

REKINDLE

“I Will Always Love You”

Malachi 1:1-5

Intro: It's a good day at Lighthouse.....we're launching a brand new sermon series.

-I've never taught through the book of Malachi.

-I've read it of course.....but there is a depth of understanding and richness of blessing that comes from studying and dwelling on a book.

-You who teach the Bible regularly understand this.

-You get to know the books author and the characters in what seems like a personal way.

*(I fully expect to be having some great conversations in heaven....

-I want to talk to John and Malachi and David and Moses and Mary and Mary and Mary (there are a few Marys in the bible) and Martha and Peter and Paul and Jonah.....

-I feel like I know them already.

-Part of me is little concerned that I'll get punched in the mouth for getting some things wrong about them.....but we'll all be glorified ... which I think means (among other things) that we probably won't be punching each other.)

>When you dwell on a book over time and savor it.....truths begin to unfold to you like a flower to the sunshine.

-So to say that I'm excited about diving into Malachi is an understatement.

>We've got a little work to do this morning:

-There's some background work....some foundation that must be laid for us to be able to move forward with proper context.

>Background: In 589 BC, Nebuchadnezzar II laid siege to Jerusalem, culminating in the destruction of the city and its temple in the summer of 586 BC.

-Solomon's Temple was a wonder of Architecture in the ancient world—a source of great pride to the Jew.

- It was now a pile of rubble.
 - Most of the devastated Jews were deported to live in exile in Babylon.
 - They would remain in captivity for 70 years...as prophesied by Jeremiah.
- >Cyrus the Great—the Persian ruler— ended the exile in 538 BC the year after he captured Babylon.
- Zerubbabel led the first wave of Aliyah.
 - Aliyah is a Hebrew word that means ‘ascent’ or ‘going up’.
 - It is the term used for Jews returning from exile to their Promised Land and to Jerusalem in particular.
 - About 50,000 exiles returned to the homeland in the first wave of Aliyah.
 - You would think it would be joyous time but it wasn’t.
 - The economic situation was bleak.
 - They returned to a land that was still in ruins.
 - There were consecutive years of drought.
 - They built the foundation to the Temple....but then stopped because of opposition from surrounding enemies.
 - They finally did finish rebuilding the Temple—20 years later in 516bc...but it was vastly inferior to Solomon’s.
 - It was very plain and unimpressive.
 - Then in 458bc. Ezra the priest led a few thousand more Jews back to the Land and to Jerusalem.
 - King Artaxerxes of Persia encouraged Ezra to relaunch Temple worship and the Law of Moses....which he did.
 - 14 years after that, the same Persian King gave his cupbearer— Nehemiah—permission to go to Jerusalem and lead the effort to rebuild the wall.
 - Not only did Nehemiah get the wall built, but he was a reformer.
 - That is, he zealously called the people to account for not taking care of their poor.....for marrying people of other religions....for not keeping the Sabbath and for not faithfully paying their tithes.
 - In 433 b.c., however, Nehemiah returned to Babylon to serve the Persian king, and during his absence the Jews fell into sin once more.
 - Later, however, Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to discover that once again, the poor were neglected, the tithes weren’t

given, the Sabbath was broken, the people had intermarried with foreigners, and the priests had become corrupt (Ne. 13:7–31).

- Most scholars agree that this is the time that Malachi came on the scene.
- Malachi and Nehemiah were contemporaries.
- Malachi is the last prophet in the OT.....and the last book of the OT.
- There was one more OT prophet who would show up on the scene, but he appears in the NT.
- Do you know who that is?
- John the Baptist.
- John the Baptist appears in the NT, but is an OT prophet.
- Why?
- Hebrews tells us that the Old Testament covenant system with its laws, prophets, etc. was in effect until the death of Christ.
- This is why Jesus said in....

Luke 16:16, "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the gospel of the kingdom of God has been preached...."

>So Malachi is the last prophet before the 400 years of silence between the Old and New Testament:

- John the Baptist would break that silence as the one crying in the wilderness, saying, 'Prepare ye the way of the Lord....'

>The Book of Malachi is structured as a seven-cycle argument between God and his people.

- It's different from the other prophetic books in that the Malachi takes the form of a dialogue or argument in which God speaks and the people answer back.
- God tells the people what their response should be to His covenantal love.
- There should be a response to God's love in the lives of God's people, you see.
- God's people will respond to God over and over with a cynical question.
- These are questions that we typically won't ask out loud.....but many of us think them and wrestle with them.

*(OK...so.....because of Malachi, I have been reflecting a lot on the state of the Church—not just our church—but the church in general.

-And so I was very interested to read a recent Pew study.

-Of course, there have been many studies and polls in recent years showing that people claiming to be believers are abandoning the local church.

-But this particular Pew study focused on the why....

-Among self-identified evangelical Christians, the predominant reason offered for not attending worship services is that they.... ***practice their faith in other ways.***

-Almost half of evangelicals in this category (46 percent) say this is a very important reason for not going to church more often.

-The next most common reason evangelicals give for not attending services is that ***they haven't found a church or house of worship they like*** (33 percent).

-One-in-five evangelicals says ***they dislike the sermons***, and a little more than one-in-ten (11 percent) says ***they do not feel welcome*** at churches.

>Most of us probably know a person or 2 or 5 that claim to be believers but are not committed to a local fellowship.

-Church attendance is a paradox.

-While it's technically true that you don't have to go to church to be a Christian, Christians are by definition a part of the Church.

*(So it's a little like saying, 'I'm a member of Kiwanis International.' without being a member of a local chapter.

-What does it even mean?)

>Every letter in the New Testament assumes Christians are members of local churches.

-The letters themselves are addressed to local churches.

-They teach us how to

-get along with other people in our church

-how to encourage the weak within the church

-how to conduct ourselves at church

-what to do with people in church who flaunt their sin and refuse to repent

-submit to our leaders

-go to our elders for prayer.

>All these things are impossible if you aren't a member of a local church.

-Christianity is not a choose your own path religion.

-Belonging to a local church is not optional.

*(When we confessed Jesus Christ as you Lord, He didn't give us a survey with little boxes to check off:

-I'll take salvation...check.

-Discipleship...not sure...I'll come back to that one.

-Faithfully attend and commit to my local church....nope....not checking that box....those people are messed up.)

>Jesus doesn't give us that option.

-We can still choose to walk out of harmony with God's heart and will by refusing to commit to a local church.

-But don't try and dress that up in pious clothing....

-I worship in my own way....' (Ask Cain how that went for him.)

-I haven't found a church that I like.' (Just imagine saying that our first century brothers or sisters!.....Imagine saying

that to the Christians in Iran....or North Korea....)

>O, I get it....Some of you have gone through some hard things at churches.

-You've been hurt.

-Some of you have gone through some weird things at churches.

-You've been spiritually manipulated.....that kind of stuff can mess with your head.

-I don't mean to diminish any of that...but please understand those are not valid excuses for you to say, 'I'm out....I'm gonna do

my own thing.'

>Malachi is going to expose all of our excuses for what they are.....

-Let's read our passage.....

Malachi 1:1 The oracle of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob

3 but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.”

4 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,’ and ‘the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.’”

5 Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, “Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!”

>We’re not going to go long here....but let me bring 2 important observations to your attention before we come to the Table.....

1. GOD’S MOTIVATING LOVE

>The Lord initiates the dialog by declaring, ‘I have loved you.’

-The Lord is not saying ‘I have loved you, but now I’m going to stop.’

-No, the idea is, ‘I have loved you and will keep loving you.’

*(G. Campbell Morgan translates this verse as "I have loved you, I do love you, I will love you," says the Lord.)

>It reminds us of what the Lord said through Jeremiah some years earlier....

Jeremiah 31:3 I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you..

>This is hugely important for us to understand:

-Love is the greatest motivator.

-It’s the only sustainable motivator.

-If we were honest, a lot of us would have to admit that we’ve leaned more on fear in trying to be a better Christian.

-Fear can work **in the immediate** for behavior modification.....but it’s not sustainable.

-Eventually I’ll become bitter....especially since life isn’t fair.

>I’ve got news for you: You can be killing it with your behavior modification program.

-You’re not doing this and you’re staying away from that.

-You've done morning devotions for almost 2 months in a row.
 -But the flip side of fear as a motivator is that when I'm doing everything I think I'm supposed to be doing and not doing everything I'm not supposed to be doing.....I am pretty sure GOD OWES ME.

-I am pretty sure I have obligated God to do what I want Him to do.
 -And then what happens when suffering and loss come instead of pleasure and success?
 -Disappointment...disillusionment.
 -'This wasn't the deal!....The deal was I avoid the bad and the naughty stuff so that you don't come down on me.....and then I concentrate on doing the good stuff—the holy stuff— so that you'll have to bless me. That was the deal! And now I lost my business....or I've been diagnosed with cancer...or I didn't get the promotion...or my wife left me...or someone at church hurt me..... or or.....I don't understand. I'm a believer, but I'm done trying so hard. '

*(I love the story of Joe McCarthy.....Back in the 1930s and 40s, Joe McCarthy was the manager of the Bronx Bombers the New York Yankees.

-He was famous for being able to get the most out of his players.
 -He was a master motivator.
 -The story goes that Joe McCarthy once interviewed a coach who was being considered for one of the many coaching positions on the Yankees.
 -"How much do you know about psychology?" asked the candidate.
 -The young coach said he had studied it in college.
 -"So you think you're good?," said McCarthy.
 The coach replied: "I don't know how good I am, but it's a subject I've studied."
 "All right," McCarthy said, "I'll give you a test."
 -McCarthy told the young coach a story about motivating a player.
 -McCarthy tells the coaching candidate, 'I went to our shortstop, Lou Gehrig and said, 'Frank, I'm not satisfied with the way Lou Gehrig is playing first base. He's too lackadaisical. I want you to help me. From now on, charge every ground ball. When you get it, fire it as quickly and as hard as you can to first

base. Knock Gehrig off the bag if you can. I don't care if you throw wild or not, but throw it fast and make it tough for him."

- “And Crosetti told me, ‘What if Lou doesn’t like it?’
- I said, “Who cares what Gehrig likes! Just do as I tell you.”
- McCarthy then said to the coach: "Now that's the story. What conclusions do you draw from it?"
- The coach considered the matter for a minute, then answered: "I guess you were trying to wake up Gehrig."
- "See?" McCarthy shrugged his shoulders in resignation. "You missed the point entirely. There wasn't a darn thing wrong with Gehrig. Crosetti was the one who was sleeping. I wanted to wake up Crosetti.”)

>God—the Master-Motivator—He knows that fear is an inferior, unsustainable motivator.

- So He says to His drifting people, ‘I have loved you. I do love you. I will always love you.’
- Love is the greatest motivator.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For Christ’s love compels us.....

>Christ’s love for us:

- We have to bask in it and mediate on it and enjoy it constantly.
- This is exactly what Israel wasn’t doing.

>That brings us to the second and final observation this morning.....

2. OUR FALSE NARRATIVES

>So when God tells them He loves them, they ask a cynical question in return.....look at...

Malachi 1:2 “I have loved you,” says the LORD. “But you ask, ‘How have you loved us?’

>They’re thinking, ‘Life is hard. The economy is bad. Our church leaders are lame. This Temple is a joke. Our enemies persecute and mock us. My spouse is a dud. My back hurts, my feet stink....and so how is it that you have loved us God?’

-Listen, if you aren't convinced that you have God's love and affection— completely, fully and eternally NOW.....you will be prone to error when you interpret the circumstances of your life.

-When things are going good, you'll be like, 'I must be killing it as a Christian and in real good with God.'

-And then when things go south on you, it's like, 'What did I do wrong? I must have sinned in some way...I'm being punished. Maybe I don't have enough fail....'

-And on and on.....

*(I'm reminded of the classic story of the baptist preacher who—in an effort to communicate effectively with his congregation—used a visual illustration—an object lesson.

-He took 4 containers and 4 worms.....

- The first worm was put into a container of alcohol.
- The second worm was put into a container of cigarette smoke.
- The third worm was put into a container of chocolate syrup.
- The fourth worm was put into a container of good clean soil.

At the conclusion of the sermon, the preacher opened the containers one by one and reported the following results:

- The first worm in alcohol - Dead.
- The second worm in cigarette smoke - Dead
- Third worm in chocolate syrup - Dead
- Fourth worm in good clean soil - Alive

>So the preacher asked his congregation - What can we learn from this demonstration?

-A lady, who was sitting in the back, shouted, 'As long as you drink, smoke and eat chocolate, you won't have worms!')

>Various factors determine how we interpret things.

-When we allow our circumstances to be the primary interpreter of God's disposition toward us.....our hearts will eventually fall prey to despair.

-A cross-centered/love oriented theology won't interpret suffering, loss, difficulty and pain in life as a sign of God's displeasure....or a lack of faith.

-But rather it will embrace these things as the very tools by which God mercifully draws us near to himself.

Philippians 3:10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.....

>Listen Church—God opens our wounds in order to heal them:

-The hard truth that God spoke through the prophet Malachi to Israel then and will speak to us in the coming weeks.....is born of God's love.

>'I have loved you. I do love you. I will always love you.....'

3. OUR THANKLESS HEARTS

4. OUR SUFFERING WILL END (henry)

5. GOD OPENS WOUNDS TO BRING HEALING