

Good Things, Little Packages: Malachi, 8/5/17

Last weekend at the wedding

The marriage you are about to enter is a covenant. A covenant can be mistaken as a contract but they are vastly different. A contract is built on the potential distrust of the parties involved. A covenant is built on a mutual trust of each other. A contract is established in order to limit liability while a covenant is based on unlimited responsibility for one another. And finally a contract is easily breakable by one party or the other but a covenant is unconditional and unbreakable. Will you, enter into a holy covenant with each other before God and these witnesses today?

After this the couple look at each other, they say- *I take you, promise to love and to cherish for better or worse, richer or poor, sickness or health, death do us part.*

Reception- Older guy, married over 60 years- Do you think they know what they are getting into? *It's going to be far better and at times, far worse than they expected! I really hope they did enter a covenant instead of a contract.*

He's right! And it's why he was able to stay married for that long. See in both a contractual marriage and a covenant marriage there are expectations for each other. Even if they are never stated. The difference is that in a contractual marriage when those expectations aren't being met, or met in the time expected or in the way expected, then the contract of marriage can be broken... walk away. If you aren't keeping your end, I'm not keeping mine. But in a covenant marriage they are committed to working through those disappointments and failures together. It's a commitment that says, "I'm still in it."

God entered into a covenant relationship with Israel (Abraham in Genesis). Within this covenant God made a one-sided vow- to bless Abraham and his descendants with the promised land and the promised seed (the Messiah who would expand the covenant promises to all nations). The problem is that God entered this covenant with perpetual covenant breakers! As we read the OT story there is a question that keeps being asked over and over again- "Is God still going keep his covenant, even after they did that?" We get to the end of the OT story to the book of Malachi and God answers that question, "Yes, I'm still in it."

Good Things, **Malachi- Written around 450 B.C.** to the **Jewish people** during the last part of Nehemiah's governorship. Last written Words of God for 400 years until the fulfillment of the covenant, Jesus Christ comes. We are going to primarily anchor our time in the first 5 verses of chapter 1, the primary message of this book. Three things we will see.

God's Covenant Commitment.

Israel's Callous Condition

God's Perpetual Proof

Malachi 1:1-2a

A prophecy: The word of the Lord to Israel through Malachi.

"I have loved you," says the Lord.

God's Covenant Commitment

God's opening words in the last book in the Old Testament is "I have loved you." Now with no context maybe that doesn't seem particularly powerful or meaningful. After all, we throw around the word love... love crab fries, the latest hit song...until we are over it.

The context of this statement is after centuries of ups and down in God's marriage relationship with Israel. This is a covenant statement. For better (the glory years of Joshua and the promised land, David, the return to the land) or worse (the wilderness wanderings, the exile). God's covenant love for Israel had been tested over centuries. If your teenager comes home from a first date and says, "I love Johnny" You may say, "Whoa, slow down..." But when your dad after 60 years of marriage (ups and downs) says to your mom, "I have always loved you." that holds some significance. That's more like the weight of this love affirmation...only times a thousand. God is looking Israel, in the eyes and saying- "I have always loved you." "I'm still in it."

How does Israel, respond?

v.2b How have you loved us?

This is not, "Tell me again how much you love me!" It's not even, "God I'm struggling to experience your love right now." This is, "Oh yeah, prove it." Behind this question God reveals the **callous condition** of their heart. In fact, much of the 4 chapters of Malachi are addressing this problem.

Priests became callous in their sacrifices and teaching of the law (1:6-2:9)

-Instead of requiring spotless, pure animals as sacrifice they were accepting lame animals. In other words, instead of demanding the best for God because he's worth it, they were fine with the leftovers.

The people became callous in their marriage commitments (2:10-16)

-Marrying foreign women who were idol worshippers.
-Divorcing their Israelite wives, contract marriages

The people became callous in their giving (3:6-12)

-They neglected the tithe.

The people became callous in their worship (3:13-15)

v. 14 It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements...

-In other words- In their callousness they convinced themselves that obeying God didn't pay off. And that statement really sums up the problem- "God's not giving me what I want. So I'm out. God isn't meeting all my expectations so he must not love

me.” They had a contractual relationship with their spouses and with God. In a marriage relationship, if it is just about what your spouse can do for you, that’s not love. God wanted their hearts, God wanted a relationship, but they just wanted his stuff.

Now it’s easy to judge the Israelites...but I wonder if you have ever questioned God’s love because God didn’t give us something we expected, or desired, or didn’t give it to us in the way we wanted it? How will God respond to this callous question- “How have you loved us?”

God’s perpetual proof.

Malachi 1:2-5

“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother?” declares the Lord. “Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals.” Edom may say, “Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins.”

But this is what the Lord 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!’

That may seem like a stranger answer to the question, “How have you loved us?” “You want to know? Exhibit A- Jacob and Esau”

For proof of God’s love for them he goes all the way back from the last book of the Old Testament to the first book- Genesis. Remember when God called Abraham? Who was Abraham? A good Christian. No. A good Jew. No...He was an idol worshipper, who came from a long line of idol worshippers (Josh. 24:2). There was nothing special about him. But God called him out of his idol worship and established a covenant of love with him. His son Isaac had twins mentioned here: Jacob and Esau. Now what is the point of saying, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" The point is this: Based on what you and Esau were in yourselves I could just as easily have chosen Esau as you. If you look at the early lives of these men, they were not good guys. Jacob was no better than Esau. Weren't you twins? Isn't he in fact your elder? But I “loved” you (entered into a covenant with you, chose you), and “hated” Isaac (Did not entered into a covenant with him, passed him by). Why?

Romans 9:10-13

Not only that, but Rebekah’s children were conceived at the same time by our father Isaac. 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.”

God is saying, neither Jacob nor Esau deserved, based on their performance, God’s grace and love. They deserved God’s just wrath toward their rebellious, godless

actions. But he gave grace to Jacob. A better picture of this than marriage is adoption. God did not first go to an orphanage and observe the behavior of the children. Ok, this kid is pulling wings off of bugs and lighting them on fire... this one is beating up the other kids... oh this one is quietly reading the Bible while humming Jesus loves me- I'll take that one. No- that's not the picture. While still in the womb... God chose Jacob. The point? I love you not based on performance, innate goodness. But I loved you freely and unconditionally.

The passage continues with God showing that He has preserved Israel (Jacob) meanwhile Esau and his descendants (Edom) God has not preserved. You want proof of that? When is the last time you met an Edomite. They aren't around anymore...

Now all of this talk of election, God choosing one and not the other... makes many of us uncomfortable. This is awkward for our modern day ears to hear because it sounds unfair. We like merit, we like things logical. Much ink has been spilled over the last many centuries over questions of God's sovereign election and man's responsibility. We aren't going to untangle and solve it in the next few minutes. I believe the Bible teaches both. But in this text, God's sovereign election is highlighted in order to demonstrate proof of his covenant love. "I love you in spite of your behavior, your rebellion, your perpetual covenant breaking, even when you haven't loved me back...and I'm still in it."

But it doesn't end there. He doesn't on just look to the past to demonstrate his covenant love. At the end of the book, God looks forward to demonstrate his love.

Malachi 4:2, 5-6

But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves... v.4 See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents.

This is a prophecy of the preparing for the Messiah. This is quoted in the New Testament in partial fulfillment of that prophecy by John the Baptist. God says, "I'm still in it and I will make good on my vows to you."

What about you and me? How do we know God loves us? And is it a contractual love or a covenant love?

Does God love you? Oh how he loves you! How has he loved us?

Jesus said, John 15:13

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends...

But even Jesus went beyond friends...Romans 5:8

But God demonstrates his love for us this way: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus died for you when you were at your worst! Jesus went to the orphanage and saw the kid torturing bugs with a grin on his face and said, I'll take that one! His sovereign election of you, was not based on your performance or your religious works, or your innate goodness. But because he chose you. God extended his covenant love, not just to the physical descendants of Jacob, but to the spiritual descendants in Christ.

But how do I know that his love isn't a contract? How do I know it's a covenant? Listen to God's marriage vows to you-

Romans 8:38-39

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

When your heart is tempted to grow callous and question whether God loves you what are you looking to for proof? Are you looking at your performance and failures? Or like Israel are you looking for proof in him giving you everything you want? Or do you look to the cross for proof of God's covenant love?

May it melt your heart, may his great love stir your heart this morning as you consider the covenant love of God toward you and me, covenant breakers. May we desire to love him back and want to obey him because he first loved us. God's saying to us today, "I'm still in it."