?

God's response to their question marks the central teaching of this passage. It will surprise you.

What does God say?

Before looking at the response here look with me at Genesis 25:21-26a READ

Two boys, same mother and father.

Each would become the first of a whole nation-tribe of people:

Esau's descendants would become the people called Edom living in a land that took that name - Edom - today it is south Jordan.

Jacob's descendants would become the people called Israel living in a land called by that name.

The most noteworthy comment to point out however is the Lord's statement about the relationship of the two: v 23 Contrary to the normal laws of inheritance and leadership, in this case the younger would be preferred over the older.

Look with me again now at Malachi 1.

Remember God is answering the people's question: "How have you loved us?"
"To answer it he says: READ 2b-4

God is proving his love to them. Doesn't this seem a rather strange way to do it?

Wouldn't you have expected him to speak of a father's love for his son as he does in Hosea?

Or a mother's love for her children as he does in the Psalms?

Wouldn't he better have stated in positive terms all that he has done for them from the days of Egypt?

How does this statement about his hatred for Esau prove anything about his love for Israel or for me?

Is God saying, "If you think you have it bad, look at Edom?"

Kind of a variation of "I complained about having no shoes until I saw a man with

no feet."? NO, that's not the rationale.

Look how God starts his answer: "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"

When God said that what would the people have remembered?

Yes, the story we just read from Genesis 25.

They would have remembered that Jacob and Esau were brothers.

They would also have remembered that Esau was the older, even though just barely older.

They would have remembered that God's choice of Jacob to form the nation of Israel ran counter to the usual human way of making choices.

They would have remembered that if anyone had the "right" to be chosen it would have been Esau - but personal worth or right are not the bases of God's choices.

The primary message coming through is that God's love for them as for you is not based on your worth, your performance - but solely on God's choice.

With each description of Esau's condition and destiny is a corresponding, understood but unwritten, description of God's gracious unearned love for Israel.

With each new phrase here describing Esau's condition, the hearers would have been reminded of God's love toward them.

Think of the contrast:

v 3 Esau's mountains or land has been turned into a wasteland and his inheritance given to desert animals.

In contrast, what had been God's promise to Israel? Their land would be fruitful and by God's grace it had - they were living in it again.

What had God said about Israel's inheritance? Their land would be for their children and their children's children forever. For 1500 years since the days of Abraham, God had kept that promise.

v 4 Esau's descendants, called Edom, rebelliously said they would rebuild their nation after God judged them. But to that day that country was demolished - gone.

IN fact to this day that land is nothing - it looks like parts of Utah - lunar landscape. The ruins of Petra are a memorial to a country that once was but is no more.

What had God said about Israel after judgment? They would be returned to the land and they had - they were living proof of it.

v 5 is probably predictive. God says there is coming a day when you will get your eyes off of your own situation long enough to see that truly God is working everywhere in this world - and you will then say with renewed conviction - GREAT is the Lord.

Each reminder of Esau's/Edom's condition points out graphically another dimension of God's grace toward Israel.

Esau has been rejected and condemned but not you Israel! You are loved and chosen and blessed.

But don't forget the point: Why are you loved? Because you were better than Esau? Not a chance. In fact if God has used human reasoning-he would have chosen Esau.

But he chose you, Israel. Why? Because He fixed his love on you!

Some of you will think I have intentionally avoided the first phrase of v 3. where God says, "Esau I have hated."

We don't want to hear God saying such a thing about an individual.

The statement causes us consternation.

Some have tried to say it is a comparative statement meaning that God loved Esau less. There are places where such stark language is used to describe love and less love but as I will show later, that is not what God is doing here.

Some have tried to say that God hated Esau because Esau deserved it - after all Esau rejected his birthright, he sought to kill Jacob, he married foreign women of an ungodly religion, and so on.

But if Esau deserved it, who else did? Jacob.

Even his very name is an indication of the kind of man he was - it comes from the word "deceive".

Incidentally if you are named "Jacob" it is an excellent name. By God's grace this Jacob became a man of God.

It will not do to say God didn't love Esau because Esau was evil. If that was the basis he couldn't have loved Jacob either or any of us for that matter.

Many of you know that the Apostle Paul picks up on this Malachi passage and quotes it in Romans 9 when he among other things makes the same point Malachi is making here.

Look with me at that passage of Scripture: Romans 9.

I wish to read first from verse 10 through verse 14 READ

What does God through Paul say?

Esau and Jacob were brothers. In fact they were twins. But before they were even born, before they had done anything good or bad, God said that the older would serve the younger - meaning God would love Jacob but hate Esau.

And why would God do this? Because of the things they would do?

No. Specifically he says it is not because of their works BUT so that God's purpose in election might stand. The choice to love Jacob would come not out of Jacob's goodness but solely out of God's choice.

Because of their sinful humanity they were both deserving of God's eternal judgment.

All people are descendants of sinful Adam and Romans 5 teaches us that as a result every person is conceived a sinner and born a sinner.

And also because of their sinful actions they were both deserving of God's eternal wrath. And the Bible confirms our experience - everyone of us sins.

For both of those reasons they were both deserving of condemnation.

But what does God say? He chose Jacob to bless

Is that actually what this passage says and means?

Look at verse 14 READ

We must have understood the passage or else the question wouldn't make sense.

That's right God makes his choice of some to show mercy based on nothing he sees in them but based only on his good pleasure.

But you say, "If God does that, He is unjust!"

And what does Paul say to that?

NO! God is not unjust.

As God said to Moses, v 15, "I will have mercy and compassion on whom I choose."

It would be unjust if God punished you when you didn't deserve it.

But it is not unjust for God not to punish you, by punishing Christ in your place on the cross - that is mercy.

God is under no obligation to show mercy. We deserve his wrath.

If God acted solely out of his justice what would happen - all would perish.

"Well", you say, "it's unfair, if God is going to show mercy to some he must show mercy to all."

Though I understand the sentiment behind such a statement I must object that it is simply unbiblical and wrong. God is under no obligation to show mercy at all much less to all.

The wonder of wonders is not that he doesn't show mercy to all but that he shows mercy to any!

I have heard some go so far as to say if this is how God acts they don't want such a God!

What kind of a God do you want?

One who gives people what they deserve? Not me. We deserve eternal wrath.

One who saves only those who prove they want to be saved, those who seek God? Not me, no one has ever sought God - God had to initiate the action - and if God didn't start it no one would ever be saved.

One who is at the mercy of the choices of people? That is no God at all but simply a pawn in the hands of people.

We seem so often determined to make God's choice of us somehow dependent on us - what God sees in us, or what God foresees in us, or how we will respond.

But Romans 9:16 wipes that possibility out for good.

God's choice of us is not dependent on something in us but something in him.

Some would say "that is what I mean, if what you say is true then God is unfair, he is arbitrary in his choice."

NO, God's choice is not arbitrary.

Arbitrary would mean God's choice is based on nothing, not even random. But God is clear that his choice is based on something but that something is not in us but in him - Ephesians 1:5 says his choice is according to his good pleasure.

God has not chosen to reveal to us yet what that basis is but we know it is in him.

The Apostle Paul finishes this section in Romans with an outstanding hymn that sets forth the whole of it: READ 11:33-36

That is what Malachi is describing in those first few verses of his book.

Israel, you didn't earn God's love.

When you look at Esau/Edom don't you see it - That would have been your fate as certainly as it was his if God hadn't intervened.

And there was nothing in you that made God choose you.

You are his by Grace. And that will never change.

I say to you today, "God loves you!"

You didn't earn that love.

When you look around you at those who want nothing to do with God do you understand that would be your fate if God had not intervened?

God chose you, not based on what he saw in you but solely out of his good pleasure.

You might ask, "If God isn't required to choose all, how do I know if He has chosen me?"

"Do you truly care to know Jesus?"

"Do you trust in his death as payment for your sin?"

"Do you want to follow Him?"

"Do you want to trust in his death on the cross for your salvation?"

"Do you even care about the things this passage describes?"

Then I know you are chosen of God.

For unless God chose you and loved you, you would not care about such things. He has placed that desire in you because he loves you.

Again let me close with what I'm convinced is God's intent with this passage in Malachi: God's love for you is unconditional.

Your performance didn't earn it and your performance can't lose it.

You can't make him love you more or less - it isn't dependent on you.

When you look around and see things aren't going the way you expected, it is tempting to wonder if God still cares.

Never forget, his love for you is intimately personal - Out of all he created, God has decided to set his love on you.

There is no truth that has revolutionized my thinking and my attitude more in the past two years than this great truth - God loves me! ME!

Do you realize that God's love for you is not based on any performance of yours?

Do you realize his love for you is not based on your response?

You didn't earn his love - you didn't choose him, he chose you.