

Malachi 1:1-3 Predestination: The Sovereign Choice Of God!

Today we enter into Israel's history at a very interesting time. It's about 80 years since being brought back from the Babylonian exile, Nehemiah is governor and Ezra is the high priest. It's around 436 to 430 BC. Now in 516 BC the temple of the Lord had been rebuilt under the then Governor of Jerusalem Zerubbabel and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah were with him. In Ezra 1:1-5 we read "In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfil the word of the Lord spoken by Jeremiah, the Lord moved the heart of Cyrus king of Persia to make a proclamation throughout his realm and to put it in writing. This is what Cyrus king of Persia says: "The Lord, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build a temple for him at Jerusalem in Judah. Any one of his people among you may his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem in Judah and the temple of the Lord, the God of Israel, the God who is in Jerusalem. And the people of any place where survivors may now be living are to provide him with silver and gold, with goods and livestock, and with free will offerings for the temple of God in Jerusalem." Then the family heads of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests and Levites, everyone whose heart God had moved, prepared to go up and build the House of the Lord in Jerusalem."

So amazingly God had moved the heart of this Pagan king to rebuild that which his predecessor Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed! In 458, more exiles returned accompanied by Ezra, then 13 years later in 445 BC Nehemiah returned to Jerusalem to become the governor with Ezra remaining as high priest. Then around 433 BC he returns to the service of the Persian king Artaxerxes and while he's away the new settlers of Jerusalem, (guided by their wretched priests, not Ezra) bring the law of God and temple worship into nothing but contemptuous lip service and hypocrisy! So upon his returning in Nehemiah 13, the sins of intermarrying with other nations, tight-fistedness toward the temple and God's Work, injustice toward the poor and treating the Sabbath with contempt are dealt with by him. As so does the prophet Malachi also deal with these same things in his short book! So the commentators suggest that they were contemporaries.

So then Malachi, 440 to 430 BC: And his name means, My Messenger! It is the last book of the Old Testament and also the last book which was written before the first coming of our Lord Jesus Christ some 425 years later. Yes, such is the nature of the relationship between God and his people that after this time, there would be about 425 years of silence from God. No true word, no true message, now true prophet of the Lord God! Now although it is true that there is a period in England's history which is referred to as the dark ages, surely the ages were never more dark in the history of the world of human kind, then when the people of God had to endure over 400 years of silence from Him!

He created them Genesis 1:1. He chose them Genesis 12:13. He delivered them out of the land of slavery, Exodus 14:19-31. And he also delivered them into the then promised land of Canaan. In Joshua 1:1-11 we read: "After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, the Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aid, "My servant Moses is dead. Now then, you and all these people, get ready to cross the Jordan river into the land I am about to give to them, to the Israelites. I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses, your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river the Euphrates, all the Hittite country to the great sea on the West. No one will be able to stand up against you all the days of your life. As I was with Moses, so I will be with you, I will never leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very

courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you, do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this book of the law depart from your mouth, meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified, do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go." So Joshua ordered the officers of the people, "Go throughout the camp and tell the people, get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own."

Yet such was their behaviour and contempt toward the One True and Living God who had treated them all along as His very own treasured possession, that in a real sense, (even as He turned His Face from His very own Son as He hung up on that cross for these same rebellious people) God would turn away in silence for this dark period of Israel's history!

Yes, this is where we enter into the sad story of Israel. The 10 northern tribes have long been dispersed. Judah and Benjamin only remained. They were taken into exile during Jeremiah's and Daniel's time and now, in accordance with his promise, God has brought them back. But lip service is what they respond with. Hypocrisy, apathy and contempt for not only God's Altar but His Commandments, His laws, and indeed ultimately for God Himself! Yes this is what they repaid His mercy to them with! Brothers and sisters, this is one of those mirrors which when we look into we can truly see ourselves!

Now I know this has been a long introduction but we did need to set this book in its historical context, because by doing so, if we really seek to apply these truths to ourselves, we will hear God speak to us in the coming months of this I have no doubt!

Well, so to today's text. Malachi 1:1-3 under the heading 'Predestination: The Sovereign Choice Of God!' V2 "I have loved you" says the Lord." Now notice the very first thing which God says in the declaration of His actions in comparison to His people's response to His unmerited favour. After 2000 years of God's undeserved position of honour, His people's reply to such a gift is rebellion upon rebellion. And what truth is it that the Almighty begins to confront them with? Yes what truth does He hold up to them as the beginning of His indictment against them? "I have loved you" says the Lord."

Now when we sit and think about this statement brethren it really is an all-encompassing one. The words love, loved, and loves occur in the NIV study Bible concordance alone, over 750 times and of course culminate in those words from John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."

Also from John 15:13 "For greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." And of course there are a myriad of other verses in the Bible of God's love to not only His people, but indeed to the whole world. And may I suggest that sitting here we ourselves, are alongside those greatest examples of His love, because it is for us, that Christ died!

Now I guess He could have said, *'Do I not give the rain and the sunshine? Have I not set the stars and the moon in their places? Do I not make your crops grow? Have I not filled the streams and the rivers with freshwater. Are there not fish in the rivers, the lakes and the oceans? Birds in the sky and animals in the forest to hunt, trees to build your houses from, yes have I not giving you all that you have and need?'* But friends that's not where He begins, he simply says "I have loved you." And the implication is, *I have loved you throughout all of your history. From Adam, Noah, Abraham, Jacob,*

Moses and David. "I have carried you on Eagles wings" Exodus 19:4 And I have sheltered you from the storms, of this you cannot deny.

And yet He continues in verse 2: "But you ask how have you loved us?" Yes such was the contempt that these rebellious children had for their heavenly Father that they had basically said by their actions, *you say you've loved us, well prove it.* "How have you loved us?" Brothers and sisters this is how we can become isn't it? We can become so familiar with our head knowledge about God, and what He has done for us and what He continues to do for us even every moment of every day, that this amazing and awe inspiring thing which we call Grace that He has done for us, through His Son Jesus upon that cross of suffering and shame, to our own shame, we can even grow to take for granted as though it were not the most significant thing which could ever happen to us this side of heaven!

Yes the business of life can crowd in on us, and we can begin to lose that first exciting love for God which we had when we first put on the banner of Christ. Yes that first love which just wanted to tell everyone we meet and know about Jesus and how we had been saved. We can even begin to have contempt in our hearts for those things which at first we had treasured so greatly. Even becoming that most deadly thing for the Christian, lukewarm! In Revelation 3:14-22 we read: "To the Angel of the church in Laodicea write: "These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So, because you are lukewarm neither hot nor cold, I'm about to spew you out of my mouth. You say, I am rich, I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing. But you do not realise that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich, and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness, and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am. I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my father on his throne. He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Yes they thought that they were "rich" and in need of no one or no thing due to their great wealth, and yet Christ points out to them how incredibly wrong they were. They were actually "wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked." Such was their actual state, that everyone should pity them! They were famous for three things: their great wealth, and their exports. One was a particular glossy black wool which was the backbone of their extensive textile industry and the other, Phrygian eye ointment which was believed to have been developed out of their medical school. It was exported in powder form to all parts of the then known world, and then when mixed with water was applied as a paste to the eyes.

Notice that all of these things which they in effect had their faith and security in, had led them into a life of spiritual laziness and apathy, and those very things were dragging them down to the grave! And like the people in Malachi's day, it had all come about through the contempt which they had for God. Indeed that same God, who all along had provided for them so abundantly! Yes "I have loved you says the Lord. But you ask how have you loved us?" God is Speaking of His boundless love toward His thankless people because dear friends, just like those Laodiceans, we can be so thankless at times.

As He speaks of His love God gives them this all important example of it. "Was not Esau's Jacob's brother, yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated." So what is the first thing which should wake them up and bring them back to their senses? Yes the very first thing which should wake them up

and bring them back (and for us it's the same thing) when apathy or resentment builds in our hearts? God's Predestination, or His Sovereign Choice! We might not be able to accept it Brothers and Sisters, but the truth is that He chooses some and rejects others!

In Ephesians 1:4-5 we read. "For He chose us in him (in Jesus) before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will." Yes it is His Sovereign choice which God points to as the first example of His love. "I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated." We can read of this in Genesis 25:21-23. And in Matthew 25:31-34 we read of "the sheep and the goats." Now again, we might find it hard to accept, but God had already chosen His people before one of them even came into being.

Listen to Paul's explanation of these things in Romans 9:9-16 "For this was how the promise was stated. At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son. Not only that, but Rebecca's children had one and the same father, our father Isaac. Yet, before the twins were born or had done anything good or bad, in order that God's promise in election might stand. Not by works but by him who calls, she was told, the older will serve the younger. Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all. For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion". It does not, therefore, depend on man's desire or effort, but on God's mercy."

Yes before one of these baby boys had done anything right or wrong God had already chosen one and rejected the other! And humanly speaking this is one of the most difficult truths about God which we will ever deal with. And many Christians go their whole lives while never coming to terms with it. Yes God saves some and doesn't save others. Some are going to heaven while others are going to hell!

Another thing that we need to understand about the Jacob and Esau situation is that in saying "the older will serve the younger" God was overturning the natural order of things. Because as we know the oldest son was the legal heir to the inheritance but God's Sovereign choice overruled those things. And again, this is the foundation of His indictment against them. *I could have chosen Esau and rejected Jacob, where then would you be? Yes where would the boasting of your ancestry be? You may claim with pride and vanity your earthly heritage, tracing your ancestry all the way back, well if you do, and you see clearly, you must recognise that you are only here because I have chosen you! And you have been an ungrateful and rebellious child the whole way. Yes you are here only because "I have loved you!"*

So the arguments arise that *God is unfair, God is unjust. I can't accept this teaching. I don't accept this teaching, I won't accept this teaching, this can't be true!* Well Paul helps us to deal with this as he continues in Romans 9:19-24 "One of you will say to me, "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, "Why did you make me like this?" Does not the Potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the object of his wrath prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the gentiles?"

Now brothers and sisters, I know we have looked at a lot of scripture this morning, but we have only been looking at this one simple yet profound and all-encompassing truth. God has the right (as the

Creator of all things including men) to do with them as He pleases. And indeed, He has chosen to love some as His particular and treasured possession. Not because they were better than the others, not because they were more worthy, not because they responded to Him by verbalising some kind of external response while others did not, No! It was simply because He chose to do so!

Beloved, when the days come, (and they will come) when you doubt in your heart that God cares, that He sees, that He even notices you at all, pray that His Spirit will engrave these words up on the walls of your heart and soul: "I have loved you", says the Lord." Because He chose you before the creation of the world. Yes He set you apart from all of the rest of the whole world of humanity as His Own. And if that were not enough to convince you of His Love, when you rejected Him through your parents Adam and Eve, and chose yourselves to live apart from Him in rebellion and sin, He sent His Own Son into the world to buy you back with that eternal gift. That gift which you had rejected by your actions! Yes when doubts of our Heavenly Father's care for you creeps in, remember these words. "I have loved you says the Lord." And then look to the Cross and hear Jesus' Words on your behalf. "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

In closing dear friends, the Predestining Hand of God leads not to a life of pride and arrogance in the saved soul as many suggest. Those who balk at this truth. It leads to a life of love, dependence and submission to Him who chose us and bought us back with His Own Son! Yes "I have loved you says the Lord." With my Predestining Hand of love!

Let's pray!