

March 25, 2007 by Steve Brandon



Don't Forget His Love

Malachi 1:2-5

1. The Declaration of God's Love (verse 2a)
2. The Doubt of God's Love (verse 2b)
3. The Demonstration of God's Love (verses 2c-5)

There is a famous scene in *Fiddler on the Roof*, where Tevye asks his wife, Golde, "Do you love me?" Startled, Golde responds, "Do I what?" Tevye breaks out in song, "Do you love me?" Golde says, "Do I love you? With our daughters getting married, And this trouble in the town You're upset, you're worn out, Go inside, go lie down! Maybe it's indigestion." Again, Tevye repeats it, "Golde I'm asking you a question, Do you love me?" Golde says, "You're a fool." Taking it in stride, Tevye admits it, "I know... But do you love me?" Golde responds, "Do I love you? For twenty-five years I've washed your clothes, Cooked your meals, cleaned your house Given you children, milked the cow After twenty-five years, why talk about love right now?"

Tevye recalled their past, "Golde, The first time I met you Was on our wedding day I was scared She said, "I was shy." He said, "I was nervous." She said, "So was I." Tevye then says, "But my father and my mother Said we'd learn to love each other, and now I'm asking, Golde Do you love me?" Golde says, "I'm your wife." He says, "I know... But do you love me?" Reflecting upon this, Golde says, "Do I love him? For twenty-five years I've lived with him, fought with him, starved with him. Twenty-five years my bed is his. If that's not love, what is?" Tevye concludes, "Then you love me?" She says, "I suppose I do." He says, "And I suppose I love you too." Then, they both sing, "It doesn't change a thing But even so, After twenty-five years, It's nice to know."

The issue between Tevye and his wife is love. Is there a love between them? Do they love each other? There are real questions about their love for each other. There are questions about the character of love.

The issue of our text this morning is similar. It's the issue of love. This text has questions about the reality of God's love. This text has questions about the character of God's love. The LORD declares His love for Israel. Israel doubts God's love for her. And so, the LORD demonstrates the ways in which He has loved Israel.

I invite you to open your Bibles to the book of Malachi. We began our exposition of Malachi last week. This morning, we will continue in our exposition of this book, by looking at verses 2-5. Consider them now, ...

Malachi 1:2-5

"I have loved you," says the LORD. But you say, "How have You loved us?" "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the LORD of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever." Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

This text breaks down nicely into three headings:

1. The Declaration of God's Love (verse 2a)
2. The Doubt of God's Love (verse 2b)
3. The Demonstration of God's Love (verses 2c-5)

Verse 2 begins with ...

1. The Declaration of God's Love (verse 2a)

In this verse, we find God declaring His love for Israel. "I have loved you," says the LORD.

This is a declaration of God's affections for Israel. It's an affirmation of God's favor toward His people. These words describe a commitment that God has for the people of Israel. He will be faithful to them.

Now, if you know anything about the Old Testament, you know of God's steadfast love for Israel. I want to take you on a quick history lesson of the nation of Israel.

The history of Israel began when God chose Abraham out of the Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:31). The Bible never tells us why God chose Abraham, out of a pagan, idolatrous country, to be the object of His great blessing. He just did. I believe that it was to picture God's sovereign, electing grace.

God called Abraham with these words (in Genesis 12:1-3), "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed."

Abraham was 75 years old when he was called. His wife, Sarah, was 65 years old at the time and was barren (Gen. 11:30). It seems incredible, that God would raise up a great nation from a man whose wife was 65 years old and barren. But that is the point. Our God is a powerful God! He gave Sarah a child in such a dramatic fashion that it was no question as to who was working behind the scenes.

After God made this promise to Abraham, God waited 25 years, until Sarah was 90 years old -- far beyond the childbearing years. At that point, Sarah gave birth to a son, who was named, Isaac. God made it clear that the great promises that He had made with Abraham would be carried out through this son: "Through Isaac your descendants shall be named" (Gen. 21:12), not through Ishmael.

God was with Isaac. Though His wife, Rebecca, was also barren, "Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, and the LORD answered him and Rebekah his wife conceived" (Gen. 25:21). She gave birth to twins: Jacob and Esau.

Regarding these two boys, God set His love upon Jacob, choosing to bless him with the promises of Abraham. The promises of the Abrahamic covenant didn't go through Esau. Rather, they came through Jacob, whose name was changed to "Israel" (Gen. 32:26). It was through Jacob that God's promises made to Abraham came to fruition. The twelve tribes of Israel all came from the twelve sons of Jacob. God demonstrated His love for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by blessing them greatly. From Jacob, there grew to be a great nation, consisting of millions of people.

Sadly, four hundred years after the death of Jacob, they found themselves enslaved in Egypt. But, by God's great lovingkindness for them, He delivered them out of their slavery. God didn't deliver them because they were righteous or strong or resourceful. It was because God was expressing His love toward them by choosing to be faithful to the covenant that he made with Abraham to bless the nation that come from his loins (Ex. 2:24).

Eventually, they did come into the land that God had promised to Abraham. Upon arriving, Moses made it very clear to the people why it was that they were privileged to enter into the land. It had nothing to do with their abilities or their power or their own righteousness. Rather, it had to do with God's sovereign choice to love them. Moses pointed this out to them with these words:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

This is the character of God's love. His love is a choosing, faithful love. The faithfulness of God continued to shine through the rest of their history.

After entering the promised land, they soon began to drift away from the LORD. The book of Judges gives the sad testimony of how they would often drift from the LORD, only to be rescued by their loving LORD. Israel would sin by forsaking the LORD, and serving the Baals (Judges 2:11-13). At that point, the anger of the LORD would burn against them. He would give them over into the hands of their enemies (Judges 2:14). At some point, the crisis would get to be so bad that Israel would cry out to the LORD for help (Judges 3:9, 15). And the LORD would demonstrate His love toward them by raising up a judge, who would deliver them from their enemies (Judges 2:16). But, the testimony is that when the judge died, Israel would "turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them" (Judges 2:19).

Through it all, God remained faithful to them, because of His great love for these wayward people. Even though they sinfully asked for a king, rejecting God, their true King (1 Sam. 8:7), God remained faithful to His original covenant with Abraham. He blessed the nation. Eventually, they became a strong and united kingdom, under King David. When David died, the nation was at peace with the surrounding nations. Under the peaceful reign of Solomon, Israel was wealthy enough to build the awesome temple of God.

But, the people drifted again. Shortly after Solomon died, the twelve tribes of Israel split in two. Ten tribes were in the north, called Israel. Two tribes were in the south, called Judah. Israel in the north was eventually destroyed by the Assyrians in 722 B. C., but God preserved His remnant in the south. A hundred and fifty years later, those in Judah were carried off into exile into Babylon. But, God's love was still upon these people, even in the exile.

Jeremiah prophesied of how their mourning would be turned into joy. Though they were in exile in Babylon with great difficulty, the LORD declared to Israel, ...

Jeremiah 31:3-6

I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness. Again I will build you and you will be rebuilt, O virgin of Israel! Again you will take up your tambourines, And go forth to the dances of the merrymakers. Again you will plant vineyards on the hills of Samaria; The planters will plant and will enjoy them. For there will be a day when watchmen on the hills of Ephraim call out, "Arise, and let us go up to Zion, to the LORD our God."

The return of Israel from the exile was a demonstration of God's "everlasting love" toward Israel. The LORD brought them back in such a way

that their return could only be attributed to the working of God. God stirred the heart of a pagan king, named Cyrus, to arise to power and decree that Jerusalem be rebuilt. Listen to the way that the Bible describes how things happened, ...

2 Chronicles 36:22-23

Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia--in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah--the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may the LORD his God be with him, and let him go up!'"

God was sovereignly working so as to insure that His people would come back into the land. And they did. Ultimately, they rebuilt the temple, they rebuilt the city-walls, and they rebuilt the city. God had provided for them everything that they ever needed.

When you understand the history of Israel, you can clearly see the love of God working to preserve and bless His people. But, the one thing that historians always say that we learn from history is that **nobody ever learns from history**. And that's the case in our second point this morning. (1) The Declaration of God's Love, leads to ...

2. The Doubt of God's Love (verse 2b)

When the LORD says, "I have loved you," Israel responds back to the LORD, "How have You loved us?" This was a little bit like the reaction of Golde to Tevye's question, "You have what?"

They didn't understand how great the love of God was. They didn't understand the sweep of history and all that the LORD had done for them, in protecting them, and in keeping them, and in preserving them. They didn't understand God's choice to love them. They didn't understand the character of God's love. Rather, they had forgotten His love! And thus, they doubted God's love.

Now, on the one hand, I don't really blame them. They had experienced great difficulties. Life in Israel wasn't particularly good. I can understand why they had doubts about the love of God.

The exile was a very difficult time for them. The Babylonians came into their land and carried many of them off to Babylon against their will. They were forced to live in a pagan culture. Their joy was gone. Psalm 137 is a great picture of how discouraged they were to be in Babylon. It was composed by those in exile in Babylon. It gives you a bit of the heart of anguish that the people were experiencing.

Psalm 137:1-4

By the rivers of Babylon, There we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion. Upon the willows in the midst of it. We hung our harps. For there our captors demanded of us songs, And our tormentors mirth, saying, "Sing us one of the songs of Zion." 4 How can we sing the LORD's song in a foreign land?

They were in a foreign land, not because they had chosen to immigrate. Rather, they were in a foreign land because they were captured and carried away to that place. They were forced to live there. For 70 years they suffered the anguish of being in a pagan land against their will. Their hearts were in Jerusalem, but they were in Babylon.

Certainly, they could easily have doubted God's love for them. "If we are indeed His people, why are we in a foreign land against our will? If you indeed do love us, why has the LORD allowed these terrible things to come upon us? Hasn't the LORD promised to bless His people? It hardly looks like we are being blessed now!" They didn't understand the character of God's love. They didn't understand the everlasting love of God.

Although those things happened in the previous generation to Malachi's readers, I'm sure that they were fresh on their minds, as their parents would have constantly told them of how difficult it was to live in Babylon. At the time when Malachi was writing his prophecy, they were in the land. God had brought them back to Jerusalem and had blessed them. (1) They had the protection of the Persian government (Ezra 6:12). (2) They were given governmental finances to accomplish the project (Ezra 7:15-18).

You might point to the recent history of things and say, "See? Isn't that a demonstration of God's love?" "Isn't this a fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy that you would again 'take up your tambourines and go forth to the dancer of the merry-makers'" (Jer. 31:4). Doesn't this show you the "everlasting love" of God for you? (Jer. 31:3).

But, things were far from perfect when they were back in the promised land. When the temple was built, it was far from the glory of the temple in Solomon's day. When the foundation was laid, the priests and the Levites and many of the old men who had seen the temple that Solomon built, "wept with a loud voice" (Ezra 3:12). They understood clearly that the glory of the newly built temple seemed as nothing in comparison with the glory of the old temple (Hag. 2:3).

On top of that, sin was in the land (Mal 2:10-16), justice wasn't being upheld (Mal. 2:17) and the worship of God was despised (Mal. 1:6). Things were far from perfect. It's understandable why the people doubted the love of God.

But, isn't this natural for us all? When circumstances in our lives take a turn for the worse, isn't it at those times that our hearts are inclined to doubt the love of God in our lives? If He really loved me, wouldn't He keep these terrible things from happening to me? "If God has promised to bless me as His child, then why are these things happening to me now? Has God's love abandoned me? If He has a favorable disposition from me, why is this happening? Perhaps God doesn't love me."

If you tend toward these thoughts, you need to know and embrace the promises of the New Testament that are made to those who are in Christ. There are two verses in Romans 8 that should be rocks of stability in turbulent times. I have quoted them before. Certainly, I'll quote them again. They need to be rock solid in our minds. You need to embrace them. Romans 8:38-39, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Notice how Paul connects our security in the love of Christ with the difficulties of this life. He isn't saying that difficulties will come. He is affirming the love of Christ in those difficulties. There is nothing in this life that will ever separate us from the love of God. Death is the worst that can happen. Even this won't separate us from Christ. "To live is Christ. To die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). There are no demonic forces that can annul the love that Christ has for you.

There is nothing that can happen in this life than can take the love of Christ away. Your wife might abandon you. Your husband may be killed in a car crash. Your wife may die of cancer. You may lose your job. Your daughter may be diagnosed with leukemia. But, Christ "will never leave you, nor will he ever forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). The love of Christ is that strong.

There is nothing that will ever happen in this life that will remove the love of Christ from you. Certainly there are times of difficulties that come into the life of every believer. But God causes those times of difficulties for our ultimate good. (Rom 8:22). But, the love of Christ will never depart from those who are His.

We ought never to forget the love of God. We ought never to doubt the love of God.

We have seen, (1) The Declaration of God's Love (verse 2a); (2) the Doubt of God's Love (verse 2b). And now, let's turn to our third point this morning, ...

3. The Demonstration of God's Love (verses 2c-5)

In the rest of our passage, we find God demonstrating His love for Israel. Israel had doubted His love. So now, God seeks to prove His love for them. Consider His proof, which begins in the latter half of verse 2, ...

Malachi 1:2c-5

"Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau, and I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness." Though Edom says, "We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins"; thus says the LORD of hosts, "They may build, but I will tear down; and men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever." Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"

He begins His proof with a simple restatement of the reality of His love. "I have loved Jacob" (verse 2). At this point in our text, God doesn't dwell upon how He loved Jacob. He doesn't begin by with proof as to how He loved Jacob. He merely re-states the point, "I have loved Jacob" (verse 2).

Should God have wanted to, He certainly could have traced the history of Israel and demonstrated the many, many ways in which He showed His love to Israel. He had 1,600 years of evidence from which He could pull. Perhaps his explanation would have sounded much like my first point this morning. He could have begun at the beginning, by tracing the blessing from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob. Then, He could have explained His faithfulness in delivering Israel from slavery in Egypt. God could have outlined His care for Israel through the period of the judges. They were straying, but God was faithful to love them. God could have demonstrated His love through the times of the united kingdom, the divided kingdom, the exile and return.

But, the LORD chose not to do this in these verses. Rather, He simply restates His love for Jacob. "I have loved Jacob" (verse 2). And then, the LORD brings up Esau in verse 3, with these words: "but I have hated Esau."

At this point, some will seek to soften the effect of these words. It seems quite harsh to them to say that God actually hated somebody. And so, they will say that God loved both Jacob and Esau. But, that these words merely indicate that God loved Esau less.

But, such an interpretation doesn't do justice to other Scriptures, which clearly indicate God's hatred toward all of those who walk in wickedness. Psalm 5:5, "You hate all who do iniquity." Psalm 11:5, "The LORD tests the righteous and the wicked, and the one who loves violence His soul hates." The Scripture is clear: there are people who God hates. And it cannot be more clear than here in Malachi 1:3, "I have hated Esau."

Furthermore, any attempt to soften these words doesn't do justice to the context in which these words are found. Look at how God describes His perspective toward Esau and the resulting nation that came from his loins. "I have made his mountains a desolation and appointed his inheritance for the jackals of the wilderness" (verse 3). In other words, God was proactive in making sure that Esau's place of habitation would be barren. God made his mountains to be desolate. God made the sun to beat hard upon the land. God prohibited the rain to fall. God stopped the plants from growing. God made sure that the inheritance of Esau would only be fit for jackals, who were adept at surviving the difficulties of the dry, hot, wilderness life. Notice that this is God's active hand against Esau and his descendants. He is determining the weather, which makes living in Edom more difficult.

Verse 4 continues on the theme, "Though Edom says, 'We have been beaten down, but we will return and build up the ruins'; thus says the LORD of hosts, 'They may build, but I will tear down.'" Please catch what the LORD is saying. The LORD makes the land desolate. He brings

other nations against them to destroy them. Then the LORD supposes that some of the descendents of Esau (named Edom), confessing that they have been beaten down. But, they haven't taken their defeat lightly. They, themselves, say, "We won't give up. We will return again. We will restore the ruins of our inheritance. We will build them up again. We will dwell in our territory." But God says this: "They may build, but I will tear down." This is the active hand of God against them, and it's not pleasant.

From time to time, my son, SR, spends a great deal of effort in making a fine creation with his Lego pieces. And then, along comes Stephanie, our 3½ year old, who wants to play with this fine creation. But, instead, she ends up dropping it or breaking it or messing with it in some way. For SR, this isn't pleasant. He has spent many hours in creating this masterpiece. And, along comes Stephanie, who begins to ruin it.

This is the very thing that the LORD says that He will do with Edom. "They may build, but I will tear down." Try as they might to build themselves up, they will always fail, because God will make them fail. Stephanie, in her immaturity, may break SR's Lego creation by accident. But God is intentional about His destruction of Edom. Why? Because of His love for Jacob and His hatred for Esau.

Verse 4 continues on, "men will call them the wicked territory, and the people toward whom the LORD is indignant forever." These words speak about the reputation that Edom will forever have. Edom will forever be known as "the wicked territory." Edom will forever be known as the people that God hates and opposes. This is the clear teaching of these words. Malachi isn't the only prophet to make these things known. There are many others who prophesy against Edom. (For further study, you could read the following verses: Is. 11:14; 34:5-6; Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:15; Joel 3:19; Amos 1:11; and Obadiah).

At this point, we need to step back and ask ourselves, "How do these words demonstrate God's love for Israel?" After all, this is the question on the table. God had declared His love for Israel (verse 2a). Israel had doubted God's love (verse 2b). And now, God was demonstrating His love (verses 2c-5). At first glance, it doesn't look like God is trying to prove how He much loves Israel. It appears that God is trying to prove how much He hates Esau.

These are many Scriptures that connect the destruction of Edom with the way that they treated the nation of Israel. Here are a few of them.

Ezekiel 25:12-14

Thus says the Lord GOD, "Because Edom has acted against the house of Judah by taking vengeance, and has incurred grievous guilt, and avenged themselves upon them," therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "I will also stretch out My hand against Edom and cut off man and beast from it And I will lay it waste; from Teman even to Dedan they will fall by the sword. **I will lay My vengeance on Edom by the hand of My people Israel.** Therefore, they will act in Edom according to My anger and according to My wrath; thus they will know My vengeance," declares the Lord GOD.

Ezekiel 35:14-15

Thus says the Lord GOD, "As all the earth rejoices, I will make you a desolation. As you rejoiced over the inheritance of the house of Israel because it was desolate, so I will do to you. You will be a desolation, O Mount Seir, and all Edom, all of it. Then they will know that I am the LORD."

Joel 3:19-21

Edom will become a desolate wilderness, because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood. But Judah will be inhabited forever, and Jerusalem for all generations. And I will avenge their blood which I have not avenged, for the LORD dwells in Zion.

Amos 1:11

Thus says the LORD, "For three transgressions of Edom and for four, I will not revoke its punishment, because **he pursued his brother with the sword.**"

Obadiah 10

Because of violence to your brother Jacob, you will be covered with shame, and you will be cut off forever.

In many ways, all of these prophecies relate back to Genesis 12:3, "I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse." Edom had cursed the land of Israel, by opposing it. God's faithful love to Abraham and the children of the promise demanded that He respond with a corresponding curse against Edom. In this way, God was demonstrating His love.

You might think of God's love toward Israel like a husband's love for his wife. Upon the altar, the promise is often made, "Forsaking all others, I will love only you. To death do us part." What makes a husband's love so special? It is selective. It has chosen one woman to love until death. A husband's love isn't magnified when he has love for other women, is it? When a man says, "I have such a love that I love ALL women," he is not viewed as a great man of love. That's because a man's love for a woman is exalted when it is selective!

Suppose that a man was committed to love his wife. But, along comes another man who defiles his wife in one way or another. Perhaps they run off together. What will a man of selective love do? He will be enraged in righteous anger for what was his that has now been taken from him. That's what is taking place here in Malachi. God has demonstrated His love for Edom in righteous vindication against another who has touched the apple of His eye.

But, there is another reason why God points out His hatred of Esau when trying to show his love for Jacob. It has to do with the phrase that I skipped in verse 2, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?"

This brings us back to the very beginnings of the nation of Israel. It brings us back to the days of Isaac and Rebekah. As I told you earlier,

Rebekah was pregnant with twins. One was Jacob and the other was Esau. Before they were born, Rebekah notices that the "children struggled together within her" (Gen. 25:22). She didn't think that this was quite normal, so she sought the LORD, who said to her, "Two nations are in your womb; And two peoples will be separated from your body; And one people shall be stronger than the other; And the older shall serve the younger." (Gen. 25:23).

Eventually, these two brothers would be the fathers of two nations (Gen. 25:23). Jacob became the father of Israel. Esau became the father of Edom. God was for Israel. God was against Edom. Of these people, the LORD says, "I have loved Jacob; but I have hated Esau" (verses 2c-3a). In other words, God set His blessing upon Jacob. But, God set His cursing upon Esau. God would love Israel, but would hate Edom.

You might be inclined to ask at this point, "Why did God reverse things like this?" It sounds strange to our ears. It's normally the older who gains preeminence. In the Old Testament, a double inheritance was promised to the firstborn. But, in this case, it's the younger who will gain preeminence. "The older shall serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23).

The question comes up at this point, "Why?" "Why did God do this?"

The key to this question comes in Romans 9, in which Paul quotes this verse from Malachi, along with Genesis 25:23, which says, "the older shall serve the younger." In the context of these verses in Romans, Paul is explaining how it wasn't all of Abraham's descendants who were to be the recipients the blessings of the covenant (Rom. 9:7). It was through Isaac, and not Ishmael that the promises would come (Rom. 9:7). Then, his argument continues to discuss Jacob and Esau. We pick up Paul's argument in verse 10, ...

Romans 9:10-13

And not only this, but there was Rebekah also, when she had conceived twins by one man, our father Isaac; for though the twins were not yet born and had not done anything good or bad, so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls, it was said to her, "the older will serve the younger" [Gen. 25:23]. Just as it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" [Mal. 1:2-3].

Regarding the twins, God chose Jacob, and not Esau. Verses 10 and 11 make it very clear that it didn't have anything to do with them. They had the same father (i. e. conceived "by one man", Rom. 9:10). They had the same mother (i. e. they were twins, Rom. 9:10). In fact, they were womb-mates.

But, notice how Paul makes it very clear that God's choice came before the twins were born, and (Rom. 9:11). God's choice came before they had done anything good or bad (Rom. 9:11). Notice how Paul also makes it clear that God's choice was "not because of works" (Rom. 9:11). It wasn't because of anything that Jacob or Esau had done. Nor was it because God looked down the corridor of time and knew that Jacob was going to be a better man. Rather it was, "so that God's purpose according to His choice would stand" (verse 11). Or, as many other versions say, "so that God's purpose of election might continue."

In other words, the manner in which God chose the younger over the older was with a purpose (i.e. "so that") God's purpose was to make it clear that His decree to love Jacob, but hate Esau came long before they made any choices of their own. The LORD wanted for it to be clear to all who saw what was happening with Jacob and Esau, that it was "because of Him who calls" (Romans 9:11b). Why did God love Jacob, but hate Esau? Because God chose to love Jacob, and God chose to hate Esau.

We are now at a point where we can get back to our text in Malachi with the question: "How does God's antagonism toward Edom demonstrate His love for Israel?" Here's why we all deserve to go the way of Edom. We all deserve to be under the wrath and anger of God. We all deserve to be hated by God. But, God shows His love for us when he doesn't give us what we deserve.

As God's hand was against the wickedness of Esau it would remind them of the fate that they should have experienced themselves. Israel certainly deserved to be treated like Edom. But, in God's selecting love of Israel, they didn't get what they deserved. Rather, they became recipients of His undeserved, unmerited, blessing.

Earlier in my message, I made the statement that the Old Testament might easily be described as a book that explains of God's great love for Israel. The way that this love demonstrates itself is when Israel is particularly undeserving of this love.

Don't suppose that Jacob was more lovable than Esau. Because, he wasn't. Jacob was a deceiver (Gen. 25:26). He deceived Esau out of his birthright (Gen. 25:27-34). He deceived Esau out of his blessing (Gen. 27). If God's love were based upon the character of Jacob and Esau, it wouldn't be Jacob who would be loved. It would be Esau.

Don't suppose that Israel was more righteous than all of the other nations. Because, they weren't. After being delivered from Egypt through the mighty hand of God, it seems as if all they could do was complain. When they finally escaped the clutches of Pharaoh, they came upon bitter water. They grumbled at Moses, saying, "What shall we drink?" Miraculously, God sweetened the water. Upon arriving in the wilderness, they were hungry. And so, they grumbled against Moses and Aaron (Ex. 16:2). They expressed their wish that they had died in Egypt, rather than starve in the desert (Ex. 16:3). God was gracious and gave them Manna to eat (Ex. 16:13-15). Following this episode, the Israelites quarreled with Moses because they had nothing to drink (Ex. 17:1-2). God was gracious and provided them water.

Moses was upon the mountain, receiving the law, the people were down below making for themselves a golden calf to worship (Ex. 32). This idolatry was so blatantly evil. They rejected God after countless displays of His grace and glory that God was so angry, that He was ready to destroy them. It was only when Moses stood in the gap to remind God of His covenant with them that His wrath subsided. Moses said, "Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants to whom You swore by Yourself, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and all this land of which I have spoken, I will give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" (Ex. 32:13)

When they took over the land, they were not to forget that it wasn't because they were so righteous that they were able to enter the land. Moses said, "Do not say in your heart when the LORD your God has driven them out before you, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land,' but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD is dispossessing them before you. It is not for your righteousness or for the uprightness of your heart that you are going to possess their land, but it is because of the wickedness of these nations that the LORD your God is driving them out before you, in order to confirm the oath which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob."

It was only by the power and grace of God, that the Jews entered into the land. It had nothing to do with their righteousness. In fact, they demonstrated that they were entirely unworthy of His love.

Why did God set His love upon Israel? It was only because the LORD chose to love them. God disposed His favor upon them, by His sovereign choice of them. He was faithful to that choice, like a loyal husband.

Should you spend a few moments reflecting upon your own life, you will come to the same conclusion about God's love for you. There is no reason why God should place His love upon you. To be sure, all of us are His creation (every single one of you). But, like Israel, all of us like sheep have gone astray (Is. 53:6). Like Israel, we have complained against the Lord. Like Israel, we have gone our own way and have rebelled against the LORD.

As a result, the Bible says that we became His enemies (Rom. 5:10), fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23), and have become children of wrath (Ephesians 2:3). That's the language of the New Testament, not the Old Testament. But, it was then that God demonstrated His great love for us. Romans 5:8 says, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Two verses later, Paul points out that it was while we were enemies that we were reconciled to God. It's when we are dead in our sins that God, "being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ." (Eph 2:4-5)

And so, I ask you this morning, If you are a believer in Christ, why did God set His love upon you? The only answer that you can give is that it was His amazing grace, that chose to set His love upon you. And when you realize that you are only in Christ because He chose you, you come to see the love of God in an entirely different light. His love was so great that it rescued you from hell, where you would have been, were it not for the sovereign hand of God to give you eyes to see the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4).

I remember hearing the story of a preacher who was preaching to many out in the open air. Off in the distance, there was a parade, leading a man to his death by hanging for a crime he had committed. The preacher pointed to the man and commented, "But by the grace of God, there go I." This is the story of our lives. It is only by the grace of God that any of us receive favor, rather than curse.

When you come to embrace the truth of the sovereign election of God in your life, it will transform you. You will be humbled, because you know that your salvation didn't come from you. It came from Him! Faith is a gift of God (Eph. 2:8-9). Repentance is a gift from God (Acts 11:18; 2 Tim. 2:25). Embracing this truth will make you thankful, because you know that you deserved hell, but got heaven. You will be joyful, because you know what awaits you in glory. You will be secure, because you know that your salvation began with God, and will end with God, keeping you until the end.

Finally, you will be a worshiper of Him. This is how our text ends, "Your eyes will see this and you will say, 'The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel.'" Israel will know that they should have gone the way of Edom and faced the consequences of their own sin like he faced his sin. But, alas, they were shown grace! It will drive the Israelites (and those beyond her borders) to worship the LORD. Are you a worshiper of Him? Do you love to sing His praise? Do you love to honor Him? Is He your delight and your joy? Do you willingly give all to Him?

If you are not, it just may be the case that you have forgotten the love of God. Oh, church family, "Don't Forget His Love!"

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 25, 2007 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.
