

LOVING JESUS, LOVING PEOPLE, PLOWING A COUNTER-CULTURE

TEXT: Malachi 1:2–5

MAIN IDEA: God's love is displayed in the cross, not in our circumstances.

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Aside from Community Groups, the other big way we do discipleship at our church is through serving. Not only do we worship Jesus through singing, prayer, the preaching of the Word of God, and giving, but we also worship by serving one another and making sure that everyone who comes is blessed by being among God's people. **If you're looking to serve**, one way to have an incredible impact is in our children's ministry—**eTown** for birth through 2nd grade, as well as **3rd and 45th Street**, for 3rd–5th grade. You can sign up for more info by selecting the "serve" option under the "connect" drop-down menu on our website (emergence.church).
- Calling all families with children 5 years old or younger! We will be having a **Family Dedication service on October 23 and 26**. This is where families have the opportunity to formally pledge to raise their kids to know and love Jesus, and where we, as a church, commit to come alongside them to share that awesome privilege with them. Sign up on the Digital Bulletin.
- The **Student Ministry Fall Fest** we be held on October 29 at our Totowa campus. We've got games, we've got music, and most importantly ... we've got the gospel. No need to register; if you're a student in middle or high school, just show up!
- Our **Student Ministry's Winter Retreat** is happening this year from **February 20–22** (okay, I guess that's next year :-/). This winter, we'll be rocking out at High Point Bible Camp in Pennsylvania. This is a great way for our teens to connect with each other, their leaders, and the Lord. Sign up on the Digital Bulletin.

GETTING STARTED:

- Watch this week's Community Extras Video.
- **Optional Icebreaker:** What is the greatest board game ever, and why haven't you played it with your group?

In 586 BC, God judged the people of Judah for their sin by giving their kingdom to the king of Babylon and sending them into exile. About 47 years later, in 539, Babylon itself fell to the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great, who allowed the Judeans to return to their land and rebuild their temple, as his loyal subjects.

What God's people experienced in the years that followed fell far short of the glorious kingdom the prophets had promised. Surrounded by enemies who attempted to frustrate their plans to rebuild at every turn, the people of Yehud (the Persian name for Judah) were forced to rely heavily on the goodwill of successive Persian emperors. Many of the sinful practices that led them to

judgment decades ago once again began to threaten their relationship with God. Debt grew rampant, leading their nobles and officials to seize the property of poorer landowners and enslave them (Neh 5:1–13). They neglected the temple and those who served there (Neh 10:32–39; 13:4–14). The Sabbath became a day for business and trading, rather rest and worship (Neh 13:15–22). And intermarriage between Judeans and the surrounding peoples who worshiped other gods became common, even among the priests and the Levites (Ezra 9–10; Neh 13:23–27).

Jacob I Loved

Much of Malachi is framed as a dialogue between God and his people. Questions that display Judah's spiritual obliviousness are scattered throughout chapters 1–3, introduced by the simple phrase, "but you say ..." (Mal 1:2, 6, 7, 13; 2:14, 17; 3:7, 8, 13).

Read Malachi 1:1–5.



Why is it significant that God begins this book by saying, "I have loved you," rather than starting with a rebuke?



What does Judah's response in verse 2 reveal about how God's people are thinking about God?



What things in life have you experienced that have caused the same kind of spiritual nearsightedness as Judah displays in his response to God?



☺ The people of Judah are having a hard time seeing that God loves them. Throughout Malachi, it becomes clear that this is because God has shown His displeasure with their sin by withholding blessings (e.g., 2:13; 3:9). Does God still work this way in the lives of Christians? Why or why not?



☺ In the sermon, Ryan described how God "wrestled Jacob down" to make him surrender to his new identity and to get him to leave his sinful past behind (Gen 32:22–32). Can you share a time when God pursued or "wrestled" with you to bring you closer to him?

Esau I Hated

Pastor Ryan noted that the Bible sometimes speaks of hate in relative, not absolute terms. In such places, "hate" refers to something having far less preference and priority, rather than the strong emotional contempt that we associate with the word. Of his two wives, Jacob preferred Rachel over Leah. And so, we are told that he "hated" Leah (Gen 29:18; 29:33), even though throughout the story he remains married to her, has several children with her, and provides for and protects her as a faithful husband her whole life.

Leaders: Other biblical examples of this can be found in Deuteronomy 21:15–17; Judges 14:16; Proverbs 13:24; Luke 14:26; and John 12:25.

Leaders: In discussing this passage, keep in mind that Esau is the brother of Jacob, and Edom is the ancient nation-state that he founded.



What can we say about the reason why God showed more love to Jacob than to Esau?



Does God's preference for Jacob over Esau mean that all Esau's descendants are inevitably consigned to hell?

Leaders: No, God's judgment on a people as a whole does not imply that every person in that nation is doomed for eternity. For example, in all likelihood, Job was an Edomite. In the final judgment, people will stand before God as individuals.

Heart Surgery

Ryan suggested five diagnostic questions that this passage forces us to ask.

First, "Am I judging God's love based on my circumstances or on the cross?"



What difference would it make in your daily outlook if you consistently judged God's love for you based on the cross, rather than your circumstances?

Second, "Do I spend more time thankful for God's grace, or in comparison to others?"



Why is it foolish to compare yourself to other people?

Third, "Do I blame God for stuff that isn't his fault?"



Here we are being urged to acknowledge that many of the problems we have are the consequences of our sin. Does it follow that we can therefore *blame* God for the other bad things that happen to us? Why or why not?

Fourth, "When I reflect on the last year, am I better at seeing my problems or God's grace on display?"



Think of a problem you have encountered within the last year. How can a focus on God's grace transform the way that problem affects you?

Fifth, "Do I spend more time complaining than rejoicing?"



God begins this book by telling his people, "I have loved you." Rather than rejoicing in that, they respond by asking, "Oh really? How?" Their sad situation has eclipsed their ability to see God's goodness. How would you minister to someone who is experiencing this?

PRAYER TIME

Praise God that he loves you.

Pray that God would help you see past the negative things in your life to the cross.

Pray that God would give you an opportunity this week to share the truths you learned with others.