

March Teaching Theme: The Book of Malachi

讲员 Speaker: Pastor William R. Horne

题目 Topic: Does God Love Us?

经文 Scripture: Malachi 1:1-5

Monthly Theme: For the next two months (outside of Easter), we will be walking through the prophetic book of Malachi. Malachi is a contemporary of Ezra and Nehemiah; thus, the historical context for this book is the same as Ezra-Nehemiah's. It is debated if Malachi's prophetic ministry comes in between Zerubabel and Ezra's return to the land or if it is shortly after the ending of Nehemiah, which we just looked at last week. Either way, we know that God was speaking through Malachi to the people of Isreal within the same storyline and context as Ezra-Nehemiah. Recall, in the Ezra-Nehemiah, the hopes were high upon the return to the land, but after it is all said and done, the people prove to be just as corrupt, unjust, and unfaithful as before the exile. Malachi steps on the scene to confront the sin, corruption, and injustice that has become characteristic of this new generation in the land. Something lurking in the background of the story of Ezra-Nehemiah that we did not mention in our last series is the pressures of mixed allegiances within the Israelite leadership. Recall that the temple and wall project and the paychecks of many Israelite leaders were being funded by the Persian government, which had other plans and agendas. So, for instance, the Persian government would have likely used the temple to collect governmental taxes, opening up the door for confusion and corruption. Thus, it is likely that these mixed allegiances to Yahweh and the Persian government contributed to the failings of Israel at the time. And this is the context that Malachi confronts - a lack of full allegiance to Yahweh, leading to corrupt, unjust, and unwise actions. The book is divided into six disputes between God and the people. Most of these disputes are formatted with God making a claim, the people responding in disagreement, and God responding with the final word.

三月 **March:** 瑪拉基書 **Malachi** (四旬期 **Lent**)

March 6th – 神的愛與信實 God's Love & Faithfulness (瑪拉基書 Malachi 1:2-5 – Dispute 1)

March 13th - 鄙視聖殿 Despising the Temple (瑪拉基書 Malachi 1:6-2:9 -Dispute 2)

March 20th – 拜偶像與離婚 Idolatry & Divorce (瑪拉基書 Malachi 2:10-16 - Dispute 3)

March 27th – 公義的神 God of Justice (瑪拉基書 Malachi 2:17-3:5 - Dispute 4)

Resources:

[Sermon Video](#) (Pastor Will)

[Sermon Slides](#) (Pastor Will)

[Overview: Malachi](#) (Bible Project) [English]

[Overview: Malachi](#) (Bible Project) [Mandarin]

Format of Book (See Slide 2 in Sermon Slides)

[Map of Israel/Judah/Edom before Babylonian Exile](#)

[Maps of Persian Empire](#)

[Map of Judah \(Yehud\) under Persian rule](#)

[Timeline of Rebuild under Persian Rule](#)

Discussion Questions (Pastor William R. Horne):

- (1) Read Malachi 1:1-5 together. What observations do you make, and what stands out to you? How would you summarize the passage? What do you recall of Jacob and Esau's story? How does the context of Ezra-Nehemiah help us understand the text?
- (2) How does the story of Israel reveal a God who loves despite our behavior? How have you experienced God's love despite your failings, faults, or mistakes? What does it mean to you that God loves you despite what you've done?
- (3) Every opportunity you have been given, every place you have been, is a gift from the God who opened the door. How does this truth change our perspective? What temptations do we face not to embrace this truth?
- (4) From our small perspective, we typically create a false picture, connected "God's love" directly to our current situation, our success, our wealth, or how we are feeling in the moment. To think that "if God loves me, then things should be going well for me" is a false dichotomy. So what are some ways we can tap into the bigger perspective of God?

Important Notes (Pastor William R. Horne):

Notes on Q1: Please take note of the context, both recalling what we learned in Ezra-Nehemiah and using the above resources (maps, videos, etc.).

Remember the context, at the close of Nehemiah; things aren't working out and everything is falling apart. In this context, the book opens up with the LORD telling his people that 'he has loved and still loves them.' To which the people respond, "How have you shown us this love?" We don't see it. God then replies to their disagreement by reminding them that he has chosen the family of Jacob to carry his covenant promises to the world. And he did this instead of choosing Jacob's brother Esau.

If you recall, God chose the family of Abraham back in Genesis 12, promising that "all peoples on earth will be blessed through" him. This promise is then passed down to Issac, who Abraham's wife Sarah gave birth to at a very old age. Issac then has twin sons with Rebekah - Esau, and Jacob. And the LORD tells her the following when she has these twins in her womb. "The Lord said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger." (Gen 25:23). Then if you recall the story from Genesis 27, Jacob steals Esau's blessing from his father, leading to a life of hostility and separation between the brothers. And 20 years later, Jacob wrestles with "the Angel of the Lord" and is renamed Isreal before reconciling with Esau. God chose to use Jacob to bring about his people Israel, whom "all peoples on earth will be blessed through," despite being a "not that great of guy" - a liar, a cheater, a thief. Jacob, then, has 12 sons who become the 12 tribes of Isreal, and Esau's family becomes the nation of Edom. Fast-forward to the time of Ezra-Nehemiah, and Malachi, God points out that his love is still evident in these two brothers' realities.

Israel and Edom ended up with similar fates being exiled at different times under Babylon, but God had created a path for Israel to return to their land, while Edom had not had the same success. During this time, Edom's cities are essential desolate ghost towns, which we get a hint of in Malachi 1:3, which says, "I have turned his [Edom's] hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." Furthermore, Edom is depicted here in the text as

willing to return and rebuild, yet God hasn't opened the door for them. "Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins" (Malachi 1:4a). On the other hand, Israel only returns and rebuilds after a lot of God moving pieces, opening doors, and encouraging return - yet, even in this, we are told in multiple places that some still did not return. God is essentially saying, "You see Edom, that is what it looks like for me to bring my justice upon evildoers and oppressive nations, yet you, Israel, have also been an evildoer, an oppressive nation, and I have brought you back to the land. Is my love not evident in this?"

The God who chose Abraham, Issac, and Jacob; who liberated the Israelites from oppression in Egypt; who provided for them in the wilderness and brought them to the promise land is the same God who has faithfully acted to return them from exile. So despite what Israel feels like, despite what they have done as a people, God still has made a way for them and has kept his promises of old back to their forefather Jacob - evident in his favor upon Israel and not Edom. The people ask - "How have you loved us?" And God says, "well, it is evident in where you are standing - back in the land."

Notes on Q2: Remember, Jacob was not some extraordinary, moral, upright guy - he was a liar, a cheat, and a thief - yet, God chose to use him and extend his love to him. And the same thing is true of Israel as a people in Malachi's time - they were no better or more moral than Edom - in fact, both peoples were corrupt, unjust, and idolatrous, yet - God's love for Israel compelled him to open doors for them despite their behavior. And we know this is Israel's story - a constant pattern of turning away from God for idols, greed, power, and pleasure met with the endless pursuing love of Yahweh, working for their good. And this same love has been extended to his people today - the Church (with a capital C) - his love is evident in his choosing us, despite our failures, flaws, and mistakes.

Take a moment and soak that truth in - that God loves you and God has chosen you, despite your deepest failures. He sees it all and yet loves you. That is an incredibly humbling and freeing truth. And this beautiful truth is how we should first and foremost understand election and chosen language - as love language from God.

Notes on Q3: James 1:17 tells us, "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Our temptation is to arrogantly think that we have opened our own doors or that we have earned our opportunities- but this reality is simply not true. Sure, hard work is good and commended, but it is naive to think that we, as finite humans, can control the future to open our own doors.

Look again at Malachi 1:4 "Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the Lord Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord." Though Edom wants to work to rebuild, Edom wants to return to their land, and it won't happen unless God opens the door. And as we know in the story - the door is opened for Israel and not for Edom, with little regard to their efforts. This reality should humble us and radical shift our perspective on life, grounding us in gratitude to the God who opens doors. And not only should it ground us in gratitude, but it should also ground us in grace towards others, as we cannot equate success with "hard work" alone.

Notes on Q4: Recall Israel's situation. Though they are back in the land, things are not going well. Their economic situation is a mess, their community is divided, and they are still under Persian rule. And in Israel's small, skewed perspective - they blame God for the mess they have put themselves in. "How have you loved us? - Everything around us is a mess." We, too, so often, fall to this malformed perspective of the world, allowing the situations around us to drive us to question God's love for us. From our small perspective, we typically create a false picture, connected "God's love" directly to our current situation, our success, our wealth, or how we are feeling in the moment. To think that "if God loves me, then things should be going well for me" is a false dichotomy. To escape this prosperity gospel thinking, we must submit our small perspective to the big perspective of God.

We see the world as one who watches a parade go by - we can only see the portion of the parade right in front of us. We might be seeing the empty street before the parade starts, or the marching band coming through, or the big float with all the candy. But, either way, we can only see and experience what is right in front of us. God's vision is like the helicopter above the parade - he can see the beginning, the end, and everything in-between. And this is where the infamous Romans 8:28 actually applies, "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." See, God's love for us does not equal worldly success and prosperity, but it will mean he is working for our good at all times.