

“I Have Loved You”

Malachi 1:1-2:9

Key Verse: 1:2a, “I have loved you,” says the LORD.

Malachi was the last prophet in the Old Testament times, living in the time of Ezra and Nehemiah, about 400 years before Christ. The temple had been rebuilt, but the people still needed new hearts. Malachi was the LORD’s messenger to them. We will study the LORD’s message through Malachi in three studies. Let’s listen to Malachi’s opening message in three movements: the LORD’s love, lame offerings, and true Levites. May the Lord’s word through Malachi also speak to us.

First, the LORD’s love for Israel and for us (1-5).

What was the LORD’s first message to Israel through his messenger, Malachi? “I have loved you.” says the LORD. The whole Old Testament is like a love letter from God to his people Israel. The New Testament is God’s expansion of his love letter to the whole world through Jesus Christ. But Israel and we have often not realized or accepted God’s love. Israel and sometimes we too, retort, “How have you loved us, God?”

God answered: “Is not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the LORD. “Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated.” God chose Jacob who fathered the nation of Israel. Esau fathered the nation of Edom. The Edomites became enemies of God and God’s people. They did not follow the LORD. They actually mistreated God’s people Israel and gloated over Israel’s sufferings and misfortunes. Listen to a prophecy against Edom in Ezekiel 25:12-13a, “Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Edom acted revengefully against the house of Judah and has grievously offended in taking vengeance on them, therefore thus says the Lord GOD, I will stretch out my hand against Edom....” The Edomites thought they could defy God’s rule and rebuild what God destroyed. But God regarded them as a wicked country with whom he was angry forever. Their plans and efforts apart from God would not succeed. For great is the LORD, not only in Israel, but beyond their borders.

God loved Israel in countless ways. God chose them to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God delivered them out of slavery in Egypt. Yes, God disciplined them as exiles in Babylon. Even that was God’s love for them. And God also brought them back to the land promised to Abraham. God loved them in so many ways.

How about you? How has God loved you? Do you know that God loves you? Can you specify ways that God has loved you? Actually, doubt of God's love brought sin and disaster into the world. When Adam and Eve doubted God's love, they listened to the Enemy's deceitful craftiness, "Did God really say? God is keeping something good from you, don't you know?" Then Adam and Eve fell from their love relationship with God. Do you believe God loves you? How has he loved you? We should all declare and write down many ways that God has loved us.

Here are five ways for starters: God chose us, God redeemed us, God adopted us, God gave us his kingdom as an inheritance, God has given us the Holy Spirit. Election, salvation, adoption, inheritance, and Holy Spirit.

Election. God chose us in Christ Jesus to know his love. To his disciples, Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit..." (Jn 15:16). Listen to what Apostle Paul wrote to fellow believers in Ephesians 1:3-4: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, ⁴ even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love..."

Salvation. Romans 5:8 speaks of God's love to save us from sin and condemnation. "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Christ died for all our sins, and there is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Ro 8:1). Amen!

Adoption. Apostle John speaks of God's love to adopt us into his family: "See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are" (1Jn 3:1). Does that verse sound familiar? It should, if you were at our last Christmas worship service at Evanston High School. Shepherd Victor spoke on this verse.

Inheritance. God has given us new birth, living hope and the kingdom of God! Listen to Apostle Peter: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you" (1Pet 1:3-4).

The Holy Spirit. Apostle Paul wrote that, "God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (Rom 5:5). God's great love for us in

shown in his presence with us in the Holy Spirit given to us. The Holy Spirit intercedes in prayer for us and assures us that we are children of God (Rom 8:16,26).

How has God loved us? God elected us, saved us, adopted us, gave us new life and an inheritance, and is with us in the Holy Spirit. These are just five profound ways that God has shown he loves us. How has God loved you?

Thank and praise be to God for his great love for us in Jesus Christ, to choose us, forgive us, adopt us, give us new life into an inheritance in his kingdom, and to be with us through the Holy Spirit of God! Can you testify how God has loved you in even more ways?

Second, lame offerings (6-14).

Malachi 1:6-2:9 is a message to the priests regarding the offerings that were being brought and made to the LORD. 1:6-8 begins, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' ⁷ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the LORD's table may be despised. ⁸ When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts." In the law, God required unblemished offerings be brought to him. Leviticus 1:3 says, "If the offering is a burnt offering from the herd, you are to offer a male without defect. You must present it at the entrance to the tent of meeting so that it will be acceptable to the LORD." The LORD required unblemished sacrifices. This pointed to the ultimate sacrifice of the sinless son of God. Malachi rebuked the priests and the people that they were bringing sick and lame animals to be offered. Verse 14a says, "Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished."

We remember the offerings of Cain and Abel. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering. But the LORD did not look with favor on Cain and his offering. The LORD sees our hearts. He deserves the best that we have. He is worthy of our best love. He is not like a beggar on the street to whom we might give some loose change in our pockets.

Verse 11 says, "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts." Again, verse

14b says, “For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.” The Israelites were treating God as small, or unimportant, or not worthy of much. We remember Haggai’s rebuke that the people were investing much time, effort, and money in their own homes, while neglecting or ignoring the LORD’s temple and ministry. Malachi will deal later with the issue of tithing. For now, he is addressing the quality of their offerings. Their offerings were literally lame.

But the LORD is great. His name is above all names. He is worthy to be magnified and praised. David wrote psalms of praise to God. Psalm 145 is a beautiful psalm of praise to God by David: “I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness no one can fathom.” David goes on to praise God for his mighty acts, the glorious splendor of his majesty, his wonderful and awesome works, his great deeds, his abundant goodness, his righteousness, his graciousness, compassion and love, and the glorious splendor of his everlasting kingdom. David is overflowing with praises for God’s greatness. David concludes the psalm: “My mouth will speak in praise of the LORD. Let every creature praise his holy name for ever and ever.” How is your praise-meter? Is the LORD great in your life? Is his name praised through your words? Does it show in your life offerings and sacrifices? Or are your offerings more like lame offerings and spare change? Lord, have mercy on us. May our lives, our words, our offerings reflect your greatness. You are a great God, a great King, and Savior. Forgive our lame offerings of leftovers.

Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, “Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship.” Help us, Lord, to offer our hearts and lives, holy and pleasing to you, as our true and proper worship.

Third, true Levites (2:1-9).

Malachi chapter 2 opens with God warning the priests that if they did not take to heart to honor his name, he would curse their blessings, and rebuke their offspring, and spread dung on their faces. God wanted his covenant with Levi to stand. Who were the Levites? They were the priests, chosen to represent and teach and guide God’s people in worship and obedience to God.

Listen to God’s intention and ideal for the Levites in 2:5-8, “My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many

from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.”

Malachi describes a true Levite. Listen to the words of God’s description. Life and peace. A right fear of the LORD. Awe and reverence for God’s name. True instruction in his mouth, and no wrong on his lips. Walking with God in peace and uprightness. Turning many from sin, iniquity and wickedness. Guarding knowledge. People seeking instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts. Jesus is the ultimate fulfillment of this messenger of the LORD. Yet, this is not only God’s ideal for priests, but for all of God’s people.

How are you doing as God’s representative? Are you like a true Levite?

Jesus said to his disciples, “You are the light of the world...let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Mt 5:14a,16). Apostle Paul wrote to Christians, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph 4:29). Apostle Peter declared to Christians, which includes all followers of Jesus Christ, “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1Pe 2:9). This is God’s intention and ideal for us.

Do your words and actions reflect God’s ideal for a true Levite, a servant of the LORD? Are you growing in holiness and in the image of Jesus? We are learning this also in our Philippians study this summer. I hope you are studying the post-exile prophets as well as Paul’s letter to the Philippians. Sincere, careful, humble, repentant Bible study will help us to grow as his servants and disciples and children.

I hope the words of Malachi the prophet have drawn you closer to the LORD, and your love relationship with him. How great is God’s love for us in Jesus Christ our LORD! He is worthy of much more than lame offerings. It is our greatest honor and endeavor to serve his great name and grow as his children. May the love of God inspire and empower us to give our best to God to grow as his servants and his children in Jesus Christ.