

## PostExilicProphets 22-06-08a

Happy Wednesday evening. Welcome to the Wednesday night Bible study at Grace Truth Bible Church. We are in the book of Malachi, which, Lord willing, in the creek don't rise, we will finish tonight.

Let's take a moment to ask God's blessing on our study, on our conversation, on our enjoyment of songs, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in our hearts to the Lord. And we'll begin. Father, we thank you for this day, for your many expressions of grace and faithfulness toward us.

Those who asked that question at the beginning of our book of study on how have you loved us have not had our experience of your manifold expressions of love toward us, and we are grateful for it. We thank you for the Lord Jesus through whom we have these wonderful blessings and opportunities. We pray tonight as we look at this portion of your word together that the Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us to understand it, to benefit from it, to be motivated and encouraged by it, and to bear that fruit that reflects your work in our hearts.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. You will remember that Malachi is a book of questions, a book of questions and answers.

But it doesn't begin with a question, it begins with a statement. And the opening and closing exchanges between God and God's people are significant because they differ from what is inside. This is sort of a reverse Oreo cookie where the good stuff is on the outside and the bad stuff is the filler in the middle.

Have you ever seen those Oreo cookies that have a white cookie and they've got like chocolate or something on the inside? It's the opposite of your standard Oreo. That's what this book reminds me of because the outside, the beginning and the ending are reassurances and reiterations of promise from God to people who are beginning to faint, are starting to grow weary, and are beginning to be susceptible to the experiences that they see around them. And it appears that the wicked prosper, it appears that those who are in leadership are getting away with all kinds of malfeasance, and they are beginning to wonder if their faithfulness and their obedience are ever going to be vindicated.

So God begins and ends by addressing that group, and for their benefit in the middle, he addresses the Levites and the Judahites, the religious leadership and the governmental leadership, and calls them out for their malfeasance and their failures to fulfill their delegated responsibilities to the people of God. We have come in the closing verses of chapter three to God's return to addressing those who fear him and who meditate on his name. We saw that last time, but if you take a quick look at the first chapter of Malachi, it doesn't begin with a question.

You could imagine in some other Bible that this book might have begun with the, I have

something against you because you say in what way have you loved us? But that's not how it begins. It begins with a declaration. It begins with a declaration.

God says, and this is the oracle or burden. Just put a mental sticky next to that term oracle or burden there. This is going to come up in a passage we're going to look at a bit later in the evening, but this is the oracle or the burden of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi, by my messenger.

I have loved you, says the Lord. This is how our book opened. Now, my question to you is, why would God open with this statement of all of the books of the Bible that we have, Old Testament prophetic books in particular, none of them start out with God saying, hello, Israel, I have loved you.

This is unique. There, we're not given a historical situation. We're not given circumstances.

We're not giving any narrative setting for this. God says, here is a burden. Here is an oracle sent by God's messenger.

And it opens with, I have loved you. Why would God say this? Probably should have asked this question when we started the book, but now that we've seen it, I think it's easier to answer. Why does God open this way? Because there are God-fearing, obedient people who are beginning to question that God does in fact love them.

This is an answer to an unspoken question, to a doubt that is beginning to form and condense and become an issue among the good people in Israel, the righteous. They have been oppressed. They have been suppressed.

They have not seen the fruit of God's blessing appear in their lives after seeing those who obviously do not care about God and who do not honor his name, do not honor the forms of worship that have been prescribed. They are prospering. They are getting ahead and nice guys are finishing last.

Why do the wicked prosper? So God opens as only God can with a statement that immediately captures the interest of the people who are most interested in where is God's love? Who is going to quibble and be uninterested, have their attention elsewhere? People who really don't care about God's love. This is the flip side of the coin of the first and greatest commandment, the summary of all of the law of Moses, with which this book is going to close reminding its audience of. Remember the law of Moses.

The law of Moses is summarized by no less an authority than the Lord Jesus himself, as we are to love the Lord, our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our strength, and all our mind. This summarizes the law and in reciprocation for that, we have God's love returned. So what is the meaning of this opening? What is the purpose of it? This is going to draw the attention of people who do love God, who want to honor his name, who fear him, but are beginning to doubt the fulfillment of the promises that express God's love.

And God says, before you start letting this question eat at you and diminish your motivation and your faithfulness, I have loved you. And this is why the natural response from these people is, in what way? I don't see the love. What I see is disintegration and deterioration of morality and spirituality.

What I see is abuse. I see departure. I see spiritual adultery.

I see the same kinds of things for which our fathers were judged with the Babylonian captivity. I see that happening and I don't see any action. You could place this in the modern day to get a feel for it.

If you say, I grew up believing in Judeo-Christian ethics and believing in morality and one man, one woman, and a man's word is his bond. And the nation is supposed to be one nation under God with liberty and justice for all. And they're supposed to be the rights that our founding fathers recognized stemmed from a creator God and that were inalienable and that everyone ought to enjoy.

And when I look around, I see travesty. I see disintegration. I see immorality.

I see spirituality gone by the wayside and people who honor God and who want to live in the light of the word of God are, last card, Charlie. Those who are out for number one, who will lie and cheat and do anything to maintain power are getting ahead. And the righteous man is perishing off the earth.

So Lord God in heaven, if you love the United States of America, I'm not seeing it. Well, you and I already know why God's favor has been rapidly withdrawn from this nation. If God seems far away, who moved? You and I don't have to spend any time considering why would God no longer extend divine blessing to this nation? And instead we are rapidly circling the drain economically, politically, socially, morally, culturally, absolutely circling a dirty drain.

And we know why those of us that have been around, you know, for the last several decades have watched this nation's leadership, both political and religious, willfully depart from scripture, willfully depart from those values upon which the nation was founded and that it embraced and espoused, not perfectly, no nation ever has, no nation ever will until the new heavens and the new earth. But in large measure, in the majority, in the main, there was strong moral fabric that stemmed from those founding principles that were rooted in the word of God and the law of God and the righteousness of God. When we departed from that, God stopped blessing us as a nation.

Now blessing comes in smaller and smaller groups and down to individuals in many cases. We know why this is, but we have scripture to inform us that this is the pattern in history. You think about the people post Babylonian captivity, they don't have a Bible in their lap.

They're supposed to be getting the word of God from the scribes, from the priests, from those who operate in the national religious teaching arena. This is their job. This is their purpose, and

they have failed it.

So when people ask in their hearts, where is God? What is the nature of our decline here? What purpose is there in continuing to serve God? Because I see my grandfather and my father departing this earth, never having claimed the promises. Abraham dwelt in tents. He was waiting for a city whose founder and builder is God.

That city has never come, sort of in miniature and in personal form. So that was how the book opened. God says and assures his people, I have loved you.

If you want to see what lack of my love is, look at Edom. That's the worst case. Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated.

That's what the hate looks like. And let me tell you where that is next going to appear. It's within the camp of Israel.

And this is why when you look at the first question and the last question in this book from the people, there is no charge leveled by God against the people asking the question, in what way have you loved us? God treats this as a fair question, and he gives it a fair answer. How have you loved us? We're beginning to lose the vision here. We're beginning to lose belief in that concept.

How have you loved us? And so God gives them a legitimate and fulsome answer. I have loved you. Look at the contrast.

Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Have you not been favored? Have I not been with you from the very beginning of your origins as a nation and as a people? Not with Abraham, not with Isaac, but with Jacob. Jacob sees the foundation stones of the nation in his 12 sons, right? And I laid waste Esau's mountains and heritage for the jackals of the wilderness. And Edom was going to try to rebuild, but that has never happened and will never happen.

There hasn't been an Edom for centuries, and there will never be again. The nation is gone. They build, but I will throw down.

The people against whom the Lord has indignation never recover. You have been judged, O Jacob, time and again, but you are restored. You are renewed.

You return. The root shoot of the stump of Jesse will sprout again. The fallen tent of David will be restored.

There is future hope even during present judgment. That's the difference between Edom and Jacob. Edom and Israel, Jacob and Esau, right? However far God goes in judging Jacob, there is always a remnant, and there is always a seed of life there that can be nurtured and brought back.

This is the promise of God, and it is a reminder to God's people that there is hope. You

remember the middle of the book. He then goes after the priests for failing to remind God's people of these truths.

It's they have corrupted their office. They have corrupted their practice. They have corrupted all of the things that would remind God's people of these truths.

The table of fellowship that says we are not just God's people. We are God's children, and that table, the tithes and offerings that Judah was supposed to ensure were brought, Judah being the ruling tribe. So the priestly tribe and the ruling tribe have both failed, and each one of the questions that they ask is in connection with a charge.

You have corrupted my offerings. You have failed. You have robbed God, and so on.

That was the heart of the book. Why would God put all of this in writing in Malachi? One reason, obviously, is to carry the warning and the prediction of judgment to these who are disobedient, but it is sandwiched between God's assurances to those who are remaining faithful and obedient. It is okay to doubt.

It is okay to wonder. God does not fault the people who ask that first question, in what way have you loved us? God reminds them, let me take you back to the beginning, and at the end of the book, he is going to take them back to the beginning, and he's going to point to the future for these people, but he does not fault them for asking. It's fair to ask, where is God when you see so many things in decline, morally, spiritually? It's okay to ask and to say, God, where is your love? You know how I know it's okay to ask this question? What does Eloi Eloi Lama Sabachthani mean? Whose words are those? They are David's, and they are the Lord Jesus.

It is an Old Testament quote, isn't it? It's an Old Testament quote, and it suggests, as all Old Testament quotes do, that you go back to the entire context of that psalm. Keep your finger here, turn back to the psalms. Psalm 22, verse 1. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me, and from the words of my groaning? O my God, I cry in the daytime, but you do not hear.

And in the night season, and I'm not silent, you are holy, enthroned in the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in you. Put a star by it.

Our fathers trusted in you. Our passage is going to reference this concept before we're done. They trusted and you delivered them.

They cried to you and were delivered. They trusted in you and were not ashamed. But I am a worm and no man, a reproach of men and despised by the people.

All those who see me ridicule me. They shoot out the lip. They shake the head, saying, he trusted in the Lord.

We'll let the Lord rescue him. Let him deliver him, since he delights in him. Notice in your New

King James, there's a lot of capitalized pronouns there.

And in the interest of trying to clarify by capitalizing references to deity, sometimes it has the opposite effect. They shoot out the lip. They shake the head, saying, he, David, trusted in the Lord.

Let him, the Lord, rescue him, David, since he, David, delights in him, the Lord. If he delights in the Lord, let the Lord deliver him. If that's where his delight is, my delight's in money.

My money's going to deliver me. My delight is in the politician I bankroll. I'll let him deliver me.

But you are he who took me out of the womb. You made me trust while on my mother's breasts. I was cast upon you from birth from my mother's womb.

You have been my God. Be not far from me, for trouble is near and there is none to help. Why have you forsaken me? Be not far from me.

Many bulls have surrounded me. Strong ones of Bashan have encircled me. They gape at me with their mouths like a raging and roaring lion." You can get that feeling today as a Christian, as someone who believes in biblical values, and you try to speak of those values, and you are surrounded by raging bulls of Bashan who are ready to tear you up, take away your job, your livelihood, your standing, your reputation, your ability to even raise your head in polite society, just for speaking biblical truth.

You can pay in these times and in these days, and just recently so. This is a new phenomenon. You couldn't be assassinated out of life and blackballed and blacklisted country-wide within seconds.

Remember that story of the girl who posted something on her social media and got on an airplane, and by the time she got off the plane at the other end of her destination, she was canceled, killed, fired, I say socially killed, just because of something she tweeted before she got on an airplane, and it was taken out of context, it was misunderstood, and her life was destroyed in the time it takes to fly halfway across the country. That kind of power has not been possible for the common individual. You might be able to ruin a politician, you might be able to pull down someone prominent, but your average Joe citizen, Jane citizen, to destroy them by piling on in a matter of minutes, this is new.

We're up at the top of this hockey stick graph in so many ways. They gape at me with their mouths like a raging and roaring lion. Why does a lion gape at you? He's not gaping in awe or amusement or entertainment value, he's gaping because he's fixing to clamp those sharp teeth down and rend your flesh from your bones.

I am poured out like water, all my bones are out of joint. You know this Psalm, I wish we had time to do it full justice, but this is what the Lord Jesus quotes on the cross. It is okay to say, Lord, you seem so far away, it seems as though you have forsaken me.

Why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? But deep in the wells of living water that are available in our soul, we can answer that question for ourselves. You really have not forsaken me, you are really not so far from helping me. It is a matter of the current time, the current purpose is to allow these things to move forward.

And God says, this is only for a space, judgment will come on those who perpetrate these actions. Trust in the Lord, be of good cheer, He will strengthen your heart. Wait on the Lord, renew your strength, you will soon be able to mount up with wings as eagles.

You can run and not be weary, you can walk and not faint. So this is the concept, it is okay to say, how are you loving me, oh Lord? Your love doesn't seem to be expressing itself in my circumstances at the moment. It's not a sin to raise that question.

The beneficial thing is to raise that question with God Himself. And this is a party of the first part, party of the second part conversation. These people aren't going to each other and saying, you know, I don't think God loves us.

They're talking to God, first and second person, how have you loved us? Help me remember these truths. So this is the idea, I think, in Malachi. And we've seen God in front of these faithful people call out those who have truly forsaken their love for God, their honor that He is due, their worship that is His right, their respect that He should have for Him as their great King.

And so they are called out and they are going to be judged and judged harshly. So then in chapter three, God returns to these with whom He began the dialogue in verse 13. Your words have been harsh against me.

Your words have been, one translator puts it, too much for me to bear. In an anthropomorphic way or an anthropopathic way, it hurts God's heart to hear us begin to doubt His love and doubt the fulfillment of His promises. You could imagine what God the Father felt when His Son cried out from the cross, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from helping me? There is an answer to that question.

It is necessary. Jesus began His ministry answering this question. John says, I shouldn't baptize you.

You should baptize me. And Jesus says, suffer it to be so now. This is necessary to fulfill all righteousness.

And Jesus' answer to John in the Jordan is the same answer He can supply to Himself on the cross. Suffer, of course, has a much fuller meaning in the English word there. It means allow, permit.

But His suffering on the cross is necessary for the fulfillment of all righteousness. So when God says in verse 13, out of no question being asked, remember in chapter 1, I have loved you, says the Lord. Here, your words have been harsh against me, says the Lord.

The words you speak are too much for me to bear, says the Lord. And you say, what have we spoken against you? Similar to how have you loved us? We're still faithful. We're wondering about your love.

But what is it we have spoken against you? Well, you have said this is the expression of your doubt of God's love and the worthwhileness of continuing to be faithful. It's useless to serve God. What profit, what benefit, what gain is there for us? Where is the spoil, the divine benefit that transcends any work that we do? What profit is it that we have kept His ordinance and that we have walked faithfully before the Lord of hosts? I don't think that is as mourners.

I think this is, we have walked taking the measure of our way. We have walked being careful to observe the commandments, even though we're beginning to wonder what's the point and what's the sense. But we've taken the measure.

We're still on the path. We're just really questioning whether it's worth it. And you will notice that as with the first question, God does not call out error.

He doesn't say you've corrupted my table. You've robbed me. You have fallen short.

You have been partial in the teaching of the law. All of those charges of malfeasance and disobedience and corrupting God's way are in the middle for the Levites and for the Judahites, the leadership. But at the beginning and at the end, these people who are honoring God's name, He doesn't charge them with error.

He doesn't charge them with fault. You can imagine when Jesus says, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Does God say, well, there's a sin. There's a sin of faithlessness.

You're not trusting me. Jesus committed no sin when he asked that question. David committed no sin in Psalm 22 when he asked that question.

And he comes before God and details his suffering. God provides the answer. God's people continue in verse 15.

So now we're calling the proud blessed and those who do wickedness, we observe that they're raised up. They even tempt God and go free. So what is God's response? He doesn't say shame on you for thinking these thoughts.

God says, I need to give you another kind of reassurance in the same way that I have reassured you with the chastisement of the wicked leadership in the land. Let me give you reassurance with this picture of the book of remembrance being written. It's very interesting, this book of remembrance.

There are several books that are mentioned in scripture. Remember when God says to Moses, these people are too wicked. I'm going to wipe them out and I'll start over with you in Exodus chapter 32.

So 32, 32 of Exodus, Moses says, Lord, now, if you out of your book, which you have written, this is really the first mention of a book. But Moses knows that God's got a book. I would suggest to you that it's this same book, the book of remembrance of those who are faithful.

And Moses knows that he's been recorded in God's book because he has been faithful to his call. There was never a more afflicted man. Moses was the most afflicted man in the Old Testament, and the Bible says so.

The most afflicted man who ever lived. If you will not forgive their sin, blot me out of your book, which you have written. 32, 32 of Exodus.

And the Lord said to Moses, whoever has sinned against me, I will blot him out of my book. And this is not having sinned in a moment or in an occasion. This is a pattern of sin.

This is practicing sin. Sin becomes the badge of identification. You started out in God's book and you get blotted out.

That's how it works. No longer remembering God, no longer honoring God, no longer worshiping God. Psalm 69, 28, add iniquity to their iniquity.

Let them not come into your righteousness. Let them be blotted out of the book of the living and not be written with the righteous. There is a book of the righteous, of those who fear God and reflect in an active way on his name.

The psalmist continues there. I am poor and sorrowful. Let your salvation, O God, set me up on high.

I will praise the name of God with a song and will magnify him with thanksgiving. I will worship him in music. Even though I am currently poor and sorrowful, I know the day is coming when I am going to celebrate him in song.

Wonderful Psalm 69. Psalm 87, verse 6, the Lord will record when he registers the peoples. This one was born there, talking about the land of Zion.

Of Zion it will be said, this one and that one were born in her and the Most High himself shall establish her. This is having a birthright in Zion. It doesn't matter where you were actually born.

Very few people were born on Mount Zion. We have a Mount Zion hospital. You could have been born in Mount Zion but in Israel people didn't birth children on Mount Zion.

The vast majority of Israelites were nowhere near there when they were born. But in the spiritual sense, the end of this Psalm 87 talks about this. I will make mention of Rahab and Babylon to those who know me.

Behold, O Philistia and Tyre with Ethiopia, this one was born there. You could have been born in Ethiopia. You could have been born in Babylon during the captivity.

You could have been born in Jericho like Rahab. It doesn't matter. In Zion it will be said Rahab was born here.

The Ethiopian eunuch was born here. Even if you're in Babylon, you were born here. You have a birthright.

You have the rights of a native. But it's a book that God maintains. Those who are qualified to claim my birthplace is Zion.

Because this is really speaking of the new birth, of course. Daniel 12, 1. At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people. There shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that time.

And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone who is found written in the book. So these books were important. Books were kept by kings.

Remember the book of Esther when the king can't sleep? And so he says, well, drag out the books and read me some chronicles. And in chapter 2, verse 23, an inquiry was made into the matter. It was confirmed.

And these two plotters against the king were hanged on the gallows. And it was written in the book of the chronicles in the presence of the king. And by the time you get to chapter 6, the king is having this book read back to him because he can't sleep.

And he says, well, did we ever do anything for Mordecai when he reported these guys and averted this assassination plot? And this, of course, leads to the very funny scene. It's almost as funny as John chapter 9, where Haman has to lead Mordecai through the streets. Thus shall it be done for the man who the king delights to honor.

It's just a knee-slappingly funny scene. But it's a book. It's a book maintained for the king by the king's chroniclers.

And he can refer to it. And he will make decisions based on what's written in these books. So these, as you continue in Malachi now, turn to chapter 3, verse 17.

Those who fear the Lord and who reflect, we saw the active nature of this reflection last time. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, verse 17, on the day that I make them my special treasure. If I ask for a show of hands, how many of us would like to be in a book written down and the heading on that page is, these are the ones that are my special treasure.

I, the Lord God in heaven. I, the creator of the universe and all that's in it. I, the one who sent my son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

On this page are the individual names of individual people who are going to be my special possession, my unique and special treasure. Would you like to be on that page? When we come back from the break, we're going to look at what this special treasure status is and what it

means. But we'll take a break at this point.