

I Have Loved You

I. Introduction

A. The setting

1. Mid 5th Century BC

A century after returning from Babylonian exile. The temple has been rebuilt. It's around same time period as prophets Ezra and Nehemiah.

2. Under foreign political control

Persian period

3. Israel disillusioned and doubting

Poverty, drought, economic adversity made Israel feel ignored and forgotten by the God who chose them, redeemed them from bondage, and took them into the promised land.

Their current “experience did not harmonize with the glorious promises found in the earlier prophets. Their vision of the coming messianic age did not materialize. They are skeptical of the promises and therefore indifferent in their commitment to live in the light of them, and to worship and serve the Lord with all their heart.” (Notes, New Geneva Study Bible)

B. The Prophet

Malachi – means “my messenger” and could refer to his personal name or to a title.

After Malachi, prophecy ceased in Israel for 400 years until John the Baptist arrived announcing the coming Messiah.

C. The dispute

Malachi is bringing the burden of the word, or God’s accusations against His people. They are being rebuked for their neglect of the true worship of the Lord. Yet the people’s response is one of defiance, challenging God’s charges against them.

II. Perspective

A. Love – More than a feeling

1. God’s first word

“I have loved you.”

Covenant commitment

God begins his address with love, not judgment.

“Often, the first truth that people need to grasp is God’s love for them. Only when they know The Lord’s love for them will they be truly drawn to repent of their sins and hate them rather than merely hating their consequences.” (Duguid, 100)

It's personal

It is unusual for God to address Himself to his people in the first person. This conveys a sense of urgency and intimacy. God is assuring them of the certainty of His love before confronting them with the burden of their sin

2. Israel's response:

"How have you loved us?"

Cynical doubt and defiance - what have you done for us lately?

B. Love is a choice

1. Election

"Jacob I love and Esau I hated." (v. 3)

A surprising answer - God's infallible purpose counters skepticism and unbelief.

Love - more than an emotion. God binds Himself to His people in a committed, never stopping, never giving up, always and forever relationship.

Hate – doesn't refer to out of control rage, but an absence of commitment or relationship.

2. It is unmerited

"Though the twins were not yet born and had done nothing either good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to Rebekah, 'the older shall serve the younger.'...I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion. (Rom 9:11)

3. Is God fair?

This question is based on a faulty premise because it assumes that left to ourselves, we would choose God. In fact, our natural bent is on a trajectory away from God.

"There is none who seeks for God; all have tuned aside, together they have become useless."

Compared to the perfect holiness required by God's law;

"There is none who does good, not even one...with their tongues they keep deceiving...destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace they have not known." (Romans 3:11-18)

4. We are deserving of justice

"We know what the message of the Law is...that every excuse may die on the lips of him who makes it and no living man may think himself beyond the judgment of God. It is the straight-edge of the law that shows us how crooked we are." (Rom 3:19-20)

Don't ask God for fairness, ask for mercy.

5. But recipients of mercy

"All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through The redemption which is in Christ Jesus." (Rom 3:23-24)

God's justice has been poured out on Jesus; belief in Christ is the basis of God's mercy toward us.

III. Providence

A. A tale of two brothers

1. Esau – looks to himself to get what he wants

Self reliance

He was the adventurous hunter, a tough guy who lived life on the horizontal plane, indifferent to God. He married two women outside the faith, making life bitter for Rebekah and Isaac.

Self gratification

He traded his birthright with Jacob, for a bowl of stew, then vowed to kill him out of revenge. He accumulated wealth, but never credited it to God's grace.

2. Jacob – looks to God as a means to get what he wants

Selfishly ambitious

Jacob lived up to the meaning of his name – cheater. He didn't wait for God's promise to unfold, but took matters into his own hand, outwitting his brother to get his birthright and deceiving his father to get the blessing. The result was exile – he fled to avoid his brother's revenge.

Self gratification

The deceiver meets a deceiver. Jacob is tricked into marrying Leah, and must work to get Rachel. But he out-schemes his father in law, returning from exile with most of Laban's wealth in hand.

3. Both brothers deserved rejection

Neither merited grace- they were dysfunctional sinners. Yet God's grace triumphs over fairness.
"So then it does not depend on the man who wills, or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy." (Rom 9:16)

4. God intervenes

With a promise

God graciously appears to Jacob at Bethel, vowing to protect and prosper him, extending the promise He had given to Abraham and Isaac, that "*in you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed.*" (Gen 28:14)

Yet Jacob is still bargaining:

"If God will be with me and will keep me...and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God." (Gen 28:21)

Jacob wins by losing

At Peniel Jacob wrestles with God until daybreak, when God disables him by dislocating his hip. In his brokenness, Jacob is undone - he clings to God, and won't let go.

Changed – given a new name and identity:

"Your name shall be Israel; for you have striven with God and prevailed." (Gen 32:28)

True faith

"By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." (Heb 11:21)

B. Edom and Israel mirror Esau and Jacob

1. It's not the end of the story

Edom will be destroyed

Edom (Esau's descendants) won't be rebuilt because of their treachery.

"If Edom says, 'We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins, 'the Lord of hosts says, 'They may build, but I will tear down and they will be called the wicked country.'" (v. 4)

But Israel will be restored

"Then all the nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the Lord Your God." (3:12)

III. Promise

A. God's call will go out to the nations:

"And your eyes will see it and you will say, "The Lord be magnified beyond he border of Israel." (v. 5)

1. To the children of the promise

All who trust in the Messiah, the promised seed – including descendants of Israel and even Edom:
"In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old, that they may possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name, declares the Lord Who does this." (Amos 9:11-12)

B. How has He loved us?

1. Jesus was broken

He wrestled with God on the cross. His life would break in order to heal God's broken world.

2. Jesus wins by losing

"For the joy set before Him [us] He endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God." (Heb 12:2)

3. Jesus embodies compassion

Jesus' consistent response to cries for mercy was to *"have compassion on them."*

Bibliography

Boice, James Montgomery, The Minor Prophets Volume 2, Micah –Malachi. Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI 2003

Duguid, Ian M. and Harmon, Matthew P. Zephaniah, Haggai, Malachi, Reformed Expository Commentary. P&R Publishing Phillipsburg, PA 2018.

Hamilton, Ted. Sermon: *The Immensity and Freedom of God's Mercy*. August 19, 2007.