

**EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**SUNDAY, MAY 9, 2021**  
**SERMON: YOU SAY YOU LOVE ME...BUT HOW?**  
**TEXT: MALACHI 1:2-5**

There is a fairly well-known tale that appears in many different cultures that is often entitled "As Meat Loves Salt." One of the earliest adaptations of "King Lear" used this motif. The tale tells of a foolish king who has three daughters. He gathers his daughters one day and asks how much they love their father. The two older sisters tickle the ego of their father by responding with they love him as much as gold or silver. The youngest daughter (who is often the favourite) responds with the answer, "I love you as much as meat loves salt!" The foolish father misinterprets the answer and flies into a rage thinking his youngest daughter doesn't love him. The daughter is cast out of the household and must fend for herself. As the story goes, it isn't until the father is served meat without salt that he realized how much his youngest daughter truly loves him.

Relationships can be rough. The reality of being in a relationship is the fact that it can turn sour yet God created us to be relational.

Last week I did an introduction for the book of Malachi to give you a bit of context to better help understand the message that God is giving through His prophet.

Let's begin by reading our scripture lesson found in Malachi 1:2-5:

**<sup>2</sup> "I have always loved you," says the LORD.**

**But you retort, "Really? How have you loved us?"**

**And the LORD replies, "This is how I showed my love for you: I loved your ancestor Jacob, <sup>3</sup> but I rejected his brother, Esau, and devastated his hill country. I turned Esau's inheritance into a desert for jackals."**

**<sup>4</sup> Esau's descendants in Edom may say, "We have been shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins."**

**But the LORD of Heaven's Armies replies, "They may try to rebuild, but I will demolish them again. Their country will be known as 'The Land of Wickedness,' and their people will be called 'The People with Whom the LORD Is Forever Angry.' <sup>5</sup> When you see the destruction for yourselves, you will say, 'Truly, the LORD's greatness reaches far beyond Israel's borders!'"**

Malachi is a fairly unique book in that it takes the form of a series of arguments between God and the very disobedient, apathetic nation of Israel. Once again, it has been about 100 years since their return from Babylonian exile, and you would think that the people would have learned their lesson about who God is and what he expects. Now, 100 years later, the people are just as evil and disobedient as ever and God is using Malachi to deliver the warning.

This section introduces the major theme of the book in the very first words spoken. ***"I have always loved you!"*** What an amazing message that God gives. Unfortunately, the people have rebelled so badly that their response comes back to God, ***"Really? How have you loved us?"*** That response absolutely floors me! These people would be well versed in their relational history with God. One of the first things that was established after the exile was the celebration of the religious holy days which exist to remind them of God's faithfulness. Then God responds...

Before we breakdown God's response, we need to understand something about how God relates to His people and how we are suppose to relate back. Have you ever asked yourself the question, "How does God love me?" or even "I know I love God, but how does He love me?" It is all about relationship.

In the church we talk a lot about having a personal relationship with God. The problem is that our relationship with God can mean many things. Do you consider your relationship with God to be "father-child?" There are those who stress the use familiar use of God's name "Abba," and some take that the very familiar idea of call God "daddy." You could think of your relationship as God being your friend who walks beside you. Perhaps you relate to God as being a teacher, mentor, or guide. You could even be "old school" and think of God as a divine judge or master.

There are so many valid concepts out there, but we must be mindful of what relationship is being used in the book itself to have a proper understanding of what is being said.

One of the oldest and most common ways that God relates to those who follow Him is by entering into what we call a “covenant.” A covenant was a type of contract or partnership that God enters with his followers. What this contract or partnership entails is that God makes promises to His people and His people commit to obeying and serving Him. This covenant relationship is one of the unifying themes of the Bible, giving us an understanding of how God relates to His children.

To understand covenants, we are going to quickly go over the 4 major Old Testament relationships that God instituted:

1. Covenant with Noah (Genesis 9).

After God destroyed the world with a flood, He makes a promise to Noah that it would never happen again.

2. Covenant with Abraham (Genesis 12).

God approaches Abraham and says that if Abraham will be obedient and faithful to God, God would make Abraham the father of great nation. This nation will be a blessing to all the world.

3. Covenant with Moses (Exodus 19+).

God’s Covenant with Abraham is kicked up a notch as God enters into a covenant with Moses on behalf of Children of Israel. The descendants of Israel have become a nation and if they will obey and represent God to all the nations around them then God will bless, keep, and protect them as a mighty nation.

4. Covenant with David (2 Samuel 7).

God makes David the King of Israel and is instructed to lead the people to obey and worship the one true God. The promise is that David’s line will be on the throne always and one day the Messiah will come through his line. This opens the door for the arrival of Jesus, who will bring the new covenant that will be perfectly fulfilled.

Covenants are all about promises and commitments. Both sides are expected to keep their requirements. The problem with the human side is that we have a real hard time keeping up our end of the commitment. Right from the beginning, humankind rebelled against God and broke the covenant. At Mt. Sinai, the people couldn't even wait 40 days for Moses to return from the mountain before they demanded a Golden Calf to worship. Today we still bail on God when it is convenient, or we lack the patience to wait on His responses and timings. But God is still faithful. Instead of giving up on his people, God remained and still remains faithful to his side of the covenant.

This brings us back to Malachi 1:2-5. The first of a series of statements and arguments between God and his people.

The nation of Israel (formerly known as Judah) has returned to their land. They have rebuilt walls, temples, houses, and an economy. They have fallen back in their old rebellious ways.

It is important to recognize that it is the LORD, Yahweh, the God of Covenants, that is addressing the people. The LORD tells his people "I have always loved you!" Not only has Yahweh always loved his people, but the grammar of the sentence is also written as an ongoing action. "I have always loved you and will continue to love you!" Like a parent who deals with a rebellious child, God's love continues, even in the face of the constant failure of his people and need to punish them because of their sin.

Why is Israel so cynical about Yahweh's love? It is because of their situation. They returned to a ruined land and they are impatient with God because they want Him to fulfill what they believe are unfulfilled promises to them. Not much changes with humankind. We want God to immediately fulfill what we think is right regardless of our lack of obedience or faithfulness to Him.

## **GOD’S RESPONSE – “Love vs. Hate”**

God quickly answers the people, and the answer has often been misunderstood or questioned. The proof of the LORD’s love is the fact that He “loved Jacob and rejected (hated) Esau” (v. 2-3). The question that arises is this: “I though God loved everyone so how can he hate Esau?” This is why we spent time talking about what a covenant is. Far too often the modern reader of scripture will apply a 21<sup>st</sup> century meaning of certain words, forgetting that meanings either change or there are multiple meanings. The trick is to understand what the words mean!

God’s answer is using “covenant” language. It is Yahweh speaking and reminding the nation of Israel of how He is keeping His side of the covenant. In covenant language, if you are “loved” you are partaking in the covenant and fulfilling your commitments. The one who is “hated” is the one who continues to rebel against God and wants nothing to do with His promises. The one who is “hated” lives outside the covenant.

There are several levels to God’s answers. Historically, Jacob and his brother Esau responded very differently to God and his requirements. Esau sold his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of stew. The birthright gave the firstborn the authority over the family. The birthright also has a covenant responsibility. The one who has the birthright is the one whom God had a special covenantal relationship with, as God, during this period, dealt with the firstborn.

God’s answer also has a national aspect. Jacob and Esau become representatives for nations. Jacob represents the nation of Israel and Esau represents the Edomites. Israel, with all of their ups and downs, represented and followed the LORD. Edom, the descendants of Esau, chose to walk away from the LORD and follow false gods and became the enemy of Israel.

## **BLESSINGS AND CURSES**

God tells Israel to open their eyes. They are to look around and see for themselves the results of God’s love. Edom had been decimated by the Babylonians also. In their continued rebellion they say to God, “We don’t need

you, we don't want you, we are powerful without you and we will rebuild and become a mighty nation without you!" God then responds with even more authority. We are told that "God Almighty, the God of Hosts" responds. This is name used by the one who commands angelic armies, the one who protects those who are in the covenant. God doesn't argue that Edom isn't able to rebuild, He simply states that their attempts are useless without Him.

As God clarifies his love for his people, the section ends with a doxology worshipping God for the scope of his power and the enduring nature of his love for his children.

## **FOR TODAY**

How would you classify your relationship with God? Did you know that God still invites us into a covenant relationship? As the Church – the gathered body of believers, we have been called to partner with Jesus and be his ambassador to a world that is desperately in need of a Saviour.

Because of Jesus' work on the cross, the covenant relationship with God is still being offered today. John 3:16 says it wonderfully:

***16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.***

We still need to make sure we uphold our part of covenant. We are expected to be God's children and represent Him. We are to spend time with our Father in prayer, study, and worship. God expects faithful obedience as Hebrews 11:6 tells us:

**6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.**