

Malachi 1:1-5 // Jesus Loves You

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- [0:00] They will be called the wicked land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord.! You will see it with your own eyes and say, Great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel.
- ! Thanks be to God for his word. Brilliant, thanks Jack, and let me add my welcome. It's great to see you all here. And yeah, we're starting a new series in Malachi.
- This evening, we're taking a little break from Hebrews till after Christmas. So let's pray and ask for God's help as we come to his word.
- Heavenly Father, we pray for the help of the Holy Spirit. That there would be no one here this evening who leaves without a greater sense.
- And a greater appreciation of your love for us in the Lord Jesus. For we ask in his name. Amen.
- [1:13] I love you. Three little words, but with incredible power. And we know that from our human relationships, don't we?
- Three very powerful words. Who we are loved by. Sometimes who we are not loved by. Shapes us deeply.
- Love defines us to a certain extent. It gives us an identity. And if that's true of human love, then how much more so of God's love.
- Well, that's how this book opens four of the most important words in the Bible. I have loved you, says the Lord.
- Now, a few years ago, not long after we'd arrived at St. Silas, I'd gone to the back there for prayer ministry during the morning service.
- [2:18] And after praying, the person who was praying with me, someone who didn't really know me very well at all at the time, she said to me, as we were praying, I felt that God really wanted you to know this, this morning.
- God loves you. And I did that kind of very British thing when somebody says something like that to you and brushed it off.
- And I said something politely like, that's very good. Thank you for that reminder. That's wonderful. And I could see that she wasn't going to let me get away with it like that.
- And she wasn't having any of it. And she looked me directly in the eye and she said, no, God really wants you to know this.
- Deep in your heart. God loves you. And you know, that's stayed with me. Because sometimes, even when we know it up here in our heads, we can forget it down here in our hearts.
- [3:29] We need to hear it again. God loves you. God loves you. God really loves you.
- That's the message this evening. God says, I have loved you. Four simple words. But words that get right to the very heart of the Christian faith.

He's not saying them to start a new relationship. He's not initiating something new there. He's saying it to a people who've forgotten his love, who've grown cold to it, who've started to doubt it.

I have loved you. Not I will love you. Not I might love you. But I have loved you. Always have done.

God loves you. Not what God wants you to know tonight. God loves you. He wants you to remind you of that.

[4 : 30] Because it's easy for us to forget sometimes. Easy to let circumstances or disappointments, or even just fatigue in our Christian life, make us wonder, does God really love me?

Now verse 1 tells us this. That this is a prophecy. The words of the Lord. It is divine in its origin, and deeply personal in its tone out of 55 verses.

Something like 47, depending on how you count them. God is speaking directly to his people. But it's a divine word that comes through a human messenger.

Malachi. Malachi. Or Malachi, as he's known in Glasgow. A friend once told me that that's how you pronounce it here. Malachi. Not an especially reliable individual, I have to say.

And I was sure that he was on the wind-up until one day I was walking down Buchanan Street, and I stumbled upon this guy busking with this sign. And I thought to myself, well maybe my friend was onto something after all.

[5 : 38] He's pretty good actually. Malachi or Malachi. I think we'll stick with Malachi. But either way, we don't know much about him, don't know too much about him, the Old Testament prophet that is.

But in the footnotes of your Bible, you'll see Malachi literally means my messenger. And that's fitting, because this book is full of messengers.

in chapter 3, verse 1 rather, the Lord promises to send a messenger to prepare the way.

In chapter 2, verse 7, the priests were meant to be faithful messengers, but they failed miserably at it. So that's why God raises up this guy, Malachi, with a message for his people in about 450 BC.

And it's a challenging message to a people whose hearts have grown cold, who are going through the motions really, as far as God is concerned. A message, a challenging message, inviting them to return to him.

[6 : 42] And we hear that in Malachi chapter 3, verse 7, the key verse in Malachi, just over the page. Malachi 3, 7, and the Lord says, return to me.

Return to me, and I will return to you. Return to me. That's the heartbeat of the book. And tonight, we're going to trace that message through three movements.

First, we're going to hear God's love declared. I have loved you. That's the starting point. That's the foundation. That's where we begin. He is our personal God.

Inviting you into a personal relationship with him. He's saying to you tonight, you want to know about me. You want to be in a relationship with me. Well, here's where we start. I have loved you.

So whether you're here and you're exploring the Christian faith for the first time, or you're a Christian who perhaps your faith feels dry and you long to rekindle it, long to rediscover the passion that you once felt, well, this is your starting point.

[7 : 54] God's love is unchanging. It's what the whole story of the Bible is about, a loving God, loving his people.

That's who he is, that's what he's like. And way back in Exodus, way back in Exodus, God rescued his people from slavery and up on Mount Sinai.

This is how God describes himself to Moses. The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving sin, yet doesn't leave the guilty unpunished.

This is the God who loves with a faithful, steadfast love, a love that's not blind to sin, but is merciful. And if you're a Christian, you'll know the story doesn't end there, but what's true for them is even more true for us.

And even our kids in KidZone know more of God's love than the church in Malachi's day, because we're this side of the cross of Jesus Christ.

[9:09] God's love comes to us in its fullest expression in the Lord Jesus. For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son so that whoever believes in him will not perish, but have eternal life.

A verse that's easy to memorize for even a child. Now, Karl Barth was one of the big guns of 20th century theology, not that we'd necessarily endorse all of his views, but a student once asked him towards the end of his career, what's the most profound truth you've ever heard?

And after pausing for a moment to think, Barth answered, simple, childlike perhaps, but profound.

Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so. It's easy for us to know it in our heads, but to forget it in our hearts, to take it for granted, to grow numb to God's love.

We might say, yes, I know God loves me. Yes, I know Jesus loves me. But sometimes that truth doesn't reach the depths of our heart, doesn't reach those places where anxiety or loneliness resides.

[10:56] So maybe tonight, that's what God wants to remind you, very particularly, you in your particular circumstances. Whatever has been going on these past while.

God loves you. And over the past few weeks, we've been hearing baptisms and the confirmation.

We've been hearing personal testimony stories of how people have come to follow Jesus, stories of God's love at work in their lives. What's your story? What's your story of God's love in your life?

How has God shown you his love? When was the last time you stopped to think about it? Have you ever written it down?

Have you ever prayed through it? Well, maybe tonight is that moment to pause and give thanks to God for his love in your life, to trace the goodness through your own story, to thank him again for that love, to return to the warmth of God's love in Christ.

[12:14] And yet, even after God has declared his love, Israel's response is shocking, don't you think? They don't receive it. They doubt it.

God says, I have loved you, but they shoot back, how have you loved us? The tone here matters.

Because sometimes that's a good question to ask when asked in humility, when asked sincerely. If you're exploring Christianity, asking how has God loved me, is a brilliant question.

And you can go and read the Gospels and see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the answers there. But this here isn't that kind of question in Malachi chapter 1 verse 2.

This is insolence. This is spiritual back chat, like a sullen teenager answering back to their parents. And this is a big pattern.

[13:16] Throughout the book of Malachi, God says one thing, they say the opposite. So we get the table up there. David had chapter 1 verse 2. Chapter 1 verse 6, God says, you priests show contempt for my name.

They say, how have we shown contempt for your name? Chapter 1 verse 7, by offering defiled food. How have we defiled you? Chapter 2 verse 17, you have wearied the Lord.

How have we wearied him? 3 verse 7, return to me. How? 3 verse 8, you robbed me. How? Chapter 3 verse 13, you've spoken arrogantly.

What have we said? They're lippy, aren't they? God says one thing. Every time he exposes their sin, they sass right back.

Seven times they throw God's words right back in his face. Imagine parents dropping off their child at college or uni for the very first time.

[14:22] They've raised her, cared for her, made countless sacrifices. They've basically provided a taxi service, ferrying her about from one place to another. They nursed her when she's sick, helped her with homework, put money aside for her, and provided for her, prioritized her throughout her life.

And as they finish unloading the car, they give her a hug and say, we love you. Now just imagine if she turns around and says, but how have you loved me?

What have you ever done for me? That would sting deeply. Shocking in gratitude. And yet, Israel's response is even worse.

After all God has done for them, they ask, how have you loved us? And their question and the tone of their question is deeply revealing.

It reveals the state of their hearts. A generation that's lost sight of God's love, grown numb to it.

[15:34] How did they get there? How did it come to this? I think their questioning of God's love invites us to reflect on this.

What's going on with God's people that it's come to this? Because the more that we can understand how and why this happened to them, the better equipped we'll be to ensure that we don't fall into the same kind of pitfalls.

So how did we get here? Well, their doubt is rooted in disillusionment. Life hasn't matched up to expectations.

Now we're going to have to do just a little bit of work here just to set the scene. But here's a helpful summary of the spiritual mood of Malachi's day. It was a time of religious cynicism.

The temple had been rebuilt, but where were the promised crowds from all the nations flocking to it? Their land was a political and economic backwater. Very few of them had come back, and Jerusalem was still very largely an uninhabited ruin.

[16:46] So these guys have returned from exile in Babylon, but it's not the homecoming that they dreamed of. Sure, the temple's been rebuilt, but it was nothing like the glory it was in Solomon's day.

And it's all just so underwhelming. And they have a look around and they think, well, where's the visible evidence of God's love for us?

And you see, in their logic, they think, well, we've done our bit, we've done the rebuilding, but they feel like God's not done his bit. I wonder if you've ever felt like that.

I've done my bit for God. But he doesn't seem to be upholding his end of the bargain. And while they struggle, the godless seem to thrive.

And it all comes out in Malachi 3, verse 14, when they say it's futile to serve God. What do we gain?

[17:48] And then the next verse, they're looking over the fence and asking, and seeing, rather, that evildoers are prospering. So they're asking, what's the point? Why bother? Why keep going like this?

Well, here's their problem. Their understanding of who God is, is based on their circumstances. They've built their theology on circumstances and on their feelings, not on God's words.

And when life inevitably disappoints, doubts creep in. And that's not so very far away from us, is it?

We know from our own experience in a nation that's rapidly turned away from the living God, if we're trying to faithfully follow Jesus, we know how hard it can be. And so we're in danger sometimes of wondering, does it really pay to serve God?

God. Now let me assure us that we are not the church of Malachi's day. Most of us here are not about to turn our backs on God's love.

[19:05] Sure, there might be times when we are feeling a little bit low in our faith. Sometimes we might even be disillusioned from time to time, but we love the Lord. We're not speaking against the Lord.

We're trusting in Him even when life feels hard or underwhelming. But if we're to let the message of Malachi get under our skin, we mustn't be too quick to let ourselves off the hook.

We need to acknowledge that the seed of disillusionment can sprout in our own hearts if we're not careful. Whenever we lose sight of God's goodness, whenever we lose sight of God's love, when we grow cold to that, we're at the risk of going down the same path.

And so here's the danger. Disillusionment doesn't stay neutral. It hardens into a denial of God's love.

How have you loved us? And denial bears bad fruit. That's always a pattern from Eden onwards. Doubt God's word, doubt God's love, and sin follows close behind.

[20:16] Just ask Adam and Eve. And Malachi shows it too. Denial of God's love leads to every other problem.

Vertically, it's in chapter one, the rest of chapter one, it's the half-hearted worship. And in chapter three, it's the bad attitude towards money, stingy giving.

Horizontally, it's broken relationships in chapter two, moral failure. Doubt God's love and disobedience flows in every direction.

That's why Malachi starts here. This is the root of sin. This is the root that spawns all the other sins. And so we need to pay attention here.

Because the same temptation lurks close to home, to doubt, to measure God's love by how life feels.

[21:15] So go ahead and ask yourselves, when are you most at risk of doubting God's love? When are you most vulnerable to that?

When do you quietly wonder, does God really love me? maybe even at an unconscious level? Because it's in those moments that we're most at risk of giving up and battling sin.

We're most at risk of giving ourselves permission to indulge in things we know we shouldn't, of seeking comfort where we shouldn't.

Friends, those are the moments to remember this truth. that God really does love you. Thankfully, Israel's doubt doesn't end the story.

God doesn't leave them there. And in our final section, we'll see how God displays his love. I have loved you, declares the Lord.

- [22 : 23] Now those words land differently depending on the context. Picture a wife saying them to her husband on an anniversary. Words of real affection, of loyalty, of tenderness.
- I've loved you. Now imagine her saying the same words on the day she discovers her husband's been having an affair.
- but I've loved you. Same words. But now they're deeply exposing, confronting, laying bare the pain of love betrayed.
- That's the vibe here. And knowing what we now know about Israel, I think we hear the words of God differently. I have loved you exposes how far their hearts have drifted.
- It's basically saying you've forgotten how deeply I've loved you. You've forgotten how deep my love for you has been. So now when Israel answers how have you loved us?
- [23 : 38] God doesn't reply with soft words but with hard evidence. He says in effect you want to know how I've loved you? Let me show you. And so he takes them back to the beginning of their story, back to the birth of their nation, back to Jacob and Esau.
- Let me read again from verse 2. Was not Esau Jacob's brother declares the Lord? Yet I've loved Jacob but Esau have I hated.
- I've turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals. Eden may say though we've been crushed we'll 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 with whom God is angry forever. You'll see it with your own eyes and say great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel.
- These friends aren't the easiest verses I'm not going to lie but the main point is clear. God's love is unmerited it's undeserved and unearned.
- [24 : 44] God's love is elective. God chooses who he loves. Now a bit of background may help here. Jacob and Esau were twins same parents same start in life and if you read their story in Genesis chapter 25 and following you'll see that they're both pretty flawed individuals in their own way.
- Esau cared more about his stomach than God's promises. He sold his birthright for a bowl of stew and the younger brother Jacob well he was a confidence trickster scheming and manipulating his way through life.
- The point is neither of them deserved God's love. But God chose Jacob not because Jacob was good but because God is gracious.
- righteous. Before they were even born before they even had a chance to do anything good or bad God declared that older will serve the younger. He wants to make it clear God's love rests on mercy not on merit.
- And as Moses later reminded Israel the Lord did not choose you because you were greater than other peoples. He chose you because he loves you.
- [26 : 07] That's God's answer. Look back at your history and see how I've loved you. I chose you. I made you mine. Brothers and sisters for us it's even clearer.
- As I said earlier we stand on the other side of the cross where God's love is fully displayed. And as Paul writes in Ephesians chapter 1 he chose us in Christ before the creation of the world.
- in love he chose us. And in 1 John chapter 4 it says this is love.
- Not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son as a sacrifice to take away our sins. Now we don't have time to go there now but in Romans chapter 9 Paul quotes these very verses from Malachi to remind us that God's love for us is just as undeserved.

He didn't choose you because you're somehow better or somehow morally good or worthy. He chose you simply because he loves you. God loves you.

[27 : 24] C.S. Lewis put it like this. God loves us not because we are lovable but because he is love.

So when doubt creeps in remember this. He loves you simply because he loves you.

Now God's answer looks back. It doesn't just look back. It also points forward. Edom Esau's descendants had opposed God's people. They gloated at Jerusalem's fall.

They said defiantly we will rebuild. You could think of it like this. Edom basically represents all who reject God. Those who say I'll do it my way.

God says let them build but I ultimately will demolish. He's saying don't envy the wicked. Don't worry about the world that rejects me.

[28 : 30] Leave that to me. Leave the justice to me. I'll deal with them in a way that will be clear and visible for all to see. They'll be called the wicked land. So we close with verse 5.

There's a day coming when you will see it with your own eyes and say great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel.

A day is coming when God's goodness and love and greatness will be evident to all. Those who've rejected his love will be shut out forever. Those who receive it will rejoice.

So tonight the call is simple. Return to God's love. love. Receive God's love.

Let your life be shaped and defined by God's love. And if you're here this evening and you're still outside the love of God let me encourage you this evening to come to the cross of Christ.

[29 : 42] Come to the cross. Think about God's deep love for you in the Lord Jesus. receive God's love in Christ. Jesus loves you.

This you know. For the Bible tells you so. Amen. And let's pray. Amen. Heavenly Father we thank you so much for the reminder of your awesome love for us in Jesus Christ.

help us Lord by your Holy Spirit to never doubt your love for us but to be confident of it.

Lord God we return to your love wholeheartedly. We receive your love with deep and great thankfulness.

peace. Please press this truth of your love deep into our souls in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. Well we're going to respond.