

PostExilicProphets 22-03-30a

Greetings, welcome to the Wednesday evening Bible study here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. This is the 30th day of March 2022. We are in the book of Malachi.

Very interesting conversation between God and his people. We saw the first five verses last time and we're picking up tonight in verse six, Malachi chapter one, verse six. I was mentioning to Matthew earlier that it's a rare thing if you always have one Old Testament study and one New Testament study to find your two books that you're studying adjacent to one another.

You only have to flip about half a dozen pages to go from our Sunday study to our Wednesday study. So we had to get a nice little crease there in the middle of our Bible. Let's take a moment, ask God's blessing on our fellowship, on our investigations into his word, and we'll begin.

Father, what a blessing it is to spend this time together to catch up on the opportunities that we have for fellowship and for prayer, for intercession and encouragement and support for one another. And for this opportunity to learn from your word truths that help us to live on a daily basis, to redeem the time, to lay hold of righteousness by faith, and to prepare ourselves for service and function now and in the ages to come. We pray that as we look at this section from the book of Malachi, that your spirit will bless it to each heart, that we will find ourselves bearing the fruit of the spirit and enjoying a closer walk with you through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray it in his name. Amen. Malachi chapter one, verse six.

This is God speaking to people in Israel. He has addressed himself to the people of Israel. I have loved you.

In what way have you loved us? Now he's going to bring up some other attributes, and we're going to be exploring the comparison and contrast of these. Look at verse six. A son honors his father, a servant his master.

If then I am the father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my reverence? Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise my name. Yet you say, in what way have we despised your name? You will remember that we have seen this in Hebrew, and we have a noun there where it says, says the Lord of hosts in verse six. And it is pertinent.

It is helpful to see the emphasis here. A son honors his father and a servant, his master. If I am the father, where is my honor? If I'm a master, where is my reverence? Says Yahweh Sabaoth.

So this is the Lord speaking. And we began the book with an expression of regard from one direction to another, from God to his people. What was that expression? What was that attitude? It is in verse two.

I have loved you. So after pointing out that there is evidence of God's love for his people in the way he has treated those who are not loved, Edom, and those that God does not love never

prosper. What they build is knockdown.

And when you see this, your eyes will magnify the Lord. The Lord is magnified upon the border of Israel. And of course, Israel shares a border with Edom.

All you have to do is look across the border to see the difference between God's love and God's hate. These, of course, are policies. This is not emotion or bitter spite.

It is simply policy. And the treatment of Edom provides a contrast to the covenant love that God has shown to his people Israel. I have loved you, says the Lord, but you don't appreciate it.

You don't see it. And how could you miss it? Look at the contrast. But that brings us to verse six.

We have the relationship between a son and a father, a servant and a master. Interestingly, you would expect if I had just started the evening by saying, let me ask you a question. What should the attitude of a son be for his father? What would you answer? What should children feel toward their parents? Ideally, you would hope they love you, right? Parents love their children.

Children love their parents. God looks at Israel as his offspring, his son. Out of Egypt, I've called my son Israel, and God commendeth his love toward us.

Even when we are sinners, Christ dies for us. Greater love hath no man than this, than to lay down his life and so on, as the Lord has done for us. But isn't it interesting in verse six, the expected attitude from a son to a father is honor.

Honor. Think of your Ten Commandments. After you get, thou shalt have no other gods before me, take his name in vain, don't make unto thee any graven image, honor your father and mother.

The commandment is to honor. Don't have to love them, have to honor them. And people in the ancient Near East, as at most times in history, would agree that a son should honor his father and a servant his master.

If then I am the father, where is my honor? Even if you don't love me, what's the fulfillment of all the law and the prophets according to the Lord Jesus? We just saw this in Matthew chapter 23. All the law and prophets are summed up, love the Lord your God. God's not even asking for love.

He says, I have loved you. You don't appreciate it. If I'm a father, there ought to at least be honor.

If you don't love me, can you honor me? And if I am a master, where is my reverence? In the old King James, this is fear. The word fear. This brings us to a very fascinating contrast, comparison contrast between love, honor, and fear.

Fear in the reverence sense. There is a treatise on this by Thomas Aquinas, and he talks about

the difference between honor and fear. He says, fear is twofold.

There is a servile fear, whereby punishment, not fault, is dreaded. Servile fear, a servant for a master, he's going to fear the master because he doesn't want to be punished. It's a servile fear in the main.

So punishment, not fault, is dreaded. Filial love, filial fear, in other words, fears fault. So this reverence or respect, if it is filial, if it is familial, you don't want to let someone down.

You don't want to be at fault. You don't want to fall short. And so you fear being at fault.

In like way, service is twofold. A servant with a service of fear, purely servile, does not deserve to be called a son of God, nor is in a state of salvation not having love. If people are claiming God and seeking to serve God out of fear of retribution, fear of punishment, you have the Jonathan Edwards sermon, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God, where he basically scared a whole large group of people into falling down on the ground in sobs and tears and repenting because they were afraid of being dangled like a spider over the fires of hell and so on.

This is not the motivation God is looking for. That is a servile fear. And someone who comes to God with a purely servile fear does not deserve to be called a son of God and is not in a state of salvation, not having love.

Whence Christ, distinguishing such a servant from a son of God by adoption, says, The servant abideth not in the house forever, but the son abides forever. This is John 8.35. John 8.35. The servant doesn't abide in the house forever. The son abides forever.

There is a difference in relationship. There's a difference in attitude. Later on in John, Jesus says, The servant does not know what his Lord does.

He doesn't have intimacy. He doesn't have understanding. He's just trying to avoid being punished.

But a servant whose service is of pure and filial love is also a son of whom the Savior saith, Well done, good and faithful servant, enter thou into the joy of thy Lord. And that, of course, is Matthew 25, 21, and 23. We saw this weeks back in our Matthew study.

Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord. Since a distinction is made here between the son and the servant, he seems to be speaking of servile fear, which although it doesn't do good well and meritoriously with a right intention from love, yet it withdraws from evil and is the beginning of wisdom because it disposes one toward grace. So scripture says, By the fear of the Lord, men depart from evil.

And that is Proverbs 16, 6. So do you see the ground we're walking on here? God approaches his people in the book of Malachi. He leads with love. I have loved you, but they have no capacity to understand God's love for them.

He can only communicate it by contrast with his treatment of Edom, those that he hates. Esau, Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated. Can you not see the difference between love, blessing, prosperity, and judgment? Do you not see the difference? They cannot comprehend or appreciate the love of God because they have no capacity to love themselves.

So God doesn't even start off here in verse six with love. He says, look, let's just start with honor. Can you not honor me? And if you can't honor me as a son, can you at least respect me like a slave does his master, like a servant does his Lord? Can you not at least get that far? Is there any motivation that will cause you to take God into account in your goals, your priorities, and your values? Very interesting that God commands honor from children to their parents.

And that honor, as we know from the New Testament and Ephesians, expresses itself in obedience. Children obey your parents in the Lord. You think about Psalm 100.

Serve the Lord with gladness. Come before his presence with singing. The Lord is God.

He made us, not we ourselves. Ideally, we would come with appreciation, with thanksgiving, with love. If we can't do that as our creator, the one who made us, and the sheep of his pasture, this of course is primarily looking at Israel.

Can you respect the shepherd? Can you follow the guidance of the shepherd? Sheep don't typically love the shepherd, but they at least follow his guidance. They hear his voice and come when they are called and go where they are told and so on, where they're encouraged to go. But you can see that God is moving down the ladder of relationship from love, which they have no clue about.

But do you at least understand honor? Where is my honor? If I'm a master, where is my reverence? Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise my name. Despise my name. We have just seen in Matthew chapter 24, Jesus saying, one of the signs of the last days is that many will come in his name, affirming that he is the Christ and deceiving many.

Because coming in his name, using his name for their purposes, they don't actually respect his name. It's a means to an end. How many people have you seen wearing a cross on a necklace because it's cool, it's trendy, it gets them a wider audience or more acceptance.

Maybe they can tap into the young, affluent Christian market with their music or their movies or whatever. It is self-interested use of the symbol of Christ, the symbol of his work, the symbol of those who would follow him. But I find this very interesting and it's been written about before.

Another really old guy, Thomas Aquinas is back in the 1200s. And sometimes the old heads really know the most. This is a little off the subject, but I'm going to share it with you anyway, because I found it interesting.

If you've ever worked with layout, graphic layout, putting text and pictures, doing a website,

creating a brochure or a flyer or anything like that, and maybe you've used some software for that. And when you're first doing a layout, or you can look at somebody whose website is not finished and they say, Oh, go to my website. You go there and it's under construction.

And so there might be a header there that says, you know, welcome to our website. And then underneath there is Latin text. And it says, Lorem ipsum dolor.

Have you ever seen this? It always starts the same way. Lorem ipsum, so much so that gibberish Latin text or what was thought to be gibberish Latin text in any layout. If you remember back in the sixties, I used these transfer sheets.

Letraset had transfer sheets that had printed letters on them, and you could put them on a place and you rub it with a pencil or something, and it would transfer. And you could, this is back before laser printers and inkjet printers or dot matrix printers were the only kind that anybody had. But if you wanted to make a poster or a flyer, you could buy sheets of Letraset alphabet in various fonts, and you could make signs and things by rubbing these plastic sheets and the letters would transfer.

Well, Letraset popularized this Latin text that wasn't supposed to mean anything. And it just came to be known as Lorem ipsum. You can now go on the web and there are Lorem ipsum generators that will just, you just need something that looks like text to show you where the text will be when you actually write it or paste it in.

Well, I've scratched my head about this over the years because I've seen it a lot. And I saw it again this last week and I thought, you know what, what is this? Does it actually mean anything or not? It looks like it doesn't. There's no word Lorem in Latin, but ipsum is a word and dolor is a word.

It goes to Spanish as pain, right? Dolor de cabeza, I've got a headache. Anyway, so I looked it up and it's very interesting because this actually came from somewhere. The typical version of it that you see says, Lorem ipsum dolor sit amit consecutur adipicin illit sed do illus mod tempor blah, blah, blah.

Right. And people say, well, you know, this is just nonsense. Well, it's not.

Back in the day, somewhere back in the fifties, late fifties, early sixties, somebody needed some filler text. And so what they did is they went to the Loeb Classical Library, which was published back around the turn of the century. Or maybe it's Lieb.

I don't know if it's Lieb or Loeb. It's L-O-E-B. I'm not sure how you say that.

But it's the Lieb Classical Library. And it is, this is Cicero. Cicero wrote a thing.

I really have a point to this. I am actually going somewhere. So just bear with me.

But what somebody did is they just turned to a page and started copying Cicero and they

skipped a few words, but they were just copying it out of this Lieb Classical Library from like 1914, volume, whatever it is. But the section that they got it from, the top of the page said lorum, but the D-O, because it's supposed to be dolorum, because dolorum is another form of dolor, and it's talking about pain and pleasure. But they just started at the top of the page and didn't realize that the first two letters of the word were on the previous page.

And so it says lorum ipsit instead of dolorum ipsit. But here's my whole point. The reason I'm belaboring you with this is the section that they chose is really interesting.

This is Cicero writing in the first century BC about pleasure and pain. It's really smart. I must explain to you how the mistaken idea of reprobating pleasure and extolling pain arose.

There are people who say, boo on pleasure, let's go for pain. It's kind of the Spartan view, you know, hardship, just kind of perverse almost. He says, I want to explain to you how this idea of reprobating pleasure, boo on pleasure and extolling pain arose.

To do so, I will give you a complete account of the system and expound the actual teachings of the great explorer of the truth, the master builder of human happiness. No one rejects, dislikes, or avoids pleasure itself because it is pleasure. But because those who do not know how to pursue pleasure rationally encounter consequences that are extremely painful.

I'm going for pleasure, but I ended up with pain, right? Nor again, is there anyone who loves or pursues or desires to obtain pain of itself? This is the dolorum ipsit dolor. This is the part where that picks up. Nor is there anyone who loves or pursues or desires to obtain pain of itself because it is pain.

But occasionally, circumstances occur in which toil and pain can procure him some great pleasure. I think about barking my knuckles working on an engine before I get to drive this car down the road after rebuilding that engine and enjoying great pleasure. But to get there, I had to endure pain.

To take a trivial example, which of us ever undertakes laborious physical exercise except to obtain some advantage from it? Who has any right to find fault with a man who chooses to enjoy a pleasure that has no annoying consequences, or one who avoids a pain that produces no resultant pleasure? On the other hand, we denounce with righteous indignation and dislike men who are so beguiled and demoralized by the charms of pleasure of the moment, so blinded by desire that they cannot foresee the pain and trouble that are bound to ensue. Equal blame belongs to those who fail in their duty through weakness of will, which is the same as saying through shrinking from toil and pain. These cases are perfectly simple and easy to distinguish.

In a free hour, when our power of choice is untrammelled and when nothing prevents our being able to do what we like best, every pleasure is to be welcomed and every pain avoided. But in certain circumstances, and owing to the claims of duty or the obligations of business, it will

frequently occur that pleasures have to be repudiated and annoyances accepted. This is called working at your job.

The wise man therefore always holds in these matters to this principle of selection. He rejects pleasures to secure other greater pleasures, or else he endures pains to avoid worse pains. That's Cicero.

People used to think. They used to put ideas together and make cogent arguments, beautiful statements of logic, of observation that are meaningful. You think about why God calls us to obedience and occasionally to suffering in this life? Cicero described it.

It is because we are enduring a momentary light affliction in order to obtain an eternal weight of glory. Paul says the very same thing, just in other words. We know that in this world we will have tribulation, but we are of good cheer because Christ has overcome the world and there will soon be a day when our affliction is vindicated, when our service, hard though it may be, is rewarded, when this amount of annoyance or pain is leveraged into a greater pleasure at well done, now good and faithful servant, and so on.

So this idea of looking at the relationship between pain and pleasure and understanding that in the ideal everyone would go for pleasure and avoid pain, but it's more complex than that. Sometimes there is a necessary pain to obtain a greater pleasure, and sometimes in directly pursuing pleasure we end up inflicting on ourselves and others pain. This is why we try to think before we act and why we map out our priorities and set our goals with some wisdom involved.

Well, the same thing is true in a different way with Bernard of Clairvaux. You think of Saint Bernard and there's a cask under the dog's chin. Saint Bernard was a real guy, Bernard of Clairvaux, and I want to read you something that he wrote.

And he was actually writing a commentary about the Song of Solomon. And this is Sermon 83 from Bernard of Clairvaux, and he's talking about the bridegroom. There's the interaction of a bride and a bridegroom in the Song of the Shulamite, I like to call it.

Here's what Bernard said, and this is centuries ago. Now the bridegroom is not only loving, he is love. Is he honor too? Some maintain that he is, but I have not read it.

I have read that God is love, but not that he is honor. Isn't that an interesting thought? Scripture says God is love. Scripture never says God is honor.

And he certainly never says God is fear, but God is love. I could stop right there and go off into a trance thinking about the implications of that. It's a brilliant point.

I have read that God is love, but not that he is honor. They're not the same thing. It is not that God does not desire honor, for he says, if I am a father, where is my honor? In this commentary on Song of Solomon, he's now quoting our passage in Malachi.

If I am a father, where is my honor? Here he speaks as a father, but if he declares himself to be a husband, if he had approached in Malachi and said, I am your husband, what would his question be? If I'm your husband, if I'm the bridegroom, where is my love? But God doesn't start with that figure. Interesting, no? He had previously said, if I am the Lord, where is my fear? God then requires that he should be feared as the Lord, honored as a father, and loved as a bridegroom. This would be the ideal.

Which of these is highest and most lofty? How would you answer Bernard? Fear, honor, and love. Which one is highest and most lofty? Love. Surely it is love.

Without it, fear brings pain, and honor has no grace. These are great words. Why do we not hear this kind of thought and perception? Why do we not hear this kind of persuasive observation and logic anymore? You don't get this in a praise and worship service.

I'm not smart enough to think of it, but these guys that weren't distracted and weren't in an information flood could reflect, meditate in the genuine sense of the word. I just think that is a great thought. God requires that he should be feared as the Lord, honored as a father, and loved as a bridegroom.

Which of these is highest and most lofty? Surely it is love. Without love, fear brings pain. Without love, honor has no grace.

Fear is the lot of a slave unless he is freed by love. Let me read that again. Fear is the lot of a slave unless he is freed by love.

Honor, which is not inspired by love, is not honor but flattery. That rings true, doesn't it? Honor and glory belong to God alone, but God will receive neither if they are not sweetened with the honey of love. Love is sufficient for itself.

It gives pleasure to itself and for its own sake. It is its own merit and its own reward. Love needs no cause beyond itself, nor does it demand fruits.

It is its own purpose. I love because I love. I love that I may love.

Love is a great reality, and if it returns to its beginnings and goes back to its origin, seeking its source again, it will always draw afresh from it and thereby flow freely. Love is the only one of the motions of the soul, of its senses and affections, in which the creature can respond to its Creator, even if not as an equal, and repay His favor in some similar way. Now you see how different love is, for when God loves, He desires nothing but to be loved, since He loves us for no other reason than to be loved, for He knows that those who love Him are blessed in their very love.

Now, I don't know if you've read the book of Solomon, but you can find it online and it's worth reflecting on. Those are some powerful thoughts, and they bear directly on our passage here. God says, you have fallen, He doesn't even mention love.

Remember the letter to the Ephesus. You get the idea that maybe there is still honor for God in the Ephesian church, there is still fear that causes them to eschew evil and to reject false teaching, but they've fallen the first step down, and they've lost love. Lost your first love.

Remember where you have fallen from. Repent and do the first works, because the first and best works are done not out of fear and not even out of honor, but out of love. Many people honor God with an almost mechanical or ritualistic attendance at church or observation offerings or whatever they may do.

They can put in the time, they can put in the resources, they are externally dedicated in some way to God, but the love that ought to motivate those works has disappeared. It is the first fall, losing love. The second is losing honor, and the third is losing fear.

You can see this in our own culture. Just think about history. The genuine love for God that motivated so much of Christianity in this country began to evaporate and to diminish, but we still had respect, and even people in the culture who weren't churchgoing or weren't Christians respected the morality and the ethics and respected the faith of those who were churchgoing and who loved God.

Then the respect began to erode away, but there was still, well, but aren't there some things that you just, you know, that's just not done. But you notice now there is no fear of the Lord. There's not even the fear that a servant ought to have that if he does wrong he will be punished.

Nobody fears punishment. They don't believe there is such a thing as punishment. They don't believe anything bad is going to happen.

They don't believe there is a God, so there is no fear, much less honor, much less love. It's a fascinating set of attitudes to reflect on both nationally and individually. How can I know if I want to examine myself and see if I'm in the faith? We've talked about the triad of Christian virtues, faith, hope, and love.

Perfect love casts out fear. I liked what Bernard said that it is from loving not revering that love receives its name. Let someone filled with horror or stupor or fear or wonder be content with reverence.

Where there is love, all these are unimportant. Love is sufficient for itself. When love is present, it absorbs and conquers all other affections.

Therefore, it loves what it loves, and it knows nothing else. He who is justly honored and held in awe and admired prefers to be loved. He and the soul are bridegroom and bride.

What other bond or compulsion do you look for between those who are betrothed except to love and be loved? That's a little bit earlier in that same sermon. I found that to be quite fascinating. It's worth reflecting on, and it's another illumination.

It's another reflection of scriptural truth. You can watch for when those words are used. Remember when Paul says, fear God, honor the King? Why does he say that? Why doesn't he say, love God, fear the King? Fruitful reflections.

Well, it's a good gut check for us. Where am I in my attitude toward God? Well, let's pause here and take our break. We'll enjoy some refreshment and fellowship and our special music, and then we'll resume here in Malachi chapter 1.