

WHEN THE SUN DON'T SHINE, MAL.1:1-5

God's Love that won't Let Go #1

◆Intro: Rich's parents got divorced. He tried to stop them but the more he got involved the worse the situation became. His fiancé dumped him at the last minute too. And now his heart aches. He's gone to college but at this point in life he finds he has no interest in pursuing what he studied. Mary prayed for hours, daily. She heard stories of great prophets like Elijah calling down fire from heaven. Mary needed a miracle too, but nothing happened when she prayed. A baby dies of crib death in Georgia. A woman is beaten senseless by her husband. A father prays at supper, "Our Father...thy will be done." but he can't continue as he looks at the empty spot at the table where his daughter used to sit, now swallowed up by a drunk driver. Each thinks to themselves, "Does God really love me?"

◆Israel thinks this too. Can you imagine the United States being occupied by a foreign army for the entire time we've been a nation? Israel first was overrun in 722 BC under the Assyrian Empire. Then they switched hands and were controlled by the Babylonian Empire in 586 BC. By 539 BC the Persian Empire had risen to the top and controlled their land. This is the era in which Malachi spoke, but after Malachi around 330 BC the Greeks would conquer the then known world and keep power until the the Roman's took power in Palestine in 63BC under General Pompey. So in Malachi's day and following, as long as anyone could remember, their country was subject to another country's army! The Babylonians deported most of them of to Babylon where they dwindled to a small ethnic remnant part of which was allowed to return to Canaan under Cyrus of Persia. It is this straggling remnant of what Israel once was, now trying to rebuild among the ruins of

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their country, still needing permission from Persia for everything –this group is who Malachi preaches to.

◆ You can imagine they were disenchanted folk. Where was the glory of Israel, the chosen people of the one true God over earth? Where was the exaltation and the promises made to the family of David? Where was the promised Messiah? God seems to have been hiding and a dark shadow had fallen across their land. Their spiritual stomachs were growling in hunger. They were giving up. Thinking “what’s the use?” or “what does it matter?” And yet God is patiently calling them back and lovingly refusing to let them go. This is the theme of Malachi: God’s love that won’t let go. The first thing in the last message to Israel is “I have loved you, Israel (v2).” That is, I have loved you and still do (verb in the perfect tense). And you and I need to hear his voice again today in whatever shadows we live under, with whatever power is enslaving us. Are you a follower of the true God? Know this. He has loved you, he has chosen you and it’s for good. Lets take a look some characteristics of God’s love

◆ **1. God’s love is electing love. God loves me just because**, for his reasons alone. God does not love me because I have or will someday impress him. This is electing love. Electing love always breathes hope because it is always beyond circumstance. The term for love here is unconditional choosing, which Israel knew from the getgo of their existence! Remember the Exodus from Egypt when they first became a nation? And God brought them to the Promised Land? What did he say then?

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◆“The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your forefathers that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.” Deuteronomy 7:7,8, NIV.

◆In those days they were on fire and stoked! Malachi's day is quite different. Now they are whiny, rebellious, and belly-aching. Church is no fun; they just do it to get it over with so they can go to the bar or the beach and not feel guilty. But here comes God through Malachi to discuss life and calmly correct and lovingly parent them anyway. Malachi prophesies both rebuke but a startling reminder of God's unchanging love for his kids.

◆A. God gives me value; I don't create it. This is what election is about. Like when we elect a president and then people guard this man with their lives, and drive him here or there, and respect his office for the sake of the country. We, the nation place value on one of our citizens. There are two kinds of love. 1) The logical kind that looks for value in what it loves. and 2) the illogical kind that creates value in what it loves.

◆When I was a child one of my brothers had the fabled article of affection: his “blanky”. (Some have teddies, or rag-doll. Tim had the blanky.) Was their a sibling in your family like this? He would take the blanky shopping. It got walked on. Buried in the sandbox. Dragged behind the stroller. It was dirty a lot of the time and guess who couldn't wait for it to come out of the washer! It's threads were battered and tattered but could we throw it out? You'd have to pry it from his cold dead hands first! It had what we call *imputed value*. No one would give you a dime for it on Ebay. But he wouldn't trade it for

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gold. What we need to see is that people are loved by God because declares his love and gives them value. His love is like his righteousness, it is imputed to us, not required by us. Paul talks about the same thing in his letter to the Romans.

◆“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. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: “I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden.”
Romans 9:11-18, NIV.

◆God chose Pharaoh as an unsaved, nonbeliever to display his glory. He chose those who follow him of Israel or of us as saved, believers to display his glory. (Now before you get all nervous about not having the freedom to determine your destiny, and thinking that's unfair of God, let me calm your worries. You never did have that freedom, and neither has any other human being. It's not a matter of fair. If we got what was fair, no human would be saved from sin. Not a single one. Any sin at all disqualifies us from life with God.

◆“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.” Isaiah 64:6, NIV.

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◆ See, even Isaiah knows we are like rag-dolls. No, to have the love of God in your life, to be chosen for forgiveness is never a choosing done by the grace of God alone, not because of but in spite of what we are. It's what theologian Karl Barth called the "miraculous nevertheless." Away with the demands of fairness, people. The real question to ask is, "Do I find any concern about this in my heart? Where does my heart turn for hope? If you find a gratefulness for Christ and his sacrifice in you, you can be sure it is already God calling you into your election.

◆ B. Ok, so Israel is feeling like a tattered rag-doll. And because they are tattered they begin to question the existence of their owner. And you and I may find that to be the case too. Affliction may be making it hard for you to believe that God loves you, but then you must remind yourself this. Do you know God? Have you trusted in Jesus? Then you are his, and he does not let go of his. Those who are his are so because of him and he does not change.

◆ [Little aside here: be careful when you read language like "Jacob have I loved; Esau have I hated." v2-3. This is poetic, prophecy. It is not a sanction to hate people because God does. Though Edom (the land of Esau) was not God's chosen people they still received blessings and graces from God. The prophet Obediah shows that they were objects of God's deliverance as well. Jesus says things like "unless you hate your father and mother you cannot be my disciple." But elsewhere he teaches us not to hate and even to love our enemies. So be careful with taking these terms literally. They are for emphasis.]

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◆**2. God's love is a just-love. Even when I hurt it is still because of love, so I should pay attention.** Though unmerited, electing love is a characteristic of God, so also is justice a character of God. He does not let sin go unaddressed, or unpunished, just as any good parent wouldn't. And it is love that brings the punishment, because this parent will not settle for less than healthy life for his children. So if he must ground them, or fine them, or spank them to keep them from greater danger, he does. Israel was at this point wandering the way of Esau and his descendants, making some choices not to obey God's directions for how human life works best. These directions are true for all men, even those who do not recognize God.

◆**A.** Take God's commandments for example: life is best when people do not lie to one another. It doesn't matter whether you are Buddhist or Animist, it's still true. Murder destroys society, doesn't matter which one. Giving and sharing your wealth promotes life and culture, doesn't matter if you're a nonChristian or not. Still true. So God points out that it is in fact his love that curbs people's evils and sin. And Israel, chosen or not, will get curbed if they don't pay attention! It's a warning of love. Expect affliction to accompany rebellion. When we break God's laws it is his love that leads to affliction because his love will not allow evil to flourish. It's woven into the nature of God's world.

◆**B.** By the way, this is a solution to disappointment. Disappointment occurs when our actual experience of something falls short of what we anticipate.

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When I remember that in the grand scheme of things I do not deserve all the graces I am used to, I have a stronger character. We live in an entitlement era of history. Everyone thinks they are owed the good life because there is so much good to be had. We think we have *rights* to air-conditioning, and that manufacturers *owe* us vehicles that don't malfunction, and that other people in my country *ought* to pay for my house when a hurricane blows it away. These things are not true! They are not our rights. They are blessings. They are wonderful to be had if we can. But you and I do not deserve them and have no right to demand them. But if we are exceedingly demanding people, we will also be exceedingly disappointed people.

◆ Edom is the example of God's justice. Just because God didn't chose Esau's descendants didn't mean that they were free from the laws of God in the world. Edom lasted as a nation for 1400 years! That's seven times longer that the USA has existed! In their history they often joined Israel's enemies and fought against God's people. God allowed their thriving, but they had no ultimate power of existence apart from him. Verse 4 reveals their attitude to be "We're not worried about God being on our side. We can do it without him." Well Edom ransacked by the Nabatean Arabs in Malachi's day, their few refugees absorbed by a new nation. These invaders set up the Idumean country and carved great cities out of rock. But even these could not keep their line alive. Today, Petra stands as a monument to this truth. **[show 4 petra pix]**

◆ "Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD



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Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD--even beyond the borders of Israel!'" Malachi 1:4, 5, NIV.

◆ Malachi reminds Israel, and reminds us, that if we have remained at all it is because we have been *preserved*. We live and move and have our being at the gracious will of Almighty God alone. If his character were justice alone, without electing grace, we would have no hope at all.

◆ **3. God love is universal. He is even at work beyond the confines of my life.**

◆ "You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD--even beyond the borders of Israel!'" Malachi 1:5, NIV.

◆ A. Often our expectations confine God to the lives of believers, as though God is not operating in foreign lands or among people of other religions. We Americans are so politically correct that we forget that God is also God over all the citizens of our country that don't believe in him as well! God in managing the world for those who pray to him, and he is in charge of those who do not. But because of our assumptions, when we sometimes have troubles we conclude "Oh, it's a waste to follow God's directions, or to live his way. It doesn't work." (as though something really "works" when life goes the way *we* plan it.) Our problem is we are evaluating God's activity only in terms of our own experience. Do not think that God wasn't omnipotent of the Persian Empire. He's pretty clear in Isaiah that he is the one who made Cyrus ruler of the Middle East! Do not think that when Persia lost power and the Greeks gained it that God wasn't in charge of that too. Do not think that when the Greeks lost their empire and the

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Romans came on the scene that God was only doing things with Hebrew people in Canaan.

◆ Here's the thing: It is not true that blessing is a sign of God's presence, and affliction is a sign of God's absence.

◆ "But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Matthew 5:44,45, NIV.

◆ When God defeats wrong either in you or in someone else, it is a sign of his unchanging love. When God showers good on a life whether your's or a atheists, it is a sign of his love. Don't measure reality by your life alone. Don't measure the presence of God by your receipts. Be careful with your assumptions. God is alive everywhere, all the time.

◆ **Conclusion:** Horrible things happen in a fallen world like ours. (Just the other day Mike beat me in a game of pickleball!) What Israel needed to hear from Malachi, and what we need to hear is this: Rather than letting your afflictions cause you to turn your back on God, let them rather turn you back to God. God has not stopped governing all things. And he has not stopped loving his people. We would be fools to stop loving him. Fast forward to the next book in the Bible. The NT. Matthew. The greatest event in all of human history was right around the corner from Malachi's day, when human sin would be imputed/transferred to Jesus, and Jesus' value would be imputed/transferred to us rag dolls. Election was possible because justice was served, but on Christ for us demonstrating once and for all that all things, the universe, is under his reign.