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 Text: Malachi 1:1-16
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 Preacher: Stephen Taylor

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It is easy to get disillusioned when you think you are putting in the hard yards & you are not getting the returns you think you should be getting. You are being constantly let down by the system or by others. Many of you will know that I badly injured my knee about 2 years ago. Since then, I have been doing my exercises & my gym work faithfully in preparation for an operation that should have come by now but hasn't. Its relatively easy to do it at the start, its harder to keep on doing what is right when you feel it is getting you nowhere.

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It is not just my knee though. What about that diet you have started and now seem to be getting nowhere? How about that attempt to discipline your kids? What about all that extra time you did at work or at uni or on your marriage and it doesn't seem to have made any difference. It is easy to get disillusioned with life.

And the people of Israel are disillusioned with their lives and especially with their relationship with God. They had been in exile in Babylon and God had brought them home giving them a second chance. And when they came home there was so much enthusiasm! So they had started to rebuild their country and the new Temple had been constructed and they went back to worship and they thought this would be the start of a new golden age. But it wasn't. And they became disillusioned. So when we come to the last book of the OT, Malachi we see they answer back to God at every opportunity. They are not happy Jan.

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So God sends them a prophecy, a further chance to lift up their eyes away from what is going on so that they can see how great their God is and what God's ultimate plans for them are going to be. So the word of the Lord came to Israel through Malachi around 450BC. And in God's provision this was going to be the last word from Him for 480 years. The last word until Jesus came announcing the Kingdom of God is at hand.

So, what is God going to say to those who are disillusioned with life and with Him? How will God treat those who are just going through the motions? Well, he doesn't begin by saying what the people of Israel should be doing or should have done. Instead, he talks about what God has done. Because God is a God of grace, he is a God who has always loved them.

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1. Grace (verses 2-5)

² "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, ³ but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals."

Those who are disillusioned with life. Those who are ready to give up on God. Those who are going through the motions of worship first and foremost need a reminder that God loves them. I have loved you, says the Lord. Think about it. I was the one who chose Abraham and sent him into the promised land and I promised to bless the world through Him and his descendants. And I was the one who choose Jacob even though he was the younger twin.

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And I was the one who choose to work through Jacob's descendants even when all they were was a bunch of slaves in Israel. And I was the one who brought them out of Egypt, who gave them my commandments and brought them into the promised land. And then He explains His motives for choosing them. *"It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set His love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all the peoples. But it is because the Lord loves you."* (Deuteronomy 7:7-8)

"I have loved you", God says. But they push back on him. "Well, that doesn't look like the case to me? You say, you love me but that doesn't square with my experience. Look here, God we are weak group of people ruled by a more powerful nation. We are submerged under the waves of worry, anxiety, pain, trouble and it seems you are doing nothing about it. So, tell us, how have you love us? Prove it! Because I don't feel the love at the moment!"

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Well look around you, says God. I choose Jacob in the beginning not Esau. Reflect on the history of the two great nations that came from those two men, Edom and Israel. Israel has been given yet another chance to get things right, not just a second chance but a second hundredth chance and Edom is still in ruins.

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⁴*"Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. ⁵You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!'"* You want proof? Look no further than the fact that I love Jacob and have hated Esau. I choose Jacob and have left Esau to his own devices.

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Now that is striking language isn't. "I loved Jacob but Esau I hated." Now as you can imagine there is a lot of conjecture over what this means. But let me take you to the NT to Luke 14, where Jesus uses the same words because I think it might help us here. ⁵*"Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, & (he said) ²⁶"If anyone comes to me & does not hate father & mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. ²⁷And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."*

Jesus point here is not that we hate our family but in comparison to our love for Jesus it will look like hate. If you are willing to carry Jesus' cross then that means you are not always putting the interests of your family #1 & it will look like hatred. And that is the way that God loves Jacob and hates Esau. But even then I still think we have trouble with this verse!

A minister sat in the vestry of his church listening to a parishioner. The man said "I have a difficulty with Romans 9 where it says 'Jacob have I loved but Esau have I hated.'" Yes, said the minister, there is a great difficulty in that verse but which part of the verse is difficult for you?" "The latter part of course" said the man. I cannot understand why God should hate Esau." The minister replied, "My difficult has always been with the first part. I never could understand how God could love that wily, deceitful, supplanting scoundrel Jacob!"

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It is astonishing that God loves Jacob or Israel or you and I for that matter. And yet "God so loved the world that gave them his one and only son". Amazing. Its amazing grace. Because

he doesn't have to love anyone. And yet God loves these people not based on their performance or their past or their position or their power. But purely because of his own prerogative. God choose them because he loved them. Pure and simple.

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And if you find it amazing that God would love Israel it is even more amazing that he would love us. For we are no better. But the New Testament tells us again and again that we are loved. *"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us that we should be called the children of God."* That's how great is God's love in that he adopted us and made us his children. His very own sons and daughters. As Philip Yancy once said *"there is nothing we can do to make God love us more and there is nothing we can do to make Him love us less."*

Yet so often you and I are blind to this love. We get disappointed with God & disillusioned with life. And so what God wants to say firstly to his people are "You are loved!" I am a God of grace, who chooses the unlovely in order to lavish my love upon them. And that sort of love and that sort of grace demands a response & in Malachi we see that Israel's response is

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2. Greed (verses 6-14)

And this greed, this self centred attention firstly shows itself in a lack of honour and respect ⁶ *"A son honours his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty.* If it is the right thing to honour your father where is your honour to the one who has fathered your nation? And if the right thing is to respect your boss where is the respect due to the boss of the whole world? But if it is bad enough that this is how the people are responding to the love of God, it is even worse that the leaders, the priests are doing it as well!

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"It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' " ⁷ *"By offering defiled food on my altar."* The leaders are showing contempt to God by giving God their leftovers. By offering to God what is second best. *"But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "* ⁸ *"By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. "* ⁸ *When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong?"*

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Now remember that when the Israelites were offering sacrifices to God some of those sacrifices were the way that God had instructed them to respond to their sin and to look for forgiveness from their sin. So how bizarre to offer a crippled sacrifice when looking for forgiveness of your sin. And other sacrifices were thank offerings, thanking God for all that He has done for you and to you so how bizarre to give God a second rate offering in thankfulness, when God has given you first rate blessings. How bizarre!

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"Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty"

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Try going to the queen with a bunch of flowers that you had got cut price from Woollies because they had begun to wilt! Guys, sacrifice means sacrifice. What is in your hands is a reflection of what is in your heart. You are just being greedy wanting to keep the best for yourself and only giving God the rest.

I wonder if we ever do something similar today? In response to his love for me, in reply to the amazing grace that saved a wretch like me I wonder if I will only give God my worship on

any Sunday that I don't have any thing else to do! I will give him what's left over in my wallet after I have paid for all my other expenses. I will serve my fellow Christians when I can carve out an hour or two in my busy schedule. We wouldn't give God our left overs would we? We block off Sunday morning every Sunday, we decide what we are giving to God first of all, we arrange our lives so that God gets the best bits of time wouldn't we?

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But it gets even worse for the Israelites. ¹² *"But you profane it by saying, 'The Lord's table is defiled,' and, 'Its food is contemptible.'* ¹³ *And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD."*

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Worship has become a burden. Do I really have to offer that sacrifice this weekend? Do I really have to go to Bible Study or Church or lead Kid's Church? God was becoming ho hum to them. They were bored with coming into God's presence. They had lost their sense of awe and fear and worship and instead have become caught up with meaningless ritualism and symbolism and predictability.

It reminds me of the story of the man who was having a hard time getting out of bed one Sunday morning. "Get up. Its time to get ready for Church" his wife said and he just grumbled "I don't want to go to church today. Those people at church don't like me. I don't want to go." His wife persisted, "you have to go." To which he responded, "Give me three good reasons why I should go?" She answered, "Because its Sunday, I'm your wife and I'm going and besides you're the pastor. Now get up!"

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And lastly the Israelites had begun to cheat God. ¹⁴ *"Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations."* They had promised to give their sacrifices to God but when they finally got around to it, they found a cut price option. And if a sacrifice doesn't cost you much it is not much of a sacrifice, is it?

So why is this such a big deal to God? Why does he demand the best of the flocks? Why does he expect reverence and awe? Why does he want people to make these sorts of sacrifices? Because he has loved them. He has showered his grace upon them. And our worship is an acknowledgment of that. It is a thermostat that shows whether the rest of our lives are hot or cold, faithful or unfaithful. And so your ability to respect God and to honour God and to worship God and make sacrifices to God Is a good indication of whether you really are responding to the love of God by loving him in return.

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God is a God of grace and if we are being greedy in return. Thankless. Bored. Burdened by his demands then it is like an engine without a spark plug. Nothing is going to happen. And that is a danger that we can all have. We just go through the motions with Church. We give God our leftovers. We say things with our lips but our lives say something completely different. And if that is you this morning, remember that God loves you. God has chosen you. God has set his grace upon you. Meditate on that. Ponder how amazing that is. Ask Him to warm your soul. Allow His Spirit to speak to our inner desires. Because Malachi goes on to say that God would prefer no worship than if we were to give him worthless worship.

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¹⁰ *"Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands."* God tells his people, "Better to give no offering that to give me something that costs you nothing. Better not to go to Church than come and just go through the motions. Better not to pray at all than just parrot a prayer that means nothing to you. Better to not read the Bible than to see it as a chore or a burden."

Now that is pretty radical. For in the OT making your sacrifices was **the way** that you could have your sins forgiven. It was **the way** that you could open yourselves up to God's grace. And so to stop worshiping God was removing oneself out of the presence of God and away from the opportunity to receive forgiveness. But generations of people have affiliated themselves with God's people, they have said I am a Jew, I am a Christian, I am a Presbyterian and that has made them think that means I am OK. I go to Church regularly. I give to the Lord. And so God owes me something. And Malachi 1 is telling us God owes us nothing! So we have grace, greed and then thirdly

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3. Great. (verses 5, 11, 14)

Look how our passage ends, verse 14, *"For I am a **great** king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations."* God is great! And it is almost an echo, a chorus that reverberates throughout the whole passage. Look back to verse 5. ⁵ *"You will see it with your own eyes and say, '**Great** is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!'"* And again, in verse 11, *"My name will be **great** among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be **great** among the nations," says the LORD Almighty."*

Worship is a chore? Remember God is great. Don't want to make any sacrifices? Don't forget God is a great king. Going through the motions, well look around you. God is worshipped everywhere. God is praised by every nation and every tongue. Because God is great. And it is not just because he loved you. And it is not just because he choose you. And it is just because of his grace. God is great because when God's people continually gave God their second best God continued to give them his very best.

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God sent us his son, the lamb of God without spot or blemish. The overwhelming proof of God's love is that he has not treated us as our sins deserve but has had mercy on us in Christ Jesus and sent him as a sacrifice to take away the punishment our sins deserved. How does Paul put it in Romans 5? *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."*

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You get that. Let's add that into the equation, lets include that in our passage this morning. "I have loved you, says the Lord." But we ask God, how have you loved us? For God so loved the world, he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life." John 3:16. That's how much God loves us. So don't make the mistakes that Israel made and just go through the motions of faith. Don't treat God as a hobby or a habit. He is the great King who loves you. And the one who should be feared among the nations.

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4. Grace, Greed, Great and finally Grateful.

How do you respond to a great king who had chosen you and loved you this much? This much? Well, we have a choice don't we?

We have a choice whether we will honour God as our heavenly Father. A child listens to his father's word but do we listen to God's word, really listen to it? Can we remember anything from our time with God yesterday? Or was there no time for God yesterday? Will we try and remember what God is saying to us today? We have a choice this morning to listen to the God who loves us or treat him with dishonour & ignore what he is trying to say to us today.

We have a choice this morning whether we are going to make meaningful sacrifices. We can give him our best this morning or just our leftovers. We can be attentive to the needs of others. We can look to serve those around us. We can find ways to encourage others or we can concentrate on our own needs and wants.

We have a choice over whether we will find worship a burden or not. Will you concentrate on that missed note, that problem with the computer, that noisy child, that hassle to sit so far away from others or will you dive deeply into prayer & sing with gusto to our great King or notice that person who is not here and go home and give them a ring or speak to that person on their own over morning tea and seek to care for them in a way only you can do?

You see you might feel disillusioned with God or Church or yourself but the great king, the one who is full of grace & mercy has reminded us today that he loves us. And that has got to get our hearts pumping and the adrenalin flowing. We are loved. God could have read us the riot act. God could have listed all the things that we are doing wrong. But he hasn't gone down that path at all has he? He loves us & that sort of love should change everything. It will make us trust Him and follow him and really want to live lives of worship to him.

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Let me end with the story of the young girl who worked hard and saved up enough money to buy an imitation pearl necklace at the local store and she then carried her pearls with her wherever she went. Her dad would speak to her each night before she would go to sleep and say "Jenny, do you love me?" "Oh yes Daddy, I love you." "Then give me your pearls." "Oh Daddy not my pearls." Night after night the same conversation took place until one time, Jenny said with tears in her eyes, "Here Daddy you can have them."

The Father accepted the gift with his left hand and at the same time with his right hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and he gave them to Jenny. He had them all the time, he was just waiting for her to give up the imitation so he could give her the genuine treasure.

Our heavenly Father does the same things with us. He says, "I love you. Now do you love me? You do? Then don't give me your leftovers, give me your best, give me your life. Trust me. And when we acknowledge that love and trust in that love. Then we realise what we have given back to him is just fake pearls compared to what he has and will give to us in Christ Jesus.