

Recession Proofing Your Faith

Celebrate God's Love

Malachi 1:1-5

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Text introduction: Today, we begin a brand new series of messages. The series is called "Recession Proofing Your Faith." All of the messages come from the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi. As we begin this new sermon series, I remind you of our challenge for 2009. We are challenging each other to grow as Jesus did: In Wisdom, In Stature, In Favor with God, and In Favor with Others. This series in Malachi will help us specifically to grow in favor with God. As we grow in faith, we will grow in favor with God. For example, when we think of faith, maybe the one person that ought to come to mind is Abraham. The Bible says that Abraham was the friend of God (James 2:23).

Now, why Malachi? Well, the similarities of Malachi's time and our time are striking. Malachi's setting is a time of economic recession as well as moral recession. The historical setting for Malachi's prophecy is the return of the exiles. Though not completely free, they were free to rebuild their lives, the Temple, and worship in the Temple. The problem is that that nothing has changed in the behavior of the people. The same sin that led to the exile was already rampant post the exile. In short, they had not learned anything. They had not been humbled by the exile. In fact, if anything, they had grown more arrogant, argumentative, complacent, flippant, and rebellious toward God. In that context, God raised up another prophet with a "burden" (oracle of verse 1 means burden) for Godliness.

Text: ¹ The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

² "I have loved you," says the LORD.
"Yet you say, 'In what way have You loved us?'
Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"
Says the LORD.
"Yet Jacob I have loved;
³ But Esau I have hated,
And laid waste his mountains and his heritage
For the jackals of the wilderness."
⁴ Even though Edom has said,
"We have been impoverished,
But we will return and build the desolate places,"

Thus says the LORD of hosts:

"They may build, but I will throw down;
They shall be called the Territory of Wickedness,
And the people against whom the LORD will have indignation forever.
⁵ Your eyes shall see,
And you shall say,
'The LORD is magnified beyond the border of Israel.'

Introduction: Our study of Malachi will reveal that the book is shaped around specific questions that Malachi poses that the people are asking. The structure is that Malachi, on behalf of God of course, makes a statement, but the people of his day are questioning that statement. You see this first example in verse 2.

The Statement: I have loved you!

The Question: In what way have you loved us? Now let's get one thing straight right off the bat. Here is the epitome of arrogance and rebellion. Anytime that we question God's Word to us or question His motives, we are on pretty shaky ground. (Regardless of what the question is!)

But question, they did. And so do we! How do we question? Here's one way. It's the lesson of this text and message this morning. We question God's love. In times of difficulty (financial, marital, health) one of our first thoughts might be: "God, do you love me?" Or, "God, now you said that you love me?" Or, God, "In what way have you loved us?"

So, if we are going to recession proof our faith or if we are going to grow in favor with God the first step has to be: **Settle the Question of God's love for you!**

The Temptation for the Question:

Why do we question God's love? Now, Malachi 1:1-5 is a complicated passage of Scripture. In fact, some of you have not heard anything yet since we read the text because of this line: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." Indeed, this is a complicated text and part of the basis for a great theological debate for centuries regarding whether God has predestined some for eternal damnation. I've shared my conviction with you about that on multiple occasions. I believe that whosoever believes in Him shall have eternal life. (So says, John 3:16) I believe that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. (So says, Romans 10:13) I believe that God does not will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (So says, 2 Peter 3:9) I believe that first of all we must settle once and for all this question of God's love for all people. So, what does Malachi 1:2 mean? When I get really stumped by a Scripture, one of the things that I often do is go to a particular paraphrase of the Bible called the *Message* by Eugene Peterson. Now, I understand that Peterson is just a man, but often times I find that his language helps unravel some difficult texts. Hear Peterson's paraphrase of this text.

From the Message: ¹ *A Message. God's Word to Israel through Malachi: ²⁻³God said, "I love you." You replied, "Really? How have you loved us?" "Look at history" (this is God's answer). "Look at how differently I've treated you, Jacob, from Esau: I loved Jacob and hated Esau. I reduced pretentious Esau to a molehill, turned his whole country into a ghost town."*

⁴*When Edom (Esau) said, "We've been knocked down, but we'll get up and start over, good as new," God-of-the-Angel-Armies said, "Just try it and see how far you get. When I knock you down, you stay down. People will take one look at you and say, 'Land of Evil!' and 'the God-cursed tribe!'"*

⁵*"Yes, take a good look. Then you'll see how faithfully I've loved you and you'll want even more, saying, 'May God be even greater, beyond the borders of Israel!'"*

The question here is not God's inability to love Esau or his rejection of love toward Esau, but rather His relationship with Jacob. The issue is one of comparison. In fact, the argument from Israel is that it appeared to them that God loved Israel's enemies more than Israel. A standard argument from Israel

and from us is that God blesses those not living for Him more than us. So, what causes the temptation to doubt God's love? A couple of things are suggested in this text.

1. Comparison to other people.
2. Callousness to what God has done.

Both of these factors are attributed to God not meeting our expectations. What's the remedy? We've got to **settle the issue of God's love for us.**

The Truth about God's Love:

1. Unmerited—We don't earn His love, so we can't do something to lose His love.
2. Unchanging—His love does not change, so we can't do something to make Him love us more, but we can't do something to cause Him to love us less. God's love is such that He already loves us infinitely so we cannot earn more of His love or risk losing some of His love.
3. Unending—

The Love of God Hymn

The third stanza goes like this. (The author of the hymn actually didn't write this stanza. He borrowed it from a poem dated back to 1150 A.D.)

Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made,
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;
To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry;
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.

The Chorus goes like this:

O love of God, how rich and pure!
How measureless and strong!
It shall forevermore endure
The saints' and angels' song!

The Testimony of God's Love:

For Israel it was covenant. For us it is still a covenant, but one we see in the cross. The cross settles the issue of God's love for us. He came to go to the cross.

Therefore:

Celebrate His love!

I want to close with a Pastoral prayer of blessing over you. It is a prayer from another Pastor, the Apostle Paul. It was his prayer for the Church of Ephesus as recorded in Ephesus 3:14-21. Consider the prayer my burden for you.

Ephesians 3:14-21--¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height— ¹⁹ to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, ²¹ to Him *be* glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.