

Roys sermons on the book of Malachi

Part 1: Malachi 1:1-3 'The Sovereign Choice Of God!'

Today we enter into Israel's history at a very interesting time. It is about 80 years since being brought back from the Babylonian exile, Nehemiah is governor and Ezra is high priest. It is around 436 to 430 BC. Now in 516 BC the temple of the Lord had been rebuilt under the then governor of Jerusalem, Zerubbabel. The prophets Haggai and Zechariah were with him. We can read about that in Ezra 1:1-7.

Amazingly, God had moved the heart of this Pagan King to rebuild that which his ancestor Nebuchadnezzar had destroyed. In 458 BC more exiles returned accompanied by Ezra. Then 13 years later in 445 BC Nehemiah travels to Jerusalem to become the governor, with Ezra remaining as high priest. Around 433 BC he returns to the service of the Persian King Artaxerxes, and while Nehemiah is gone the new settlers of Jerusalem (guided by their wicked priests, not Ezra), bring the Law of God and temple worship into nothing but contemptuous lip service and hypocrisy. So upon his return in Nehemiah chapter 13 he deals with the people's sins of intermarrying with other nations, tight fistness toward the temple and God's work, injustice toward the poor and treating the Sabbath with contempt. The Prophet Malachi also deals with the same things in his short book, which leads the commentators to believe that they were contemporaries.

So Malachi is set around 440 to 430 BC. 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. 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 Him. No true word, no true message, no 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 than when the people of God had to endure over 400 years of silence from the Almighty.

He created them. Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in His own image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them." *He chose them.* Genesis 12:1-3: "The Lord had said to Abraham, 'leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse, and all the peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"

He delivered them out of the land of slavery. Exodus 14:19-31 "Then the Angel of God, who had been travelling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side, so neither went near the other all night long. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea and all that night the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. The Egyptians pursued them and all Pharaoh's horses and Chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and

cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said 'let's get away from the Israelites. The Lord is fighting for them against Egypt'. Then the Lord said to Moses 'stretch out your hand over the sea so that the water's may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen. Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at day break the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the Lord swept them into the sea. The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen, the entire army of pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. That day the Lord saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. And when the Israelites saw the great power the Lord displayed against the Egyptians the people feared the Lord and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant."

God also delivered them into the promised land of Canaan. Joshua 1:1-11 "After the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, The Lord said to Joshua son of Nun, Moses' aid, 'Moses my servant 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 through the camp and tell the people, get your supplies ready. 3 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.'"

Yes, all of God's great goodness to His people, yet consider their behaviour and contempt toward the One True and Living God who had treated them all along as His own treasured possession. In a real sense, (even as He had turned His face from His own Son as Jesus hung up on that cross of suffering and shame for these same rebellious people) God would turn away in silence for this dark period of Israel's history!

This is where we enter into the sad story of Israel. The northern tribes have long since been dispersed. Judah and Benjamin in the south only remain. They were taken into exile during Jeremiah's and Daniel's time, and now, in accordance with His promise, God has brought them back to Jerusalem. But yet again, they respond with lip service. Yes, hypocrisy, apathy and contempt, not only for God's Altar but His commandments, His laws, and indeed ultimately for God himself! This is how they repaid his mercy. Brothers and sisters, this is one of those mirrors of the Bible which when we look into them we 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 these coming weeks.

This morning's message from Malachi 1:1-3 I have entitled "The Sovereign Choice of God". Verse two begins "'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. Yes, after 2000 years of God's undeserved position of honour, the reply of His people 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 for a moment we see that it is all-encompassing. The words love, loved, and loves occur in the NIV study Bible concordance alone 750 times. And the culmination is 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." We also see in John 15:13 "for greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."

Of course there are a myriad of other verses in the Bible expressing God's love to not only His people, but indeed to the whole world. And may I suggest that we ourselves are alongside those greatest examples of His love, because it is we ourselves for whom Christ died! Now I guess God could have said things such as '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, I have filled the streams and rivers with freshwater . Are there not fish in the rivers, the lakes, and oceans? Birds in the sky and animals in the forests to hunt for food. Trees to build your houses from, yes have I not given you all that you have and need?'. But friends that's not where God begins. He simply says "I have loved you." 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, all this you cannot deny!

Yet He continues in Malachi 1:2 "But you asked how have you loved us?" Yes, such was the contempt that these rebellious children had for their Heavenly Father that they have 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, that this amazing and awe inspiring thing which He has done for us through His Son Jesus Christ upon that cross of suffering and shame, which we call Salvation, (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 Jesus. 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. We may even become that most deadly thing for the Christian, lukewarm. In the Book of Revelation chapter 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 spit 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 him 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 ears to hear let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

These churches thought that they were rich and in need of nothing due to their great wealth, and yet Christ points out to them how incredibly wrong they were. They were “ wretched, pitiful, blind and poor”. Such was their actual state that everyone should pity them! They were famous for three things: their great wealth and two exports. One was a particular glossy black wool which was the backbone of their extensive textile industry and the other a Phrygian ointment which was believed to have been developed out of their medical school. It was exported in powder form and then when mixed with water was applied as a paste to the eyes. Notice that all of those things which in effect held their security, had actually led them to a life of spiritual laziness and apathy, and those very things were dragging them down to the grave and hell! 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?”

Yes God is speaking of His love toward His thankless people because, dear friends, just like the Laodiceans, we can be so thankless. As He speaks of love, God gives this all important example. “Was not Esau 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? For us it is the same when apathy or resentment build in our hearts. God`s Sovereign Choice! We might not be able to accept it brothers and sisters, but He chooses some and rejects others.

In Ephesians 1:4-5 we read “For He chose us in Him before the creation of 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, His Predestination! “I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.” We can all read this account in Genesis 25.

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 those things in Romans chapter 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 purpose 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 those baby boys had even done anything right or wrong He had already chosen one and had rejected the other. And humanly speaking, this is one of the most difficult aspects about God which we will ever face. Many Christians go their whole lives without ever coming to terms with this truth. God saves some and does not save others. Some are going to heaven while others are going to hell.

Another thing we need to understand about the Jacob and Esau story is that in saying that “the older will serve younger”, God overturns the natural order of things. The oldest son was always the legal heir to the inheritance. Yes, it is God’s sovereign choice, His predestining, over-ruling ALL THINGS. Look again at the foundation of God’s argument to them. ‘I could have chosen Esau and rejected Jacob, where *then* would you be? Yes, where would the boastings 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 here only because I CHOSE YOU. And you have been an ungrateful and rebellious child the whole way. Yes, you are here only because “I have loved you.”

Some will say that God is unfair, He 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. Paul helps us to deal with this as he continues in the Romans passage: vs 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, oh 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 objects 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 that we have looked at a whole 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 men to do with them as He pleases. And indeed, He has chosen to love some as His particular treasured people and possession. Not because they were better than the others, not because they were more worthy, not because they responded to Him while the others didn't, 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 The Spirit will engrave these words upon the walls of your heart: “I have loved you says the Lord” because *He chose you before the creation of the world*. Yes, He set you apart from all the rest as His own treasured possession He PREDESTINED YOU. This truth does build up pride and arrogance in the saved soul. It builds dependence and submission to the One who chose!

And not only did He do those things, but when you rejected Him through your parents Adam and Eve and you continued in your own sin, choosing yourselves to live apart from Him in rebellion, He sent his Own Son into this world to buy back for you that eternal gift which you had rejected by your own actions!!

Yes when doubts of our Heavenly Father’s care for you creep in remember these words “I have loved you says the Lord.” And then look to the cross and the words of Jesus on your behalf: “Father forgive them for they know not what they do.”

Yes, “I have loved you says the Lord”

Let’s pray!