

Malachi Week 1 “God Is Love”

LESSON GOALS

The point of every lesson is a main idea with the goal of informing our knowing, feeling, and doing.

MAIN IDEA: God is love.

Head Change: To know that when we doubt God’s love, the problem is with us, not with Him.

Heart Change: To feel grateful that God’s love isn’t based on our performance but on His promise.

Life Change: To allow the warmth of God’s love to flood our hearts and motivate us in all we do.

OPEN

How would you explain to a toddler what it means to be ‘fully devoted’ to something or someone?

I mean...kids are fickle. Their devotion often only goes as far as their interest at that particular time!

Would you use words such as caring, love, time.

To which of the following would you say you’re fully devoted: your job, your kids, Netflix, your bank account, travel, your studies, your spouse, coffee?

In these next five to six weeks we are going to go through the book of Malachi (not a common one), we are going to uncover conversations between God and His people, each one revealing how He wants us to be free from safe, mediocre Christianity and to live a life *fully devoted* to Him..

It is truly my prayer that as we listen to God speak through the book of Malachi, our heart, minds and spirits will be more engaged in the Fathers will for us.

Background: As always, before we dive in, we need to give context to the scripture.

The author of this book is Malachi (meaning ‘messenger’) and we are told in verse one that this is prophecy, meaning it is the words of God written down for his people.

The Book was written sometime in the 5th Century BC at a time when life was tough.

God’s people were experiencing drought, famine, economic stress, opposition from surrounding nations, and a temple that seemed too small and too weak to withstand the cultural onslaught.

Considering the state of our world today, Malachi’s message is profoundly relevant to us.

As we journey through this book we get to listen into five conversations between God and his people.

We'll hear the people's joys, their struggles, their frustrations, and we'll get to experience God's call to remember the scriptures, to keep his commands and to look forward to eternity to come.

Core Questions:

- 1. Who starts the conversation – God or the people?**
- 2. How would God’s people already have known that He loved them?**
- 3. Did Jacob earn God’s favour through greater holiness or godliness?**
- 4. Can our actions change God’s love?**

The first conversation God has with His people in the book of Malachi is about love (Malachi 1:1–5). As in all the subsequent conversations, God makes a claim, the people disagree, and God gives His response.

In this case, God tells the people how much He loves them, and they immediately say, ‘How have You loved us?’ (Malachi 1:2)

We are only in the third sentence of the book and the people are already demanding God prove His Love for them.

When have you found yourself asking God, ‘How have you loved me?’

- When you were sick
- When you were struggling financially
- Family issues

From Genesis to Revelation, God’s Word is abundantly clear that God is love.

The people of Malachi’s day would have known this from scripture.

They would have read stories of His protection, provision and victory in spite of their stubbornness.

Just a few year prior God had brought them out of their exile

“I have loved you with an everlasting love” Jeremiah 31:3

“And he prayed to the Lord and said, “O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.”
Jonah 4:2

“Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love.” Micah 7:18

I'm reminded Jesus' love towards Peter. Even after Peter denied Jesus three times when Jesus was arrested and taken away to be crucified...after the resurrection, Jesus forgave and welcomed Him back with open arms.

It reminds me that no matter what I've done, Jesus' love poured out on the cross was me, and for all who would repent and accept Him as Lord.

We need to realize that God's story is a love story because God *is* love, and His love is unconditional, full, and free. When we don't grasp that, the problem is with us, not with God.

We need to recognize that, in seasons when we doubt God's love, it's *us* problem not a *God* problem?

The question then becomes, how do you resolve the tension to embrace God's love once again?

Sometimes it is ok to cry in anguish and ask God where is your love. Or as the Psalmist said in Psalm 89:49 "*Lord, where is your former great love?*"

What is God's response to the people's question beautiful?...God reminds them of Jacob and Esau, the sons of Isaac and Rebekah.

Their (long and complicated) story is found in Genesis 25–27. The gist is that God gets to choose who He shows love to.

Both Jacob (who stole his brother's birthright) and Esau (who despised his father and disobeyed God's commands by marrying two Canaanite women) were as bad as each other.

Neither of them deserved any blessing at all. And yet God covered Jacob with His mercy. Why?

Because Jacob was chosen by God and Esau wasn't

Some of us may find this story unfair or hard to swallow?

Some may relate more to Esau, some to Jacob.

Paul unpacks the story of Jacob and Esau a little more in Romans 9:11–16 (read),

11 Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad—in order that God’s purpose in election might stand: 12 not by works but by him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” 13 Just as it is written: “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” 14 What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! 15 For he says to Moses, “I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.” 16 It does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.

When we clarify verse 16, We see ‘[Love] does not, therefore, depend on human desire or effort, but on God’s mercy.’

Have you found yourself slipping into the belief that God loves you because you’re somehow better than those around you?

Who do you look down upon? Does it change how you feel about them when you picture Jesus joyfully embracing them with all the same tenderness He feels for you?

So in other words, the people forgot that the only reason God loved them, is because he chooses to.

Deuteronomy 7:7-8 *“The Lord did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. 8 But it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery...”*

‘God’s love is not based on *your performance* but on *His promise*. God gets to choose who He has mercy on. God loves you because He’s chosen to.

It doesn't depend on how you feel.

He doesn't compare you to a sister or brother.

God's love is not based on your performance but rather on His promise.

And so, if God says He loves you, it's true.'

Do you *feel* God's love, or is it more of an intellectual acceptance?

Consciously or subconsciously, do you try to perform your way into God's love?

As I was preparing this message, I was thinking of the times when I forget about God's love or even questioned it. I never seem to question God's love when things are going well, but rather when I've fallen short in some way.

That's when Satan steps in and makes me think I'm unlovable because of what I've done.

We're hamstrung by regret, shame, and guilt, believing God's love for us has diminished because we've sinned.

If you're a Christian you no longer face wrath but love...full love.
Flowing from the mercy of God!

Your action can't change that because God's love is reliant on God, not on you. He has chosen you.

There is a huge danger in the Christian life when we think God love us when we are good and living in obedience, but hates us when we're not.

What an insult to God!!

Whether your faith feels strong or weak right now, regret is not the overarching story of your life. Your guilt or shame or failure.

The story of your life is that God has chosen to love you. Even on the day when you can't see any light at all and the pressures of the world

seem to be suffocating you. God's love for you is still shining as bright as it ever has or ever will.

How do we know this is true? God's love for His people was based on proof, not pretending (Malachi 1:3–4), and the same is true for us today.

Edom was descended from Esau and Israel from Jacob. Edom had constantly opposed God's people and made life hard for them, but God promised:

“They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. ⁵ You will see it with your own eyes and say, ‘Great is the Lord—even beyond the borders of Israel!’”

Any threats to His promise of love will be dealt with. God's love for you is so strong that anything standing in its way will be defeated, and He *will* achieve His purposes.

When the son of God, Jesus Christ hung on the cross, it looked like darkness had won the day. But underneath, God was achieving something so significant we can hardly comprehend it.

A full forgiveness of sins...the greatest display of love, the world has ever seen...proof of his promise.

Perhaps your experience of love in your life has not been great. I'm really so sorry if that's the case.

If that's you then I want you to hear this. His love for you will never run out, His love will never hurt, His love will never leave, His love will always protect, His love is constant.

Why? Because it is dependent on Him! Praise the Lord that is true!

As we go through the rest of this study we are going to see that doubting God's love leads to so many other troubles and problems.

It's this downward spiral of turning away from Him and it starts with forgetting His love for them.

'I see so many in church today who are bitter and cynical and negative. And it's so destructive. There's this theme in the book of Malachi where God declares truth and people constantly contradict Him.

It's a dangerous place to be in, and it's one that leads us away from the source of love and away from a life filled with joy, unity, and peace.'

Let the Warmth of Gods love flood in, right to the corners of your heart and let that motivate you in all you do.

I want us to get this right before we move on. We're going to be talking about some big, heavy things in this study, but you've got to start with this genuine conviction at the center of your life that God loves you.

And That is a promise

Conclusion

Celebrate the truth that nothing you do can change God's love for you. Don't succumb to the danger of thinking God loves you only when you're living a life of perfect obedience, and He hates you when you're not. Whether your faith feels strong or weak right now, regret, guilt, shame, and failure aren't writing your life script. The story of your life is that God has chosen to bestow His love on you, now and forever, and even the direst circumstances can't diminish it. May you wholeheartedly embrace God's love for you, allowing it to motivate your every move.

DEEPER WALK

Pray: Starting this week, form a prayer habit of daily thanksgiving to God for His insurmountable love. Use a regular activity as a prayer trigger – like, every time you switch on the kettle or put your key in the front door or clip the lead onto your dog's collar.

Thank God that His love for you will never run out, never hurt you, never leave you stranded. Thank Him that His constant love protects you. Praise Him that His love for you isn't dependent on your performance, but on His promise.