



"I HAVE LOVED YOU"

Over the next 3 months we're going to look at a book written around 400 years before Jesus, by the final prophet of the OT: Malachi. Why are we looking at this tiny 4-chapter book when we could be reading the NT?

- One day we might get the chance to meet Malachi. And what will you say if he asks, "So what did you think of my book, then?" How embarrassed will *you* feel?!
- God wants to speak to us, and He's given us 66 books to do it. And Malachi ('My Messenger' in Hebrew) has written a book that is as relevant today as ever.

What's the book about? The very purpose of our existence: worship.

And today we're going to begin with the most important point of all (and if you don't get this you can never understand what true worship is) ...

Malachi 1:1-5

What's the point? Actually, there are 3:

1) I Have Loved You. Preparing for this got me thinking about when Kellie and I started going out. We'd spent the day together, her parents had gone to bed, and there we were, just the 2 of us, chatting in her front room. And then ... the kiss happened (and after 27 years, we still can't agree on who kissed who first). And I walked home on cloud 9, but I was also wondering,

"How does she really feel?" So, the next day, to get across how serious I was, when I kissed her goodbye, I said, "I love you."

Now you'll have to ask Kellie how she felt about this, but all I know was she said, "I love you too."

3 (or 4!) simple words that can change a world.

And the God who created the entire cosmos, from the biggest stars to the tiniest molecules; the God who is actively involved in the life of every creature that has ever lived; the God who has x-ray vision, who can see into the very core of your being; is saying the same thing to *you*.

And that can make us feel good. Or make us wonder.

Because sometimes, things can happen that can make it difficult to believe that God loves us - and perhaps that's true of some of you. Perhaps you know you've screwed up in some way, and so God's love sounds implausible. Or perhaps things are really hard at this moment, for you or someone else, and you're wondering what it is you've done wrong. Or perhaps you're not even sure whether God exists at all, and so these words sound empty.

Malachi's contemporaries were having similar issues: they'd returned from exile, but things were still tough. Hence their response: "How have You loved us?"

2) I Have Chosen You. God's reply is this: "Jacob I have loved; Esau I have hated." What is God saying here?

God is taking them back 1500 years, to 2 individuals - Jacob and Esau - and they were twin brothers. Esau was the firstborn, which meant he was guaranteed a double-whammy when his dad Isaac died - that's most of the inheritance, plus all the blessings that God had promised their granddad, Abraham. Now one day, when Esau got back from hunting, he was so hungry he was willing to swap his birthright with his brother - all for a lentil curry. And in the process, he lost the blessings, too!

Hence, "Jacob I have loved; Esau I have hated."

Even so, it sounds harsh - if not OTT! But what we're looking at here is actually a case of Jewish exaggeration for effect (similar to Luke 14:26). God loved them and blessed them both, but the blessings God poured on Jacob made His blessings to Esau seem like nothing by comparison - not because God has His favourites, or because Jacob was any more deserving, but simply because God knew he would say "yes" to God's will for him, whereas Esau would have other priorities.

Now if you're a Christian, what was true of Jacob is true of you - because as surely as God chose Jacob, God chose you. In fact, Ephesians 1 tells us that God appointed us to be His children before the beginning of time itself. Why? Because He knew we would say "yes."

But that still doesn't explain how we can *know* that God loves us, does it?

Which leads onto the final point:

3) I Have Been There For You. The story of Jacob and Esau had a knock-on effect on their descendants, too. The people of Jacob became known as the Israelites, the people of Esau became known as the Edomites. And God blessed the Israelites with a “beautiful land”, whereas the Edomites got a “wicked land”, a desert.

What is God saying? He’s reminding the Jews of how He has looked after them, down through the centuries.

- How He brought them out of slavery in Egypt.
- How He gave them His Law to help them live right.
- How He looked after them for 40 years in the desert.
- How He blessed them with a beautiful land to live in.
- How He’d stuck with them in spite of all their failings.

In a nutshell, God is saying to them, “You may struggle to believe that I love you, but look back over your history – to Abraham, to Moses, to David – and you’ll see that I’ve been there, all along.” That’s why God is speaking past-tense – not because He loved them then but not anymore, but because He loved them then, and He loves them now.

Today, we can rewind to something even more amazing: the cross. Jesus was crucified knowing all the stuff we’ve done, and yet He loves us. And while we might go through dark and difficult times, we can know that Jesus understands us, He’s with us, and He won’t let us go.

“Do You Love Me?”

But there’s an inferred question here, isn’t there? And it’s a recurring theme throughout the rest of the book:

“So, Israel, do you love *Me?*”

Because when I told Kellie I loved her, I didn’t just want to express how I felt about *her*. I wanted her to say, “I love you too.” And when it comes to God, some of us struggle to say that - because some of us can be a bit too cerebral for our own good, or worry too much what others might think. Yet the word for “love” here, *ahavah*, literally means a ‘love shown’, a demonstrative act. God has proven His love for us - by hanging naked and bleeding on a cross. Doesn’t He deserve something in return?

So, when was the last time you told God that you love Him?

What’s stopping you?