



MALACHI

DOUBTING GOD'S LOVE

***“For as high as the heavens are above the earth,
so great is his steadfast love toward those
who fear him.”***

– Ps. 103:11



“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they don’t not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?”



“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the fields grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these...”



“If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?”

- Matt. 6:25-30



“There is indeed a great distance between God and us; we think small thoughts of God’s heart, but he knows his heart is inviolably, expansively, invincibly set on us.”

- Dane Ortland, *Gentle and Lowly*





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Timeline of Malachi

Ryrie Study Bible
by Charles Caldwell Ryrie

Nebuchadnezzar of
Babylon conquers
Judah

586

Cyrus decrees
return of the Jews

539

Cyrus of Persia
conquers
Babylon

Cyrus decrees
return of the Jews

538

Temple
construction
begins

Temple
construction
halted

535

Darius I
becomes king
of Persia

Temple
construction
halted

530

Haggai and
Zechariah begin
prophetic ministry

521

Temple
Completed

Haggai and
Zechariah begin
prophetic ministry

520

Ezra goes to
Jerusalem

515

Nehemiah goes
to Jerusalem

Ezra goes to
Jerusalem

458

Walls of
Jerusalem rebuilt

444

Malachi
begins
prophetic
ministry

Walls of
Jerusalem rebuilt

443

430

“I have loved you,’ says the Lord.”

- Mal. 1:2



Definition of Love:

A deep commitment and heart connection to someone or something.



***When we doubt God's love,
we are doubting his commitment to us.***



“For God so loved the world that he sent his only Son that whoever believe in him would not perish but have eternal life.”

- John 3:16



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“He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed.”

- Is. 53:5



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- Is. 53:5

***“My God, my God,
why have you forsaken me?”***

– Matt. 27:46



The Prayer of Lament: 4 Parts

Address:

***“Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord;
Lord hear my voice!”***

– Ps. 130:1



The Prayer of Lament: 4 Parts

Address
Complaint:

***“How long, O Lord?
Will you forget me forever?”***

– Ps. 13:1



The Prayer of Lament: 4 Parts

Address - Complaint
Request:

“Consider and answer me...”

- Ps. 13:3



The Prayer of Lament: 4 Parts

Address - Complaint - Request
Expression of Trust:

***“But I trust in your unfailing love;
my heart rejoices in your salvation.”***

– Ps. 13:5



“He himself bore our sins in his body on that tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness.”

- 1 Pt. 2:24

“After you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

- 1 Pt. 5:10



Sunday Sermon

2/5/23

Series – Malachi: Doubting God’s Love

Passage: Malachi 1:1-5

Title: Covenant Love

Good morning church! Please turn in your bibles to Malachi chapter 1. If you don’t know where the book of Malachi is, it is the very last book of the OT before you hit the NT and the Gospel of Matthew. It’s a short book, just 4 chapters long, and you will find it somewhere between 2/3 and ¾ of the way through your bible. If you still can’t locate it, at the beginning of the bible there is a table of contents which will tell you the exact page to find the book of Malachi. Today we are beginning a 7-week series through the book of Malachi entitled “Doubting God’s Love.”

In Psalm 103, David prays, ***“For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him.”*** – Ps. 103:11

But the truth is that things happen in life, we might even go so far as to say that God allows things to happen in life, things he could take care of but doesn’t, things he could fix but allows to remain. To us, to loved ones, he allows pain and suffering, death and loss, hardship and trial. And the truth is that sometimes those experiences can cause us to doubt the reality and steadfastness of God’s love.

The book of Malachi is a book about covenant faithfulness. In all things God is faithful, and he desires his people to remain faithful to him. Why? Because he’s threatened by us leaving? No. As we learned last week looking at the concept of obedience, his desire is based in his love. He’s where our life is found.

But the truth is that if we don’t believe in the reality of God’s love in every circumstance, we will struggle to live in covenant relationship with him. If we don’t believe in the reality of God’s love, we will seek our own filling because we don’t trust that he cares enough to fill us. If we don’t believe in the reality of God’s love, we will seek our own justice, so we don’t get the short end of the stick. If we don’t believe in the reality of God’s love, we will doubt his provision and become stingy with what we’ve been given. But if we understand the love that God has for us, we can live in a unique freedom knowing that we are bound in covenant relationship to a loving God who is faithful and will be faithful in every circumstance.

Jesus tells us in the Sermon on the Mount, ***“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they don’t not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your Heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life? And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the fields grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you that not even Solomon (the richest king of Israel) in all his splendor was dressed like one of***

these. If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you – you of little faith?"

Doubting God's love. Doubting God's love. So much of our faithlessness is doubting the love God has for us. And others need to know this love. That's why ministry to those in need, and poor and marginalized, the widow, the orphan, the foreigner is so meaningful and so powerful because, in it, not only are we tangibly participating with God in his work, but we are bringing with us the message and the reality of his love.

Dane Ortland in his book "Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Sufferers" says this concerning our relationship with God, **"There is indeed a great distance between God and us; we think small thoughts of God's heart, but he knows his heart is inviolably, expansively, invincibly set on us."**

Read with me Malachi 1:1-5 [Read/Pray]

In 1986, a man by the name of named Steve Saint was traveling through the country of Mali when his car broke down. Stranded and alone, Steve's thoughts ran to his father, Nate Saint, who had been a missionary in Ecuador. When Steve was only five, natives speared to death his father and four other missionaries. Can you imagine the trauma a 5 year old boy went through when he found out his father had died on the mission field? Though now a Christian himself, thirty years later, Steve still struggled with that and with why God would allow such a thing to happen.

As Steve walked he happened upon a village and some kids led Steve to a tiny church. The pastor's name was Nouh Yatara. Steve learned that after becoming a Christian, Nouh's family disowned him. His own mother even tried to poison him.

Steve asked Nouh why he was willing to pay such a steep price for following Christ. He said, "Because I know God loves me." When Steve pressed him, Nouh explained that when he was young, he had read many stories of Christians who had endured suffering and how God was always shown to be faithful. He said, "My favorite was about five young men who risked their lives to take God's good news to people in the jungles of Ecuador. The book said they let themselves be speared to death, even though they had guns and could have killed their attackers!"

Utterly shocked, Steve said, "One of those men was my father." Amazed, Nouh told Steve that God had used his father's death to help him, a young Muslim who had become a Christian, hold on to his faith.

Unlike Steve, God may never fully reveal to us the reason for our suffering, but in every circumstance, he wants us to trust in his love. Because when we doubt the Lord, we leave him. Maybe not immediately, maybe not fully, but there's compromise.

The people of Malachi had begun to doubt the Lord. Malachi was a prophet, sent by God to his people to deliver a message about covenant faithfulness.

The prophecy of Malachi was delivered around the year 430 B.C. – about 150 years after Israel's exile to Babylon and 70 years after their return. At this point, the temple of Jerusalem, though a lesser temple than the one that had been destroyed in the exile, had been rebuilt. We read about that in the book of Ezra. The walls of Jerusalem had also, at this point, been rebuilt. We read about that in Nehemiah. And now the city of Jerusalem and the people of God had finally returned to a certain degree of normalcy.

But the trauma, the experience of those events also left God's people in a state of disorientation and doubt. The popular attitude was that God had forsaken his people. In a sense, they had lost their "chosenness." God had allowed them to lose everything, to be exiled, to be ridiculed, to be defeated. Maybe their God wasn't as powerful as they thought. After all, couldn't he have prevented this? Since he had judged them, did he still want them? Had he forsaken them? Did he still love them? If asked, they might say, "I don't doubt his existence, but I do doubt him. Because of my experience, I do doubt his love."

And I know that many of us understand what I'm talking about this morning. And at the end of the message, I want to give us a biblical and healthy way to deal with our issues with God - the bible calls it lament. But before we get there, we need to hear and understand God's truth.

Verse 2 - In the midst of Israel's doubt, God sends them a messenger with a very simple and clear message, "***I have loved you.***" I love this because God is always concerned with addressing the problem, not the symptom. Here God's like, "This is the core issue. This is what you need to know: I love you."

Now pause here, because there are a thousand definitions of love in this world, most of them garbage. But when it comes to God's love, perfect love, biblical love – a great definition for us is "**a deep commitment and heart connection to someone or something.**" Listen: love is not weak, it's not driven by sex, it's not focused on self, it's not relationally flippant. When God speaks of love, he speaks in terms of devotion, of covenant, of binding.

That's why the Christian marriage is such a powerful example of love. One man, one woman, one flesh bonded together for life. There's commitment – "For better, for worse, in sickness and in health." There's covenant – "I will be faithful, forsaking all others." There's sacrifice – "All that I am and all that I have is yours." It's not a transactional relationship, it's a covenant relationship. Why? Because love is a commitment – you before me. The reason why marriages break down is because one or both partners let go of their commitment to the good of the other person. And listen: **when we doubt God's love, we are doubting his commitment to us.**

And God wants his people to know, "I love you." I am fully committed to you. In the good, bad, easy, hard, better, worse, richer, poorer times of life my love for you does not change.

The tense of this verb is the imperfect tense. It's a tense used to describe a past action that is ongoing and not completed yet. That is why it is translated, "I have loved you." Not only is it a reality now, I have been committed to you. All the way through Egypt, all the way through the wilderness, all the way through the exile, he says, "My love for you has not changed."

Beloved, some of may be struggling to believe in the reality of God's love this morning. Hear God's message you to, "I have loved you, and I am not done loving you. Even if you don't feel like it's true, I am fully committed to you."

Because God understands. He knows what it's like to love and experience loss. That's why Jesus was sent to the world he loved.

And he knows what it's like to suffer. [***"He was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our sins; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and by his wounds we are healed."* - Is. 53:5**"]

He knows what it's like to feel forsaken and alone. [***"My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* - Matt. 27:46**]

But Christ willingly endured all those things because he's wholly committed to you and to me.

And I know that this assurance won't answer all of our questions, and it won't relieve all our pain, but knowing it will bring with it healing and assurance that we are not alone in our suffering. God knows, and in his love he enters into our suffering with us.

I wanted to close our time this morning talking about the concept of lament. Because the question remains: Great, God loves me, but what do I do with my suffering?

Lament is a way for Christians to process grief in God's presence. Lament is a prayer searching for understanding and peace in the midst of suffering or difficult circumstances.

We see lament all throughout the bible, especially in the psalms. And a prayer of lament is usually broken down into four parts.

First, the address: ***"Out of the depths I cry to you, O Lord; Lord hear my voice!"*** – Ps. 130:1

In our grievance, it's the choice to turn to the Lord instead of away from him. "God, I'm not ok, but I'm coming to you." This is an act of worship. This prayer honors the Lord because it brings him into struggle. He wants that.

From the address, we move to the complaint. ***"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"*** – Ps. 13:1 – What gives? Where are you? How's this fair? How is this good? Whatever the issue is, this is the spot for it. Don't be afraid to be honest. God can handle it. There's no dignity or formality in the complaint of the lament. This can be as raw as it needs to be. Tell him the issues. Tell him what you think. Tell him how you feel.

Because from it comes the request. ***"Consider and answer me..." Ps 13:3*** Remember. Save. Hear. Provide. Move. Protect. Heal. Release. In the book of Exodus it says that God heard the groaning of his people and he remembered them. The word "Remember" is covenant language. This is remembering not as the alternative to forgetting but as the alternative to *forsaking*. In God's perfect will sometimes we get what we desire, sometimes we do not, but know that in all things he is still fully committed to us in his love.

Which bring us to the last part of our prayer of lament: an expression of trust – ***“But I trust*** (imp. started in the past, continues now) ***in your unfailing love; my heart rejoices*** (also imp.) ***in your salvation.***” – Ps. 13:5

The apostle Peter tells us, ***“He himself bore our sins in his body on that tree, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness”*** and that ***“after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”***

The prayer of lament is a response that honors the Lord in our suffering. If we want a faith and a relationship with God that is strong enough to handle any of life’s circumstances, we need to learn the beauty of lament. Too many people think that worship is only an expression of joy and a happy demeanor. But grief-filled prayers of pain while seeking God are among the deepest expressions of our worship to God.

God, in Christ, is fully committed to you in his love. Will you commit yourself to him?
Let’s ready our hearts for communion.

As we approach the Lord’s table morning, let us remember God’s covenant faithfulness. It’s a faithfulness that sent Jesus to the cross. It’s a faithfulness that keeps us in his care. When Jesus said, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood” he was talking about a covenant of forgiveness and life. Hebrews tells us, ***“For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance – now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.”***

Taking communion does not set us free from sin and move us into God’s grace. Placing our faith in Christ as our Savior sets us free from sin and moves us into grace. That’s why we remember it. We are grateful to be bonded to a God that would love us so.