

Messenger!

A Journey Through the Prophecy of Malachi

Malachi 1:1-5

3-The Sovereignty of God in the Distribution of His Love, Part 2

July 14, 2019

Malachi 1:1-5

1 The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.

2 "I have loved you," says the Lord. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord. "Yet I have loved Jacob; **3** but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and *appointed* his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness."

4 Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the Lord of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and *men* will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever."

5 Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

To the Glory of God

Now as I told you in the Introduction, the entire **Book of Malachi** is really a series of "Divine Indictments" against the nation of Israel in general, and individual Jews, in particular. God the Holy Spirit "moved along" the Prophet Malachi to issue a series of Statements which were designed to bring Conviction and Repentance to the people. But, instead of humbling themselves under the mighty Hand of God, in every case, the people responded to the Divine Indictment with a Question of bewilderment.

So, for example, the very *first* Indictment that God gives to them is found here in verse 2 when God begins this Book by saying:

"I have loved you," says the Lord.

... but instead of either *rejoicing* over the fact that the Lord God is telling them that He loves them, or *repenting* because they haven't *received* God's Love properly, they respond to this Indictment by a bewildering Question of their own:

"How have You loved us?"

Now this is incredible! God just told them that, above all the peoples on the face of the earth, He loved *them*, and their immediate response is to ask, "*How have You loved us?*" That's the *first* thing that pops into your mind when God tells you that He loves you? But this response is very telling of the condition of the heart of that people at that time. And that means that we need to pause here and take inventory of our *own* hearts at this moment.

Now as we do that, keep in mind that when Malachi was in his Ministry, Israel had just returned from being in a very brutal and violent and humiliating Captivity by the Babylonians for over 70 years. And God had moved and had freed them from seven decades of Captivity, He had brought some of them home to the "Promised Land", He had allowed them to restore the city of Jerusalem, which in their mind was the "Habitation of Peace" in the world, and God had moved to allow them to restore the Temple in Jerusalem, which in their mind was the very "Throne of God".

And yet, the people had become apathetic. They cared little or nothing about God or the things of God. But *how* does that happen? How is it that God can supernaturally move and free you from pagan Captivity, and bring you Home, and give you both the desire and the means to restore the City of David, and then to rebuild the very Dwelling Place of the God of the Universe, and you respond to all that with apathy? Seriously? You respond to a great demonstration of God's Mercy and Grace by caring nothing for Him?

While they had the boot of the Babylonians on their necks for 70 years, the Jews were humble, and they repented, and they begged God to forgive them. **Daniel 9** contains one of the most powerful Prayers that is found anywhere in the Bible. And in that Prayer, even Daniel included himself in the sin and backsliding as he cried out to God for Mercy.

And God heard their cry, and God moved, and God forgave them, and rescued them. And yet, after they had begun to come back to the Land God had sovereignly given them, instead of *continuing* in this God-ordained Humility, they had:

- Grown *skeptical* of God's Love (**Malachi 1:2**)
- They had become *careless* in their Worship (**Malachi 1:7**)
- They were *indifferent* to the Truth (**Malachi 2:6&7**)
- They were *disobedient* to the Covenant (**Malachi 2:10**)
- They were *faithless* in their Marriages (**Malachi 2:15; 3:5**)
- They were *stingy* in their Offerings (**Malachi 3:8**)

And so, *not* in an arrogant or self-righteous way, but in complete *astonishment* and *fear*, we should collectively and individually cry out to God, “O, Lord, help me to not get like that! Grant to me, whatever You see that I need, so that this Divine Indictment will not be true about me!”

In a nutshell, we can group all of Israel's Problems under a single Heading:

An *Absence* of Love for God

Now be careful here. When I say that “spiritual Apathy” is caused by a *lack* of us loving God, I'm not speaking of *any kind* of love. I'm not referring to some shallow or surface Affection for God. I'm talking about a *satisfying* love, a love that produces “spiritual Contentment”, and a love that is deep and profound and real and eternal. But what we have to understand is that this is *not* a human form of love. This kind of Love *for* God is a Gift *from* God, that God *grants* to the believer in the Miracle of the New Birth.

You see, Christianity is a Religion that is bathed in Love. But not *any kind* of Love, because not all types of Love are “Good”, not every expression of Love pleases and honors God. Because we are fallen, humans have the ability to genuinely love things that are sinful and that dishonor God and that bring God no Glory. We have the capacity to sincerely “set our Affections” on people and on activities and on ideas and concepts that are diametrically opposed to God and to the Ways of God. And because that is true, we have to be told what true Love really

is. We simply *cannot* trust our own imaginations or our own comprehension or our own choices. God must tell us who to love and why, or we will energetically delight ourselves in all sorts of wickedness and evil.

And the *main thing* that God has told us to love, is God. So, loving God is the *highest* and the *best* and the most *important* love. In fact, God has *commanded* us to love Him. Way back in **Deuteronomy 6**, God told Moses:

Deuteronomy 6:4&5

Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.

... and that means that "Rebellion" or "Transgression" or "Wickedness" or "Evil" or "Sin" can be defined as:

***NOT* loving God**

... and so, the *absence* of loving God allows for us to love someone or something *else*. And in loving that *other* "thing", we "think" certain ways, and we "talk" in certain ways, and we "do" certain things, all in *response* to loving something besides God. So, in its simplest form, "Sin" is really nothing more nor less than us "setting our Affections" on things that have been made and things that are passing away, *instead of, or in the place of, or in distinction to* the single most lovely Being in the Universe.

And in doing that, we *devalue* God, we *lower* God's Own intrinsic Worth, we *marginalize* or *minimize* (or outright *ignore*) that which is *infinitely* valuable and important! So, "Sin" is when we behold God in all His magnificence, but we are not impressed with what we see. "Sin" is when we are infinitely MORE impressed, and MORE wowed, and MORE moved by something else, anything else, besides God. This is how we "fall short" of the Glory of God (**Romans 3:23**), and you simply cannot *insult* God any more than that.

And that means that Sin is *not* best understood as being the blatant, violent, vicious, and destructive things like mass-murder or pedophilia, or war. But in loving your children, or in loving your hobby,

or in loving your own ideas, or your money, or your possessions, or your time, *more* than you love God.

And that means that "Obedience" and "Righteousness" and "Purity" and "Goodness" and "Holiness" can be defined as:

Loving God

... where all that we "think", and all that we "say", and all that we "do", flows out from a heart that has beheld God in all His Perfections, and genuinely *delights* in what we see. And a heart like that doesn't need a list of Moral Standards. Why? Because a heart that has become captivated with God and His Worth *automatically* strives to "think", and to "say" and to "do" EVERYTHING to God's Glory, to the Advancement and the Exaltation and the Magnification of Who God is and what God has determined to do.

And it is this new heart that genuinely and freely loves God that has been promised to us in the New Birth. God, *sovereignly* and *miraculously* and *supernaturally*, taking out our old, hard heart that delights in Self and Sin and *replacing* that heart with a new one that genuinely enjoys and relishes God is what it means to be "Born Again".

So, *all* those who have experienced the Miracle of the New Birth now love God, while *none* of those who have NOT been born again love God. So, that one, single Issue, "Love for God", is the line of demarcation between the person who is born again and those who aren't. Another way of understanding this is to say that the Gift of Love for God is what it means to be born again. Another way of saying this is to know that it is impossible to love God without being born again.

And yet another way of seeing this is to comprehend that we, who are the sons and daughters of Adam, cannot *manufacture* a love for God, we cannot *initiate* it, or *work it up* from within. No human has the capacity to *discipline* themselves into loving God, we cannot *psyche ourselves up*, we can't *talk ourselves* into loving God, we cannot *decide* to start loving God, and we cannot *make a choice* to love God.

No, loving God is a Gift. God must *grant* us the Gift of Love for Himself. And God has promised that kind of heart to every single sinner whom He has "set His Love on".

So, what I'm trying to tell you is that the only Hope that we have of loving God is for God to love us first. Because when God "sets His Love on us", that Love changes us, it rebirths us, and it gives us new spiritual Life. And this is what the Apostle John meant when he said:

1 John 4:19

We love [God and God's people], because He first loved us.

... where the word "**because**" has to do with the origination, or the source, or the initiation of our Love for God. So, what John is teaching here is that the reason we love God is because God has first loved us and changed us and given us the Gift of loving Him. So, when God says, "**I have loved you**", He means to say, "*I have chosen you to change you and to give to you the Gift of loving Me!*"

Now keep in mind that everybody loves *something*. Lost people love things, too. They just don't love God. And that is what we lack in being "fallen". So, the Bible teaches that the reason lost people do all sorts of selfish and wicked and destructive things is because they love them. Now many of them don't love or enjoy the *consequences* of their evil deeds, but Jesus said in **John 3:19** that all lost people love their evil deeds.

And the Doctrine you should get from this Reality is that human beings "do" what we "love". We "carry out" what we "enjoy". And we "choose" what we "delight in", and what makes us "happy". Nobody chooses to do what they don't like or don't want or don't love or don't enjoy, long term, unless they are under some form of duress.

So, lost people are not going to Hell because of a lack of self-will, or discipline, or even bad choices. They aren't "lost" because they don't have access to money or opportunity or education. You can't fix "lostness" with Medicine or Technology or Government. Lost people do what they do because they don't love God. And they *don't* love God because they *can't* love God. They do not possess the power or the ability as a lost person to love God. But, ultimately, they *can't* love God because they don't *want to*. And that is what makes them fully culpable.

So, even though lost people find pleasure and delight and happiness in all sorts of things, they do *not* find any happiness or pleasure or delight in God. And that means that being "lost" is *not* best

understood in what people "do", precisely because not all lost people do as *badly* as they could. No, being "lost" is *best* understood in "who we are". We are fallen. And being "fallen" means that we don't *normally* or *naturally* love God.

And that means that unless and until God moves upon us *first*, to love us, to come to us, in our lost condition and change us and give us new spiritual Life, we have no Hope. And, yet, God moves toward us all the time. The only reason most of you are here today is because God has already moved on you to give to you the greatest Gift in the Universe, so that you are able to find the fullness of your Joy in loving and obeying and worshipping Him.

But the wonder of wonders is that God moved on you when you were yet wicked and in your sins. And to this carnal and rebellious people, who lived about 400 years before Jesus was born, God sent His Messenger. And the very first Message that God the Holy Spirit put on this man's lips was to tell the wicked sinners of Israel:

"I have loved you...!"

Now as we are trying to comprehend this, keep in mind that back in verse 1, Malachi wrote:

The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.

... but the literal Hebrew says:

The *Burden* of the Word of the Yahweh to Israel through Malachi.

Malachi called the Word of the Lord, that God had given him, a "Burden". And this was *common* in the Old Testament. Sixty-two times, from **Genesis** to this very Book, God the Holy Spirit "moved along" a human writer to call the Word that God had given him a "Burden".

And that tells us that the Word of God is never *silly* or *light* or *frivolous*. What God says is always *weighty* and *serious* and *eternal*. Now be careful that you don't think that means *dull*, or *boring*, or *morose*, because it doesn't. It means "substantial". So, there is never anything *chipper* or *fluffy* in the Word of God. It's *always* "meaty", even

the "milk" is "meaty". And the Word of God comes to a Prophet as a "Burden" because it is so thick and rich with Absolute, Eternal Truth.

But we must recognize that Malachi also calls the Word of God a "Burden", because even when it is "Good News", as it is here, it will be *rejected* by many, if not most. And that is *why* the Prophet Isaiah groaned under the *weight* of his preaching Ministry. Now please go with me to **Isaiah 6**, and look at verse 8.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

Now many of us are very familiar with verses 1-7 of Chapter 6. Isaiah is blessed to be able to behold God in His Glory, and the *first* thing that happens to Isaiah is great Conviction and an awareness of his own inherent unworthiness. And that tells us that the only place in all the world where "Celebration" comes before "Repentance" is in the Dictionary. It *never* happens in the Bible. The *first* thing that happens to human beings when God manifests His Own intrinsic Holiness to them is a deep and profound sense of Humility and Confession of Sin.

And then the angels took a live coal from off the altar and touched Isaiah's lips and purged his Sin, and then Isaiah cries out:

Here am I. Send me

... so, the very *first* thing that prepared Isaiah for Ministry was being gifted to behold God in His Glory. And what that "seeing" produces is Conviction of Sin. And what Conviction produces is Repentance. And what Repentance produces is Salvation. And what Salvation produces is Obedience. And most people stop reading **Isaiah 6** at this point. But look at what Isaiah writes after this (**Isaiah 6:9-13**):

9 He [God] said, "Go, and tell this people: 'Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand.'

10 "Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim, Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed."

11 Then I said, "Lord, how long?" And He answered, "Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, Houses are without people And the land is utterly desolate,

12 "The Lord has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land.

13 "Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be *subject* to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump."

Now this is incredible! In verses 9&10a, God tells the Prophet:

Go, and tell this people: "Keep on listening, but do not perceive; Keep on looking, but do not understand. Render the hearts of this people insensitive, Their ears dull, And their eyes dim..."

In other words, God did NOT want the people, to whom He is sending Isaiah, to hear or believe what Isaiah was telling them! In other words, God is telling His Prophet, *"I am going to send you to herald my Word. But, you need to know, Isaiah, that nobody is going to listen to you! But you be faithful, and go and tell them what I say anyway."*

Now *why* would God do this? Well, we can *speculate*, but God tells us *why* in the *last* part of verse 10:

... Otherwise they might see with their eyes, Hear with their ears, Understand with their hearts, And return and be healed.

Here, God tells Isaiah that He doesn't want the people to hear or believe His Word. And the reason that God gives here is because if the people heard, and if they believed what God told Isaiah to tell them, then their response to hearing and believing would be that they would repent and God would save them.

But since God didn't *want* to save them, God sovereignly *prevented* them from hearing or believing what He told Isaiah to tell them! And so, because God did not allow these people to hear or believe, when Isaiah gave them the Word of the Lord, the hearts of these people remained fat and their ears remained heavy and their eyes remained shut.

And in his amazement at this, Isaiah cries out in verse 11:

"Lord, how long?"

... and then God gave him the Answer:

**"Until cities are devastated *and* without inhabitant, Houses are without people
And the land is utterly desolate..."**

So, it was God's Intention, from the very beginning, to *destroy* these people, and so, God sovereignly did *not* open their eyes so they might see and repent and believe. God moved here to NOT unstop their ears so they might hear His Word from Isaiah. God did NOT give these people a heart that was able and willing to believe so that they might repent and be saved. Why? The Bible's Answer is: *Because God did not love them.* Another way to understand this is to say that God "hated" them.

Now I realize that this must sound terrible to some of you. But I remind you that I didn't write this. God moved on Isaiah to write this. This is in your Bible, and I challenge you to read these verses of inspired and inerrant Scripture *honestly*, and come to a *different* conclusion. So, while you may not like this, and while this may not sit well with you, this is *exactly* what the Holy Bible teaches. And that makes it true, and that makes it right.

But then notice that God goes on to tell Isaiah:

The Lord has removed men far away, And the forsaken places are many in the midst of the land. Yet there will be a tenth portion in it, And it will again be *subject* to burning, Like a terebinth or an oak Whose stump remains when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

... and this is just *another* way of saying that while it was NOT God's Will to save some of them, it WAS God's Will to save others. And God calls the people He is going to save by two names here:

- 1. A tenth portion**
- 2. Stump**

... which is simply another way of understanding the Remnant of Jews that God is going to save.

Now let's assume, for the sake of argument, that I've just lost my mind. Let's assume that I've just blown this up way out of proportion. And if you think this, please examine carefully what Jesus said in **Matthew 13:10-17**. Because in *that* Passage, Jesus was answering the Question:

Why do You speak to the people in Parables?

... and Jesus Himself answered them and said:

Matthew 13:11b&13

13 ... To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted... Therefore, I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

... in other words, Jesus said that the only reason He spoke to the people in Parables was so that everybody would NOT hear, so everybody would NOT believe, and so everybody would NOT be saved! And then, Jesus quoted from this very Passage in **Isaiah 6** to show that this is the Way God has always moved. And this is simply another way of understanding the difference between God *loving* someone and God *hating* them.

When God "loves" somebody, He graces them with the single most important thing in all the Universe, to be able to see God in His Beauty. And when they "see", when they behold, they are *immediately* overcome with great Conviction. When a sinner, who is graced with the Gift of Sight, beholds God in His pristine Holiness, they immediately comprehend the vast difference between an infinitely glorious God and themselves. And the results (100% of the time) is that they are smitten with an overwhelming sense of their own wickedness and their own unworthiness. It is at this moment that the Arrogance and Self-righteousness (that is inherent in every human at birth, and that prevents them from being saved) is overcome. That Power, that effective Force, that overwhelming Tsunami, that overcomes fallen

Human Pride, is called "Grace". And it is at this moment that the "process" of Salvation begins:

- As they see, they are convicted.
- As they are convicted, they cry out to God in utter helplessness.
- As they cry, they repent.
- As they repent, God forgives.
- As God forgives, God sends the purifying Fire.
- As they are purged, they desire to be used to proclaim God's Glory.

... but it all begins with "seeing". Without our eyes being opened so that we may behold God in His magnificence, we remain selfish and sinful. So, the forceful, sovereign, miraculous, and supernatural *unveiling* of our eyes, so that we may behold God in His Glory, is God loving us.

But, of course, it doesn't stop there. The very same Love that *forcefully* and *violently* and *effectually* opened our blind eyes, and unstopped our deaf ears, and that gave us a heart that could believe, *continues* with us all through this Life. And so, those who once believed, *keep on* believing; those who once trusted, *keep on* trusting; those who once saw, see *clearer and clearer*; those who once heard, *keep on* hearing; those who once repented, *keep on* repenting; and the Arrogance and the Self-righteousness that was once overcome is *continually* being minimized and damaged and reduced, and it grows weaker and weaker. And our *response* to God's Love grows as well. So, as we see, we respond by loving what we see. And as we love what we see, we are *changed* into what we love.

Conversely, when God "hates" somebody, He does NOT make them blind. No, we are *already* blind at the moment of conception in our mother's womb. All God does when He manifests "Divine Hatred" is to passively "step aside" and allow us to *remain* blind. We need to remember that, as a normal condition of being fallen, we are both *unable* and *unwilling* to see God in His Splendor. And so:

- Because our eyes are blind, we do not see.
- Because we do not see, we are not convicted.
- Because we are not convicted, we do not repent.
- Because we don't repent, God does not forgive.

- Because God does not forgive, we remain in our sins.
- Because we are "in our sins", we do not love God.

... so, God doesn't have to actively "do" *anything* to those He "hates". They are *already* lost, they are *already* fallen, they are *already* self-centered and arrogant, and they are *already* unable and unwilling to love Him. All God does when He "hates" somebody is to *allow* them to *remain* as they already are, and to *allow* them to *continue* to do *whatever* is in their hearts to do.

So, the *best* understanding of God's Love is when God *violently* stops us from doing what we want, and then changes our hearts so that we genuinely want Him. So, God graciously give us a new heart, and we respond to that new heart by loving Him, and then God blesses us like it was all our idea to begin with.

And the best way of understanding God's "Hate" is when God simply allows us to do what we want, and then damns us for not wanting Him.

So, when people ask you, "*Do you really believe that God will violate your will?*" Answer them by saying, "*Only for those He loves. God doesn't violate the will of the ones He hates.*" So, God's Love is the overt, intrusive, Interruption by God on those He chooses to save. And God's Hate is the passive, silent Allowance by God on those He has no intention of saving.

So, when God looks at the "damned" and asks them why they didn't love and obey Him, they will respond, "*Because I didn't want to*". But when God looks at the "saved" and asks them why they loved Him and labored so hard to obey Him, they will respond, "*Only because You set Your Love upon me*".

And that is why the Truth of Sovereign Election doesn't cause us to be arrogant, and why it humbles us and makes us tremble. And that is why the Word of the Lord is a "Burden", because the very Words that are designed for Eternal Life in those God loves becomes the stench of Eternal Death for those He hates.

And so, my understanding of what it means to be a faithful Pastor is that I should take up the "Burden" of every verse that I preach, and deliver it to you as I tremble. So, I come this morning with this Word, this Burden, a Burden that is true, a Burden that astonishes me, and a Burden that causes me to tremble.

Preaching what Malachi says here is like a strange cloud coming toward us on the battlefield of life. We are surrounded by enemies and mortally wounded and cringing before the final blow is struck. And we see this cloud approaching us in our misery and hopelessness, and some groan that darkness should be added to all the other dangers of life. But others remember the words of William Cowper's hymn:

Ye fearful saints, fresh Courage take,
The Clouds ye so much dread,
Are big with Mercy, and will break,
In Blessing on your head.

And the cloud comes over the wounded soldiers of the Lord of hosts, it swallows them up, and, lo and behold, within the cloud there is light. And slowly the cloud moves with its broken and wounded soldiers through the battle lines of the enemy. And ten or thirty or eighty years later all the soldiers in the cloud arrive safe beyond the battle and beyond the reach of pain.

But some of the enemy mock the cloud as it moves. They scoff and say, "*It is a dark cloud.*" And some of their bullets penetrate the cloud and wound the soldiers of the Lord. But not one is ever lost from this cloud. And no matter how rough the terrain or terrible the battle, the soldiers in this cloud survive the conflict and reach the Place of Peace.

In other words, the heralding that "God loved Jacob but He hated Esau" appears to some as dark and foreboding and unapproachable. But for others, it brings a sense of awe and safety. There is a sense of trembling and speechlessness, for this is not like *anything* we have known. But inside the cloud the sense of Peace and Safety is as firm as the mighty Everest, and as deep as the ocean space and stars. May the Lord give us Grace to see the Glory of this Teaching and the Privilege of entering in.

So, I ask you, when God says, "**I have loved you...**", does that Statement make you tremble? Isaiah said:

Isaiah 66:2b

... But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.

So, have you learned about the Love of God in a way that makes you tremble? Malachi's Burden in this Book is to show us a God, Whose distribution of Love towards us makes us tremble with "*reverent Fear*". Therefore, when the Prophet begins his Prophecy to Israel in Chapter 1 with the Good News, "**I have loved you, says the Lord,**" he unfolds the Love of God for us in a way that makes us tremble before the Majesty of God.

Now I have been told many, many times that the Doctrine of God's free and sovereign electing Love, and its counterpart, God's "Hate", in Him "passing over" others and "leaving them" to Sin and Condemnation, is just too deep and too profound for most believers to grasp. The common reason that has been given to me as to *why* more Pastors on this Coast don't preach this is NOT because they don't know or understand it. It is because they don't *like* it. And so, they justify their own *personal animosity* toward this part of God's Truth by "copping out" and saying that the people of God are not "ready" to hear thing like, "***I have hated Esau***".

But I reject that. And I reject it because Malachi is *not* speaking to a mature group of seasoned theologians here. He is not telling fifth year seminary students that "God hated Esau". He is telling a worldly, skeptical, careless, indifferent, disobedient, adulterous, and stingy people the Truth about God's electing Love. And Malachi uses terms here that are more *bold* and more *unmistakable* than anywhere else in the Old Testament.

And that tells me that these deep and profound Truths that make us tremble are *not* designed by God for the Comfort and Courage of the "mature" believer. No, they are designed to shock the Presumption and the Flippancy of the careless ones, the man or the woman whose grasp of the Love of God is so shallow and so worldly that it *never* makes them tremble.

So, I tell you that "Sovereign Election" should be preached to all, even to unbelievers, so that their understanding of God's Love will *not* make them careless or casual or even presumptuous in God's Presence, but will humble them and break the staff of their Pride and make them tremble.

So, when God said in verse 2, "**I have loved you, says the Lord,**" the Israelites respond *skeptically* and *flippantly*, "**How have You loved us?**"

Now here is where we need to test *ourselves*. How would *you* answer that Statement of God's Love? How do *you* comprehend God's Love? Is your life and your family in such a shambles that you feel about as skeptical about this as the Israelites did? And in your heart of hearts, do you want to say, "*How have You loved me?*" It will do us all Good to listen to God's Answer which is almost never heard today.

Question: *How have You loved us?*

Answer: "Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob, but I have hated Esau."

Now what sort of Answer is this? The descendants of Jacob have asked, "**How have You loved us?**" But how is it an Answer to say, "**Jacob I loved, Esau I hated**"? Isn't that just a repetition of what God already said in the first part of verse 2, "**I have loved you, says the Lord**"?

No, it's not. Because of the little Question, "**Was not Esau Jacob's brother?**" *What* does that mean? *Why* did God ask that? God asks this Question because He knew that the Answer contained the key to the very Essence of His Love.

What is the Answer? "*Was not Esau Jacob's brother?*" So, the Answer is, "*Yes!*" In fact, as every Israelite knew, Esau was not only Jacob's brother, he was his *twin* brother, conceived in the womb of the very *same* mother, Rebecca, by the very *same* father, Isaac.

And that means that Jacob and Esau were *not* like the sons of Abraham, Isaac and Ishmael. Isaac had a *different* mother than Ishmael, and his mother wasn't even an Israelite. But Jacob and Esau were twins. And not only were they twins, Esau was the *elder one*, which means, that, by all customary rights and privileges, he would normally be the *main heir* of the father's Blessings.

So, what was the point of God responding by asking, "**Is not Esau Jacob's brother?**" The point is this: "*Based on what you and Esau were, in yourselves, I could just as easily have chosen Esau as you. Isn't he your brother? Weren't you twins? Isn't he, in fact, your elder? But I chose you, and passed him by!*"

What then is God's Answer to the Question, "**How have You loved us?**" His Answer is, "*I have loved you with a free, sovereign, and unconditional, electing Love. That is how I have loved you. My Love for you is a 'unique and special Love', because I chose you for Myself above*

your brother Esau. My Love for you is 'unconditional Love', because I chose you before you had done anything Good or Evil, before you had met any conditions, and while you were still in your mother's womb (Genesis 25:24). My Love for you is a 'Sovereign Love' because I was under no constraint to love you, I was not forced or coerced, and I was totally in charge when I set My Love upon you. And my Love for you is 'Free' because it's the overflow of My Own infinite Grace that can never be bought."

So, if you are a Christian here today, and if you say to God, "How have You loved me?", can you answer the way God answered the Israelites? For example, do you look at your own family members who are living in sin, and does that make you tremble, that, even though you came from the very *same* Family and the very *same* Mother and Father, **you** have been chosen for Salvation? Do you tremble that your Election is *not* because of *anything* in you? Do you tremble that all your "Believing" and all your "Trusting" are Gifts from God and do not originate from inside of you? Do you tremble when you look at that childhood friend, or your college roommate, or your neighbors, or co-workers, who turned away from God, and, yet, you stayed on the Path that leads to everlasting Life?

But, what about Esau? Probably the most striking thing about this text is that in it, God chooses to highlight His "Love" for the *descendants* of Jacob by *contrasting* it with His "Hatred" for the *descendants* of Esau, which were called the nation of "Edom".

If we ask, what does God mean by saying (in verse 3), "**Esau I hated,**" the answer is spelled out for us in some detail in verses 3 and 4:

but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness. Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the Lord of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and *men* will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever."

Now please notice four aspects of God's "hatred" of Esau:

1. God *Opposes* Them

First, it means that God *opposes* their prosperity and brings their land under His Judgment. God says, "**I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness.**" Those who do not love God are *opposed* by God.

2. God Will *Continue* to Oppose Them

Second, it means that God will *continue* to oppose them as they continue to *resist* His Judgment. Yet God's Judgment will not tolerate their resistance. Verse 4: "**Though Edom says, 'We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins'; thus says the Lord of hosts, 'They may build, but I will tear down.'**"

3. They Will Be "Given Up" to Wickedness

Third, God's hatred for Esau means that they will, by and large, as a nation, be "given up" to Wickedness. Verse 4b: "... **and men will call them the wicked territory...**" This is the most *devastating* of all God's Judgments and the one that makes all the others to be absolutely "Just". We must understand that God is inherently "Good". And so, God *never* brings Judgments on people who are innocent. God is always perfectly "Just" in all His Dealings.

Sovereign Election does NOT teach that Jacob was "innocent" and Esau was "guilty". No. It teaches that Jacob and Esau were *both* guilty of not loving God. And it *could* have been that Jacob might have actually been *more* guilty. So, God didn't look into the heart of Jacob and see a love for God. No, God saw only Sin. So, when God "passed over" Esau and chose Jacob, it was *not* because Jacob was "innocent" and Esau was "guilty". God sovereignly and freely chose to "set His Love" upon Jacob, and God chose to leave Esau in his sins. So, even though God did not choose Esau, this man could not complain to God for giving him Judgment. So, even though Jacob absolutely deserved to be damned, that had no effect on God's disposition toward Esau. Esau was absolutely guilty of what God judged him for.

The Argument given by those in the modern church is: Since God showed Mercy to Jacob, He is now *obligated* to show *equal* Mercy to Esau. Another way of understanding this Argument is to say that if five cars are all breaking the law and going faster than the speed limit,

and the police stop all of them, but decide to let four of them go, then the police are obligated to let the fifth one go too. But the police are not obligated to show Mercy to anyone. So, if the police give the fifth one a ticket, even though he let four of them go, the fifth one cannot complain. He has no voice of complaints, precisely because he was guilty. And the fact that the police showed Mercy to the other four doesn't change the fact that the fifth one is guilty and deserves Justice. So, this Argument denies the basic premise of what Mercy actually is:

- Mercy/Love cannot be *earned* by anything we do.
- God is not *obligated* to distribute Mercy/Love to anyone.

For Mercy to be "Mercy", it HAS to be "free". And for God's Love to be "Love", it must also be "free". God *cannot* be *coerced by anything* in the distribution of either His Love or His Mercy. So, freely, sovereignly, God chose to distribute His magnificent "Love" upon a guilty sinner named "Jacob", and God chose to distribute His equally magnificent "Justice" upon another guilty sinner named "Esau".

4. God Will Be Angry with Them *Forever*

God called the descendents of Esau "**the people toward whom the Lord is indignant forever.**"

So, here we see an even *more* disturbing thing. In *addition* to NOT choosing to set His Love on Esau, evidently, God chose to also hate the *descendants* of Esau as well! And again, this should never cause any of us to doubt God, this should be yet one more reason to tremble before Him.

Now God didn't give us the reason WHY He continued to pour out His Indignation on the descendants of Esau, but He *did* tell us what was **NOT** His Reason: This has *nothing* to do with an "*inferior* bloodline or ethnicity". It was **NOT** due to being a "*sub-standard race*", or some "*defective DNA*". That thinking is Sin, and was the *basis* of both Adolf Hitler's Third Reich and Margaret Sanger's Planned Parenthood. But Christians don't believe that. And the Christian Church doesn't teach it.

What we believe and teach is that God is "Sovereign", even in Salvation. And that means that *how* and why God chooses to *distribute*

His Love and Mercy is left solely in God's Own Divine Prerogative. And since *nobody* deserves Mercy, and since God is not *obligated* to ever love any of us, the fact that we are so thoroughly loved by God should make us all tremble.

But *why* does God inspire Malachi to begin his Message to these worldly Israelites, and to us, with such a "Burden" as this? The Answer is in verse 5:

Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

So, there are several reasons *why* God set His Love on Jacob and withheld that same Love from Esau:

- ✓ So that He might be feared.
- ✓ So, His people will be humbled.
- ✓ To take away our presumption of His Mercy and Love.
- ✓ To remove every ground of boasting in yourself.
- ✓ To cut the nerve of Pride that boasts over Esau as though your Salvation were owing to anything in you.
- ✓ To kill the cavalier sense of "human Self-reliance" that permits you to think that you were an equal partner with Him in your Salvation.
- ✓ To make you tremble with tears of Joy that you *do* belong to God.

... but, that's not all. God has *another* Purpose in revealing the *unequal, free* distribution of His electing Love for Jacob, and His Judgment upon Esau. Look again at verse 5:

Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

In other words, *part* of what it means for God to distribute His Love differently among the world is so that sinners, out of every tribe and people and tongue and nation, will be able to see the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ, and to love what they see. So, God hating Esau allows for God to love us! And that should make us happy. But it should also make us tremble.

To be loved by God is to know that God reigns. That He is great and mighty, even *beyond* the people called by His Name. So, God reigns supreme in Edom. His Purposes are *not* ultimately frustrated by the wickedness of any people.

So, let us humble ourselves under the mighty Hand of God. Let us give Him the Glory, *all* the Glory, for our Salvation. And let us never grow weary in savoring and strengthening and spreading the Vision of our God setting His Love upon the most unlikely of the unworthy rebels, so that they too will see and love what they see.

Amen. Let's pray.

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The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen. Be watchful and quicken your pace. Soli Deo Gloria. For the Glory of God alone.