

Sunday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012, 6:00 p.m. - Teaching #1534

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**WHY GOD SHOWS LOVE TO HIS PEOPLE IN THE FIRST PLACE - Malachi 1:1-5** - "The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. [2] "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob [3] but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert." [4] 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, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the Lord is angry forever.'" [5] Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel!"

Malachi was speaking to a different time of history than most other Old Testament prophets. In years gone by we've studied some of the writings of *Jeremiah* and *Ezekiel*. They were warning of the coming judgement of the Lord upon Judah. *Daniel* and *Shadrack, Meshack* and *Abednigo* were all taken away into *Babylonian captivity* as the judgement of God came upon Judah. Other prophets like *Isaiah* prophesied that God would raise up *Cyrus, the king of Persia* to deliver Judah from Babylon. And then *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* were used by the Lord to come back and rebuild both the Temple and the city and its walls.

Gradually the people returned. And, in time, life returned to normal. So here they were, back in their own land. They were the clearest example of God's supernatural love and care that the world had ever seen. And it's right at this point that you get a good picture of what the book of Malachi is all about. It's a study in *contrasts*. God remembers His covenant and they completely forget about theirs. This is the burden of Malachi's prophetic complaint. We know about this. Malachi's basic complaint is one we can all feel the logic of. How can it be possible that even though they are so recently back into their own temple, they are so quickly back into their old ways of sin and rebellion?

Fifty years had passed since *Haggai* and *Zechariah* had prophesied about the coming of the Lord. All of the big projects - the building of the temple and city walls - were completed. There were no international crises to stir up the hearts of the people. The prophetic word of the Lord was growing rare and dim. All of the hopes of a new world of righteousness and peace had died with the last generation. That's the climate into which Malachi plants his message of warning and renewal.

1) **TERRIBLE SPIRITUAL RUIN TAKES PLACE WHEN PEOPLE FAIL TO TAKE TO HEART THE LOVE OF GOD - Malachi 1:2** - " 'I have loved you,' says the Lord. But you say, 'How have you loved us?'"

Those responding words of the people have to be some of the most ridiculous and perverse words ever penned - "*You have shown love to us? Where have you shown your love to us?*" These are people who, without raising a sword, have been delivered from the strongest empire of the known world - *Babylon*. They've been brought back into their home land by their enemies. They've been given all the funds and supplies they needed to rebuild their own city and to re-establish their temple and worship to their own God. These very people are now saying, "Seriously, God, where have you shown your love to us?" In fact, They're going to say later on in this book that their participation in temple worship is a *bore* to them - **Malachi 1:13** - "But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts...."

We need to remember that there is also a reminder of this very danger in the New Testament to the church. The apostle *Jude* (brother of James) says we are to "*....keep yourselves in the love of God....*" And I think it's interesting to read this instruction from the Apostle with the book of Malachi in mind. The apostle is writing on the subject of *perseverance*. He's talking about *keeping going and growing* in the Lord. And he too starts, not with our love for God (as important as that is) but the importance of God's love for us, and how to *keep going* in it.

2) **GOD REMINDS THE PEOPLE JUST HOW COMMITTED HE HAD BEEN TO THEM - Malachi 1:2-3** - "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob [3] but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert."

This reminder about elective work in Jacob over Esau is foundational to a very important point God wants to make. Jacob and Esau were *brothers*. More than that, they were *twins*. More than that, *Esau* was the *older* of the two. That meant that, if anything, he was the one more *entitled* to the inheritance. This is Paul's whole point in Romans 9 through 11. He magnified God's grace and mercy. Israel had forgotten how *unearned* all her blessings were. All through her history, what should have been a source of constant *devotion* and *humility* became a fuel for false pride, entitlement, and arrogance.

And so God speaks through Malachi and stabs their conscience awake. They had been defeated along with *Edom* (4) by a common enemy. Why had *Judah* been able to rebuild while *Edom* never could? Why was Israel back in their land, worshipping in their temple? This is God's way of saying, "Do you think this was all your doing? Or do you imagine that you just happened to strike it lucky?"

They had no excuse for not knowing all of this. God had gone to great pains to drill this concept into their minds right from the very beginning: **Deuteronomy 7:7-8** - "It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, [8] but it is because the Lord loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the Lord has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."

There are so many examples of this in Scripture. Let me mention just one familiar passage: **James 4:3** - "**You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.**"

What is really wrong in this person's prayer life? I don't imagine anybody kneeling before the Lord and saying, "Boy, Jesus, all I ever want is gobs and gobs of material goods. And the only person I care about is me. Phooey on the needy, the lost, and phooey on any kind of prayer for spiritual growth. Just gi'me, gi'me. gi'me."

Nobody talks like that to God. The process is much more subtle than that. James says it has to do with the "*passions*" of the heart. This person has come to think wrongly about the goodness of God - the *love of God*. And very gradually, it is shutting down everything that's power generating in his life.

How many of my prayers go unanswered because I cry out to God to bless me with no real intention of *using* what He *has* already blessed me with to extend His kingdom and reveal His glory? It may be the biggest hindrance to revival in the Body of Christ today.

3) **WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S GOODNESS IN MY LIFE** - And it's right at this closing point that we see the clearest sign of a new heart. When a heart isn't spiritually right with God there are two responses to God's goodness:

a) ***Blessings are consumed with no thought of devotion*** - You can see God's appeal in the very first words in **1:6** - "**A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'**"

For a son not to honor another adult may be discourteous. But for a son not to honor his own *father* is wickedness. That's because a son *owes a great deal to his father*. He has received so much that he owes a great deal.

b) ***Another mark of a bad heart is that God's patience is turned into an excuse for further rebellion.*** There's something that we no longer think about, but the angels must shake their heads over in disbelief. God, being who He is - the *Creator* and *Owner* of all that is - could make all of us do whatever He wants. But, in truth, He doesn't *make* us do anything.

And the second shocker is, that ***God, doesn't quickly judge us for our rebellion.*** Now, it isn't amazing that *we* can tolerate our own sin. We're fallen creatures. But ***God*** is absolutely stainless - unblemished in even the slightest quirk or thought or character.

So cold and distant hearts quickly *take advantage* of such a gracious God. They'll take Him for all they can in terms of self-indulgence and catering to their own desires. That's the way fallen hearts treat the *love and goodness of God*. They milk it.

Now we're ready to wrap this up. First, we need to get to the heart of the issue with the right questions: ***Why is God patient and loving to us? What is the proper response to such a God?*** And the Bible gives a crystal clear answer to both of those questions: **Romans 2:4** - "**Or do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance?**"

If we answer the first question too quickly, we're probably not being honest. "***Don, do you presume on God's kindness and patience?***" And I'd like to think, "***No, I don't.***" But I'm not ready to answer the first question in that verse until I've listened to everything the Holy Spirit had to say in the *rest* of the verse.

Is there any point of attitude or ambition or action in my life that doesn't line up very comfortably with what I know to be true of Jesus Christ? If so, am I truly and thoroughly repenting and turning from it? And if the answer I get is either "***No,***" or "***We'll not yet,***" then ***yes,*** I do *presume* on God's kindness and patience.