

## Malachi #1 - Learn to Love

- All right, here we are, it's time for Christmas. How many of you are feeling the pressure, time to get ready? As we're getting everything ready for Christmas, you get your list ready, you get your house ready, you get your travel plans ready. Also need to get your heart ready to prepare the Christmas season. And I was, I was thinking, how do we prepare our hearts to receive the gift of the Lord Jesus in this holiday season? And there's actually a book of the Bible that is written to prepare people for the first Christmas. So the last book of the Old Testament is written to prepare people for the first Christmas. It's God's final word to prepare people for the coming of Jesus. And then there is 400 years of silence. And so it is God's way of saying, "Jesus is coming, prepare your hearts." And then we pick up the story with the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament. And when you have final instructions for someone, you know that they are important. So before your child gets married, whatever you tell them, before they walk down the aisle, that's important. Whatever they tell you at your graduation ceremony, as they commission you into the world, that's important. If you're a soldier being deployed into the field, whatever your final instructions are, that's important. Whatever a coach would say during halftime at a football game, before you take the field to close strong, that is important. The Book of Malachi is God's final words, His final instructions, the last book of the Bible written, preparing everyone for the coming of Jesus. It's God's final word for the first Christmas. So we're gonna spend about six weeks studying it together. You can read it in about 15 minutes. I would encourage you to read it frequently, and you could just be prepared every week. We'll start this week in Malachi 1:1. And here's how the story begins. The oracle of the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. And so it is to God's people. They are collectively called Israel. This would be the old covenant people of God in the church family. God, ultimately, is the one speaking. He is the Lord, and then the messenger, the one who is delivering the mail, this man's name is Malachi. Now a little bit here, this little word, oracle, some of your translations might call it a burden. What this means is that God has a burden on His heart. God is burdened for His people, God is burdened for His children, God is burdened for relationship. And so Malachi is going to reveal the father heart of God, and it is His intent to build a relationship with you, so that you have a healthy relationship with Him. And then also with family and also with friends. And that's where Malachi is going. So God has a burden for His people and relationship, and health for them, and as a result, He has a word to them. So God cares and God speaks. And ultimately when God speaks, it is the Word of the Lord. Now this is significant, because this book is unlike any other book that has been or will ever be written, that there are lots of words about God, philosophy, religion, speculation. This is not a word about God, this is the Word of God, and when we open it, we receive a word from God. This is very important because what he is claiming is this is the Word of the Lord. So, as God is communicating to us, you are hearing from God, you are receiving a message, a revelation, an instruction from God as you open this word. And it's interesting as well, the man who delivers it, he is the mailman, his name is Malachi. And in chapter three, verse one, we are told that his name literally means messenger. Some of the commentaries will say, maybe this is a personal name, maybe it is not a personal name, maybe it is just his job description. I think it's both. For example, my last name

was O'Driscoll till we dropped the O, we're Irish. And it literally means, O'Driscoll literally means messenger of God. It means a preacher, a communicator of God's truth and Word. So God knew that He would call me to be a preacher of His Word, and He named me in such a way to prepare me for the future that He destined for me. I believe God does the same thing with Malachi. His name means messenger, and that is his appointed duty and responsibility in the sight of God to be a messenger. All of that, to say, when you open this book, you are going to learn a lot about God, and you're gonna learn next to nothing about this man, Malachi. He doesn't tell us about his parents, his history, his pedigree. We really know virtually nothing about this man. Here's why, because it's about God and His relationship with His children, His people, and Malachi doesn't meddle in the middle. There's a good relational principle here, and that is that sometimes you need to get out of the way and just let people talk to God and hear from God for themselves, amen? How many of you have reached that point with people? You are like, "If I argue with them, it always goes bad. I'll let God argue with them, it'll probably go better." And so sometimes this is saying, "I'm not gonna just hammer you, what I'm gonna do is I'm gonna give you the Bible. I'm gonna buy you a nice Bible and you read it and you deal with God. Let me get out of the middle. You talk to God, you pray to God, you study God's Word. You work it through with God." Malachi chooses not to meddle in the middle. He's the messenger, he's not the meddler. Some of you, particularly during the holidays, you want your family to get connected to the Lord, that you're in the middle, but sometimes in the middle, you're not the messenger, you're the meddler. And sometimes it's just getting out of the way and saying, "I'm gonna pray, I'm gonna give you God's Word and I'm gonna let you talk to God, I'm gonna let God talk to you." That's what Malachi does. And the people of God have a problem with God, and He allows them and encourages them to deal directly with the Lord. So there's the introduction, here is the Word of God, God is going to speak to His people. Here's the good news, I believe as we open the Word of God, we receive a word from God. The same God who spoke to them, wants to speak to you. And now it is important to consider, what will God's first words be? When there is a relationship, how we start the conversation, oftentimes determines its conclusion. Your Genesis determines your Revelation, where you begin can affect where you end. Here's where God begins. Malachi 1:2, first, I want you to know, God speaks first, God initiates. And God says, I have what? I have loved you, God starts with love. There is a sociologist, he's a researcher, his name is Dr. John Gottman. He's done some of the leading work on relational and marital conflict. And after lengthy, significant clinical study, one of the factors that he says contributes to a very painful, broken relationship is something called a harsh startup. Meaning the conversation starts as a conflict or as a criticism or with controversy. How many of you know exactly what this is like? There are certain times where people or topics that when you broach them, it is a harsh startup. It's a hard startup. And it's, you know, why are you so mean and angry and nasty and like Satan? You're like, "Well, here we go, fire up the carnival music, pop the popcorn and just, you know, watch the dumpster fire. Here we go again, da, nan ta dadalanta ta da right?" Just that how you start the conversation, sets the conversation in motion. It's like firing a gun, right? If you're off course, ultimately it is going to end very, very badly. A harsh startup sets the conversation in the wrong direction. Where does God start? Love. Now these people, they're trying to coax God into a harsh startup. As you read the book, God is going to take some of their accusations against him, and he is going to answer

them, but He doesn't answer them by attacking them. He answers them by loving them. Here's what I need you to know, if you're angry with God, He can handle you. If you have questions for God, He can handle those. That in this instance, God is serving like the lightning rod. God's people, they're not atheists, but they're angry, they're frustrated and God grounds out their storm. And He loves them, He loves them. "I have loved you," says the Lord, but you say, "How have you loved us?" Now, how many of you have a child, small or grown, and sometimes they accuse you of things that are not true? God, here is a father, and they're accusing Him of not loving them. In fact, as you read the book, they're going to say, "God, You don't love us, You don't bless us. You love and bless wicked people who are our enemies. As a result, we have no use for You and we judge You and we have found You to be a failed Father." This is a strong statement from the people of God, and it comes from a place of hurt. They're hurting financially, their economy is collapsed, they're hurting politically. They're a little nation getting kicked around by the other nations. They're hurting morally. They have decided that they have a right to rebel against God and they are hurting spiritually, and even some of their "preachers, Bible teachers", have created a theology where God is a failure. People are the product of their instruction, and these people are hurting, and rather than getting clarity, they're getting confusion. And ultimately what the bad Bible teachers are saying is, God is a failure. And what this is, this is an inversion of the storyline of the Bible. The storyline of the Bible is that God is good, that we have failed, that God judges us and we need forgiveness. They have inverted the storyline to where they are good, God is bad, God has failed, therefore they sit in the seat of judgment, they determine and decree that God is wrong and God needs to repent and God needs to apologize. And maybe then they'll forgive God for His failure. See, we chuckle, but we're like them, amen? How many of us, when we're hurting, start accusing God of failing? Now what God is going to do is something that is very significant, and because God is a father, there are a lot of parenting lessons and grandparenting lessons in the book. Here's one, connect before you correct, connect before you correct. The rest of the book, God is going to correct, but here He is going to connect. I'd always do this when I would deal with our kids when they were little, I'd get down on eye level, and I would say, "I love you, let's talk about this. I love you, I love you. Let's talk about this." Connect before you correct. Some of you had parents that they would correct and they never did connect. You correct after you connect. Think of it this way, let's say there is a chasm between two points and you need to build a bridge from one place to the other. You need to make sure that that bridge can carry the weight of the load that needs to traverse over it. Well, if God's people are here and God is here, He needs to build a relationship that is strong enough to carry the load of truth and correction. That's why some of you, you need to understand that it is ultimately about building a relationship with someone, to where they know that you love them and care for them and have their best interest at heart. And then that becomes the bridge over which the correction and information can venture. Some of you have loaded up too much correction and information, you have not built the bridge of love and trust. And as a result, halfway through the conversation, things collapse and they will no longer listen to you, because they do not trust you and your love for them. We connect before we correct. And that is exactly what God is demonstrating, and He is modeling here. So what I wanna say here, is they ultimately have accusations about God that are unfounded and untrue, and they posit them in the form of questions. This still happens, sometimes we'll do it academically, philosophy,

sociology, psychology, Christians are mean, the Bible is an outdated old book, God is a bigot, God is intolerant, God is unloving. All of these things we still say. And sometimes, religious people, instead of making the clear accusation, we'll hide it and guise it in the form of a question. How many of you have been in a relationship like that? Where somebody asks a question, but it's not really a question. It's like, why are you a stupid, evil idiot? You're like, "That's not really a question, that's more of a conclusion that is disguised as a question." So they go to God and they're like, "Why are You evil?, and why are You failing us, and why are You mean, and why are You not good to us?" Those aren't really questions, those are accusations. Those are accusations. God hears those, God knows those, and God responds to those. Couple of things I want you to see. And before I do, let me just emotionally try and connect your life with the hearers of the original recipients of the book. The more that you study the Word of God, and the more that you get a vision for the kingdom of God, true or false, the more frustrated you get in this world. I mean, some of you are like, "I was frustrated till I got saved or read the Bible, now I'm super frustrated." Like, 'cause in heaven, everyone will be healthy. Is that the case? No, my neck hurts, I pulled it in the first service. Some of you say doing what? I'll show you, I did this. That was it, that's all it took. I have a huge crank in my Shrek size head neck. It's terrible. In heaven, it will not happen, in heaven, we'll all be healthy, in heaven there will be no copay or deductible, there is free healthcare for all. In heaven will people be rich or poor? Rich. In heaven, there is so much gold that they pave streets with it. That's when you know you have a lot of extra loot. They're like, I don't know what to do with all the gold, it's in the way, I don't know. Expand the 101, put in some extra lanes, just get it out of the way. Heaven is paved in gold. Everybody's gonna be rich, everybody's gonna be healthy. I will be tall, I will be slim, my bangs will be full. Right now, I don't, I mean, I don't have a hair problem, I have a distribution problem. I can, I can braid my feet, but not my hair. In heaven, I'm just, you know, sharing a little bit from the heart. In heaven, it's gonna be amazing. Guess what? We're not there. In heaven we won't have elections every year, it'll be, hey, Jesus is in charge again, yay. Yay, yay. Yay, we don't have to vote. 'Cause it's a series of bad options. I won't get into it, but if you're paying attention, it's frustrating, amen? It's super frustrating. As you read the Bible, you're like, can we just get there? And then you look at life on the earth, you realize this is frustrating. These are not atheists, they're people that are angry. They're not people that necessarily hate God, they're just hurting. God doesn't do harsh startup, God connects before He corrects. God comes and starts with I love you, let's start with a relationship. A couple of things I want you to know about God from Malachi, number one, God is a father. In chapter one, verse six, He says, "I am a father." In chapter two, verse 10, He says, "I'm the only father." 'Cause some people are like, "Can we get a new dad?" Nope, you gotta deal with this one. Gotta deal with this one. Some books of the Bible are gonna really focus on Jesus, like the gospel of John that we'll pick up in chapter 17 in January and continue studying all the way through Easter. Some books of the Bible are really gonna focus on God the Holy Spirit, Malachi really focuses on God the Father and the father heart of God. So think of His people like kids who are throwing a fit and having a tantrum. And God is like a father who is dealing with His rebellious kids Number two, God knows what His kids are saying, doing and thinking. God is not a father who is un-involved, non-relational. He's paying attention. He comes and He says, "I know what you're thinking. I know what you're saying, I know what you're doing." How many of

you moms, you're like that? See a good mom, a mom's like, "I know what you're doing, I know what you're saying." And a good mom, she's got a spidey sense. She says, "I know what you're thinking." And she does, okay? God's like that, He knows what His kids are thinking, saying, and doing, God pays attention. Number three, God calls a family meeting. So as you read the Book of Malachi, think of it, God is a father, His people are a family, and when there's a problem in a family, if it involves one of the kids, you go meet with that kid. This little parenting lesson. Like, if Johnny's got a problem, don't call a family meeting and shame Johnny in front of everybody. But if Johnny and Susie and Tom are now, you know, a prison riot aligned together, you gotta deal with the whole family because now everyone is involved. What happens here is all of God's children are having the same rebellion. So God calls a family meeting where He pulls the family together. So for those of you that have had a family meeting, where do they tend to occur? What places? Dinner table or living room? It's family. Okay, everybody, come on downstairs, stop playing "Fortnite". Come on, right? Just leaking a bit. Okay, come on down, we're gonna have a family meeting, which means this is important enough that we all stop what we're doing, and we all have this conversation. And God calls a family meeting. When we come together on Sundays, I need you to know that this is a family meeting. That at times in your family, you need to call a family meeting. God calls a family meeting. So as you read Malachi and you can read it in about 15 minutes, I want you to be reading it over and over and over, think dinner table, think living room, think couch, think family meeting where the father is leading and loving the family. And then number four, God doesn't act like a sibling. What happens is sometimes children will not respect and honor the authority of the parent. So they sort of shoot a torpedo up the chain of command, trying to get the parent rattled and emotional and freak out and then respond like a sibling, rather than a parent. Now don't raise your hand, but how many of you have this kid? They come to you and they just know how to get you, like their spiritual gift, is this. That's their, it's just, they're so good. This kid drives me crazy. And they know it. And so what they realize is, if I can get you to freak out, then you will act like a sibling, stop acting like a parent, and I will win and you will lose because you will lose your authority. Write that down. So what they do, they come to God and they're like, "You don't love us, You fail, You're horrible, You're terrible." God doesn't act like a sibling, He acts like a parent. When you take it personal, you make it personal. Some of you, if the kid yells at you, you yell at them, you just went from mom to sister, or from dad to brother. Some of the kids say something crazy, you say something crazy back, you just went from parent to peer, amen? Now some of you like, one of the kids testified in the front row, so there there's the spirit right now. Sometimes the parents will say, "But they drive me crazy." You're still supposed to above it and be the parent and lead them through it. So God doesn't act like a sibling, He doesn't come down from His place of authority, though He's still loving. Number five, God meets us where we are to bring us where we need to be. The children of God, young and old in this story, they're not where they're supposed to be. They're not giving, they're not serving, they're not worshiping, they're not praying, they're not caring, they're blaming God, they're all retweeting #Godfails. I mean, these kids are just being naughty. And what God does is He meets them where they are to walk them to where they need to be. How many of you are parenting adult children? It's harder, amen? When kids are little, let's say the kids are not where they're supposed to be, physically, what can you do? Hey, that's a toilet, get out of there. You know, here's toys. We trade toilet for toys, that's what we do. You could just, what about when

they're 25? Like I tried to pick them up, and they're bigger than me, and they're frustrating. How do you move an adult child? Through a relationship, one step at a time, meeting them where they are and walking them through influence, love and relationship to where they need to be. That's what God is demonstrating and modeling here with His adult children. You're not where you're supposed to be. But through relationship, I will walk you, through influence and love, where you need to be. And then number six, God starts with love. All healthy relationships have to start with love. And this is very different, for those of you that may not know, from the other religions of the world. Really, you can break down religions into two categories, what is called works or grace, which means love in action. All other religions teach works, and that is if you perform, I'll be your parent. If you obey, I will love you. God says, "Because I am your parent, My love will change your performance." Jesus says it this way, "I love you, and if you love Me, you will obey Me." The loving relationship leads to the change in behavior. Some of you grew up in performance-based relationships where the parents said, "If you do good, I will love you and have a relationship. And if you don't do good, I will punish you and cut off my relationship with you." God comes and says, "I love you. No strings, no conditions." God's love forgives the sins you are committing and changes your heart to not commit them anymore. God's love changes you to be more like Him, because we become like those whom we love the most and have loved us the most. And then, lastly, sometimes we just need a word from God, amen? Some of you you're here today, and you're like, "I just, I don't know what to do, I don't know where to go, I don't know how to respond, I don't know, I need a word from God." These people need a word from God. And so what they get is the Word of God. God doesn't just give an individual word to every single person in the nation, He writes a book of the Bible for every person in the nation, and also for all the nations. So lemme say this, if you need, or when you need a word from God, the surest, best way to get a word from God, is to open the Word of God. I want you to read Malachi, I want you to study Malachi, I want you to memorize Malachi. It's a little book, but it has big implications for your family and your future. And as you read it, what you will hear, is there are 55 verses, 47 of those are God saying something. It's God talking to you, it's God speaking to you, it's God pursuing you, it's God seeking you. So, they asked the question, "How have you loved us?" And God says, "Well, let Me tell you how I've loved you." And then He proceeds to tell them, in verse two through four, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" How many of you didn't see that coming? God, how do I know you love me? He's like, "Well, Jacob and Esau were brothers." How many of you were like, "Okay, good, that's all I needed to know. We can go home now." How many of you were like, "What does that mean?" They knew the Old Testament, and what He's talking about is their family. And it's His way of saying not only have I loved you, I've loved your crazy family for generations? How many of you, now that makes sense? How many of you have a family/crazy family? Those are synonyms, by the way. God looks at our crazy family and says, "I've loved you for a long time." And He's talking here about family history. "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord, "Yet I have what?" It's not a trick question, it's reading. Okay, what does it say? Love Jacob and but Esau I have... Uh oh. Let's say, whoa, what? how many of you, that's what? God hates people? We'll talk about that. I have laid waste his ill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If Edom says, "We are shattered, but we will rebuild the ruins," the Lord of hosts says, "They may build it, but I will tear it down, and they will be called the wicked country, and the people with whom the Lord is what?

Angry forever." There are some people who say, "I don't need God. I'll be my own God, I don't need to obey God. I'll live by my own might, will, conscience, decree. I'll build my own life. And even if it's tore down, I'll build it up again." And God says, "You're fighting Me and no one ever wins." What He's talking about here is their family history. He's going all the way back. This is the last book of the Old Testament. It's their version of the Book of Revelation. It tells them what comes next. He goes all the way back to the first book of the Old Testament, Genesis chapter 25, and He starts with a story about a man named Abraham. Story of Abraham is this, Abraham is a bad guy. He comes from a godless nation. I can't get into all of it, but Numbers even says that his dad was a godless, ungodly, pagan worshiper of a false demon god. He's a bad guy from a bad family, doing bad things. God comes down and says, "I pick Abraham." Not because Abraham is good, but because God is good. And God makes a promise, a promise rather, to Abraham, "Through you will come Jesus Christ, the Savior of the nations, the forgiver of sin, the Son of God." Okay, that's amazing. So Abraham is chosen by grace and he is not yet a Jew, he is a Gentile. He's just a regular old pagan. Now Abraham has a wife named Sarah, Abraham has a son named Isaac. That son, Isaac, has Abraham's grandsons, twin boys, Jacob and Esau. They start wrestling and fighting in their mother's womb. How many of you have got two sons and you've seen this? They're always going at it. These are very different boys, but hear me in this, they're both bad boys. And God is going to pick one to be the line through whom the nation of Israel comes and, ultimately, Jesus, our savior. Jacob and Esau are bad guys, and they're different, but they're bad in different ways. So Jacob is a mama's boy, Esau is daddy's boy. Horrible things happen in a family when you play favorites. That's one of the underlying themes of Genesis. Jacob is very tender, Esau is very tough. Jacob drives a Prius, Esau drives a truck, a diesel truck with a lift and nightlights, okay? Now Jacob wears open toed Birkenstock, sometimes with socks. Esau wears steel toed boots. Jacob really likes musical soundtracks and figure skating. Esau, it's all in the Hebrew, I'm just summarizing. Esau, loves Country Western music and hardcore metal and cage fighting, okay? Now Esau only eats things that he kills, and Jacob is committed to vegetarian, sustainable living. So while Esau is out hunting, Jacob is finger painting his feelings. So they come home, it's all in the Hebrew, they come home and God has to pick one of these boys. So is Esau a bad guy? Yeah, he is. Later in life, he has the birthright as the first born, that's significant, and he trades it for what? A bowl of soup. That's coming to somebody and saying, "How important is your family and your legacy and your inheritance to you?" They're like, "I don't know, not as important as a bowl of soup." Well, then you are not a very honoring person or you really like soup. Either way, you've got a problem. So what does Jacob's name mean? Trickster or conman. See, some people look at him and they go, "How come God doesn't work through the good guys?" 'Cause there's no good guys. For God, all of history is an old Western and everybody's wearing a black hat. There's no good guy, there's only bad guys. So we need to start looking at history saying, God doesn't just love the good guys. If He did, God would love no one, 'cause we're all bad guys. And so, when he's telling the story, what he's saying is, through Jacob comes a nation called Israel whom God has blessed and Jesus is coming. Through Esau comes another nation, he mentions them here, Edom, and the Edomites are opponents and enemies as a nation of God's people. Not only do these two boys war in the womb, the nations that derive from them, they war on the earth. Now some will say, it's talking about nations, not individuals. It's talking about both. I'll prove it to you,

Jacob is a person, Edom is a nation. It's both, it's the individuals and the nations that proceed from them. And what happens is, over time, these boys become nations and they're warring against each other until Jesus comes from the line of Jacob, and there is a man named Herod who seeks to murder Jesus and all the baby boys in the nation, because Herod is a descendant of Esau and the Edomites. It's as if that is a demonic family that leads to a demonic nation, that sees its intent of destroying the life and salvation that God is bringing into history. So here's the big idea, they're both bad guys, Jacob got grace, Esau got what he deserved. This raises some questions. I'll unpack them for you as best I can. Here's one of the first questions that comes, next slide, please. What does it mean that God hates people? How many of you were asking that? Like, what about the hate people thing? Can we back up, pull the car over, take a look at that? "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the Lord, "Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated." When we think of hate, we think of personal vengeance, ungodly, untethered, emotional hammering. Is that what it means? I wanna be careful with this, how many of you have painted a house or painted a room in your house? And you go to the paint store and they have all the paint swatches, and you realize, there is an entire range for a color. So let's say you're looking at blue, there might be the lightest shade of blue that almost looks white, all the way over to the darkest shade of blue, that almost looks black. But all of that is blue. Words, like colors, have hues, shades and degrees. The question is what is the hue, shade or color of this word hated? Many of the scholars, and I wanna be careful with this, would say it means to prefer one over the other, or to choose one over the other, or to involve oneself with this and not to involve oneself with that person. And I would give you an occasion in the gospels where the Lord Jesus uses a similar word. Jesus says, and the point here is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. So if you hit something in Scripture, you're not sure what it means, look for other Scriptures that are saying the same or similar things and let those things that are clear, help you understand those things that are less clear. "If anyone comes to Me," Jesus says, "and does not what? Hate his own father and mother." Did Jesus hate His mom? Let's let the moms vote on this. Moms, what do you think, did Jesus hate His mom? No, He loved His mom. On the cross, as He's dying, He appoints John to care for His mom. He's loving His mom while He is dying. Did Jesus hate his dad? No, He had a great dad and they had a close relationship. And wife, how many of you, are husbands supposed to hate their wives? Now most men didn't answer as quickly and enthusiastically as the wives were hoping. The wives were like, "Please tell him to love me, we already have our problems." Husbands are to love their wives, as Christ loved the church. What about our children, are we supposed to hate our children? No, we're supposed to love our children. "And his brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." The shade or hue of the meaning of hate here, is the law of priority. Jesus is referring to the law of priority. And that is that our relationship with God needs to be our first and highest priority. And what Jesus is saying is, "Our relationship is more important than your marriage, our relationship is more important than your children, our relationship is more important than your family or your church family." And it doesn't mean that those relationships are unimportant, but the law of priority means that this is of first importance. I believe, you can disagree with me, this is an open, not a closed handed issue, but I believe that here, in Malachi, He is saying something similar, and that is that I have preferred Jacob, not Esau. Both were bad, but I gave grace to one and I let the other experience the consequence of his decision-making without



intervening. And this leads to other questions. Next slide, please. Why does God choose some people but not others? Have you ever had this conversation or debate? In every Bible college or seminary, it is required that you argue about this 47 nights in a row, it's just required. So, why does God pick some but not pick others? In the New Testament, again, we looked at Malachi, there's a man named Paul, he writes a book of the Bible called Romans and he actually quotes Malachi. I've underlined it here, as it is written, where's it from? Malachi. Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated. So Paul writes Romans and it's a bit of a commentary on Malachi. Here's what I need you to know, sometimes the best way to interpret Scripture, is to let Scripture interpret Scripture. So Malachi says something and then Paul writes a commentary on it. The best way to look at Malachi is to also look at it through the lens of what Paul has said, both inspired perfectly by the Holy Spirit. The whole context of Romans nine through 11 is this, how does someone enter into a relationship with God? Do you pick God, does God pick you? How does this work? In every relationship, someone chooses, someone responds. So Grace and I, we met at 17 in high school. Two weeks in I said, "I love you, I pick you." And she said, "I haven't picked you yet," because she has the gift of discernment. But I have fortitude and patience, so I hung in there. I picked her, then she picked me. To have a relationship, you need to choose each other. But the question is who initiates? Who initiates the relationship, is it God or us? Well, here we go, he tells a story. When Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose in election. Okay, there are various words, choose, choosing, chosen, elect, appointed, plan, purpose, predestined, which means to predetermine the destiny, those words are in your Bible, and it means that God not only knows the future. He decrees it and oversees it. So his election might stand not because of works, not what we do, but what God does. But because of Him who calls, she was told the older will serve the younger. In that culture, the first born was in the priority position, but through election, it was the younger who then became in the position of head of the family upon the death of the dad to assume leadership of the household. As it is written, he quotes Malachi, "Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated. What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part?" Let's just leave it there for a moment, by no means. What he's saying here is this, there were two boys, both bad, God worked through one, brought Jesus to be the forgiver of sin and savior of the world. The other, He just let that guy get what he wanted, and all of his descendants go their own way. Here He intervened, here He did not intervene. And then the question is, does this make God unjust? And the answer is fairly self-evident, between Jacob and Esau, which of them deserves to go to heaven? Neither. You and I need to start with that presupposition. You and I and we all deserve nothing but hell. When you accept that, you become grateful for everything else. So you know what? I don't like my life. Hey, you're not kindling, it's better than you deserve. We have a culture of entitlement where everyone thinks that not only should they go to heaven, they should be there now. And as a result, we say foolish things about God, like, "He's not loving, He's not present, He's not gracious, the Bible's not true. God's a bigot." All these horrible things we think and say about God, and the truth is everyone deserves nothing. As an American, you need to get your mind around that. It'll breed in you an attitude of gratitude. If God sent everyone to hell, would that be unjust? No, that's like what happened to all the criminals? They got convicted and went to jail. You can't say that's unjust. No, actually, that is the definition of justice. Guilty people

got tried and convicted and sentenced. That's not injustice, that's justice. Now let me just say this, what happens is if I sin against you, you want justice for me. If you sin against me, you want forgiveness for you. We're all a bunch of hypocrites. It's always law for you, grace for me. I deserve to get out and you need to get in, to that sentence of eternal torment. If God sent everyone to hell, He would be just. If He takes anyone to heaven, we call that grace. He then gives another analogy, illustration, and here, just, Paul is gonna say this in Romans 12 coming up, "Don't be conformed any longer to the pattern of this world. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind." You can't just go to the Bible and say, "You know, America's right, and the Bible is wrong." Instead of you go, "You know what? The Bible is right and we're all wrong." Okay, he uses another analogy illustration, next slide, please, from the next book of the Bible, first, he goes to Malachi, he looks then at Exodus, "For He says to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and compassion on whom I have compassion. So that it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy. For the scripture says to Pharaoh, the political leader who thinks he's god in Exodus, 'For this very purpose, I've raised you up, that I might show my power in you, that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth.' So then he has mercy on whomever He wills, and He hardens whomever He has hardened." Okay, let me unpack this. God's people are a small family at the end of Genesis. During the famine, they take refuge in a nation called Egypt. For generations, the Pharaoh who rules as a god, political and spiritual, he is favorable because Joseph, one of the Hebrews, was helpful. Eventually the Bible says that the new Pharaoh forgot about Joseph and how good God's people had been to the nation. And he then wants to be worshiped as God, and he wants to abuse them and make their life, for the children of God, basically a hell on earth. God raises up a man named Moses, sends him as a messenger, like Malachi, to speak against the nation and to bring promise of doom to the Pharaoh. It says 19 times, if my memory is correct in the book of Exodus, that Pharaoh had a hard heart. About half the time, it says that Pharaoh hardened his heart against God. And about half of the time, it says that God hardened Pharaoh's heart. And there's this big debate. Well, who did it? Well, here's what I would tell you, Pharaoh hardened his heart toward God and God hardened Pharaoh's heart, but how He did it as crucial, He did it through love, He did it through patience, He did it through kindness, He did it through extending a hand, inviting Pharaoh to a relationship with the real God and the forgiveness of his sins. The old Puritans, they were Christians, they used to say the same sun that melts the ice, hardens the clay. How many of you have someone who hates you? If you approach them, they attack you. If you forgive them, they declare war on you. If you try to bless them, they assault you. God feels like that all the time. God's love exposed Pharaoh's hard heart, God's goodness hardened Pharaoh's already hardened heart. Who is to blame? Pharaoh. Who is good? God. That's why the Bible says in Ezekiel that we, as sinners, have a heart of stone. It is a hard heart. And that God has to take out our heart of stone and give us a tender heart of flesh. Here's what I'm telling you, and if you love God, it's because you have a new heart. If you choose God, it's 'cause God chose you. If you have affection toward God, it's because God's affection has transformed you. The hard heart can only hate God, the hard heart can only oppose God, the hard heart can never choose God, the hard heart can never love God. That's what we see with the Pharaoh. Some of you say, "But I love God." Then God gave you a new heart. And the evidence of that new heart, is a new affection for the Lord. So this leads to a series of questions, is it unloving for God to choose

some people and not others? One guy says no. Okay, what do you think? Well, here's what's interesting, when God talks about predestinating or choosing or electing, in the same more of it, He also talks about loving. God says, I have, I've loved you, back to Malachi, says the Lord. You say, "How have you loved us?" And He says, "Well, I love you by choosing you." Three times, he talks about God's love. And God says, You don't love us. Yes, I do love us. How do you love us? I chose you. He says it this way in Ephesians 1:4 and 5, in love He... We're like, "God, if You love people, You wouldn't predestinate them." God's like, "Because I love people, this is how, that's how I love them, is I choose them." Let me say, let me make this, can I make this simple? How many of you are fathers who have adopted a child? Raise your hand. How many of you have ever seen a child adopt a father? A child never adopts a father. Right now, no kid can fill out paperwork and adopt a father, amen? Who has to fill out the paperwork? The father. If you were a child of God, it's not because you adopted God, it's because God adopted you. And the fact that He adopted you means He's loved you. These are the children of God sitting on God's lap, screaming, freaking out, cursing Him, slapping Him in the face saying, "You don't love us." He's like, "I'm your dad and I'm still here. I promise you I do. I promise you I do. And I'm gonna love you until I change you, 'cause that's the kind of dad I am. And I didn't pick you because you're an awesome kid, I picked you because you really need a dad." That's the father heart of God. So let me summarize all of the options. Okay, can I be your nerd friend? Y'all need a nerd friend, I'm a nerd, I'll be your friend. We're gonna summarize all, a whole year of Christian theology, all right? We're gonna summarize it in six options, bring me the next slide. Here are the options, there is God, there is us, how does this work? I'll give you six options, they're in the app. But the first is, everybody goes to hell. This is not a popular position, by the way, there's not a lot of parades. Like yay, we're all kindling, fire up the band. Let's sing a song and celebrate again. But let me ask it this way. Angels who rebelled against God and fell, they became demons, is there any opportunity for the salvation of a demon? Zero. Jesus says, and I quote, "Hell was made for the devil and his angels." One of Peter's letters says that Jesus died for people, not for demons. All demons rebel, all demons go to hell. If all of the rebellious people who joined the demons in the rebellion went to hell, true or false, that would be justice, that'd be justice. It's really weird, there are people that believe everybody should go to heaven. I don't know anybody who believes that everybody should go to hell, but that makes more sense to me. Number two, option two, God chooses everyone. Everybody's saved, everybody's going to heaven, everybody's sins are forgiven, everybody lives forever, everybody's okay. Is that what the Bible teaches? No. It's called universalism, it's been rejected as a heresy. It's wrong, it's false teaching. Jesus talks of hell more than anyone in the whole Bible. There are people that hate God, there are people that don't love God, we just looked at Pharaoh. He is an example, Judas is another. We say, "Oh, they died and went to a better place." It doesn't always work like that. Number three, good people can choose God. And that is, we have complete and total free will, and let me say this, the only two human beings that ever had complete and total free will, were Adam and Eve. Before sin entered the world, before they got a corrupt nature, they had free will to choose freely. Once we inherit a sin nature, the Bible says that we are by nature objects of wrath, that we are by nature dead in our trespasses in sins, that we are by nature enemies of God and that no one chooses God. And Jesus says it this way, "You didn't choose me, I chose you." But this heresy, this false teaching from a guy named Pelagius is that you're

good and you could just pick God. Let me tell you this, you can pick your breakfast cereal, but you can't pick your Savior. So the first three are all false teaching, they're heretical, they're wrong. Some of you say, "I don't believe in right and wrong." Well then you're a heretic too, 'cause these are wrong, okay? The last three are what I will call faithful Christian options. There are closed handed issues like the death, burial, resurrection of Jesus, there are open-handed issues like this, and there are three positions that godly, Bible-believing, faithful, Jesus-loving people will hold, if you believe these, welcome to our church, you can be in leadership, we can agree to disagree agreeably. We can open the Bible and hash it out, but we don't need to file for divorce over this issue, this is a secondary matter. The first is called Arminianism named after a guy named Jacob Arminius, God grants sinners a free will choice. They would teach, he would teach that we are sinners and we don't choose God, but God chooses to give us a choice. That God, at some point in everyone's life, opens up their will and gives them a free opportunity to choose or not choose. So if you don't choose, it's not God's fault, it's your fault, God chose to give you a choice. Some would teach that and it comes with something called prevenient, for you nerds, prevenient meaning first grace, prevenient grace, that He opens up the will at some point to make a free will decision. Number two, double predestination by God comes from the teaching of Calvinism, named after a man named John Calvin. And this is that God chooses some for hell and some for heaven. Before you were born, before you live, your destiny is sealed. God chooses you for heaven, God chooses them for kindling. That's the way that it is, double predestination. Some would argue that this makes God seem unloving, cruel and capricious. I've often joked, you know, this is like dot, dot, damn. Like I want be a dot, am, you know what I mean? So, you know, it can make God look capricious, amen? But that is faithful Christian teaching. Single predestination by God is the position of a man named Martin Luther, Lutheranism. Me, Jesus, the Bible, and all that is right and good in the universe. So you can disagree, but this is where you should land, just kind of kidding a little bit. Okay, so single predestination is this, everybody chooses hell and God chooses to save some. People who go to hell, get their choice. People who go to heaven, get God's choice. And that sometimes God's choice overrides our choice. And what that means is that the people who choose hell, they got to choose. They chose through sin, folly, rebellion. Those who get heaven, they should thank God because He saved them from Satan's sin, death, hell, the wrath of God and themselves. I'll give you an analogy, I know I'm way over time, you're welcome, and I think of it this way, imagine there were a group of people that had a suicide pact. They just decided we're gonna kill ourselves today. They lock themselves in their home. They chain themselves to the sink and the furniture. They set the place on fire and they were determined to die. The fire department shows up, everything is a raging inferno and they're putting the hoses on it. It is not subsiding. They're calling to the people, "Come out, come out, jump out of the window." And the people are, "No, we refuse to live. We've chosen death." Imagine then one of the firefighters decreed and decided, "I'm gonna go in and I'm gonna save some." The other firefighters are like, "They wanna die, they did this to themselves, they are not looking for your help. And if you go in, you're gonna die." Let's say the firefighter runs in, breaks the chains whereby they have chained themselves up. These people are fighting and hitting him because they wanna die, they don't wanna live. He overrides their will, takes them, carries them out on his shoulders and they live and he dies. I'd be very disappointed if the news showed up and said, "We're really

disappointed in the firefighter, he didn't get everybody." I would say he's a, he's a hero. He saved people, at the expense of his own death. That's the story of human history. Through sin, folly, rebellion, we've all said, "I'm gonna kill myself." And Jesus comes and says, "I'll die so that you can live." Some are going to get what they choose, some will get what He chooses. Now in closing, Malachi 1:5, your own eyes shall see this. It's a promise, it's a prophecy. And you shall say, and in your heart today, my friend, I want you to say this, "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel." You know what? If God chooses, then an unborn child can be chosen of God. If God chooses, then someone in a closed nation that has never heard, could be chosen of God and revealed to by God. If God chooses, then someone that lacks the mental capacity to fully understand the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus, can be chosen by God. If God chooses, then it's not just one nation, but all the nations that can be invited to the kingdom of God. And if it is God who chooses, then God can choose the worst, the most vile, the most evil. A man like Paul, who was murdering Christians, when he himself met Christ. A man like me, who is sinful to his core, rebellious, foolish, and I have chosen death, and I am happy to report that God has made a choice that overrode my choice and He has chosen to save me from Himself, from Himself and myself. And let me tell you this, great is the Lord. And the promise here is great is the Lord, beyond the border of Israel. Where are we today? We are 2,500 years later, beyond the border of Israel. We are here to testify that this is in fact true. God has saved people from every nation. God has saved some of the worst people and made them His children. God has saved people who are far from Him and drawn them close to Him. And if you are here today, and you belong to God, or your heart is inclined and stirred toward a relationship with God as your Father, and Jesus as your Savior, you need to understand great is the Lord, great is the Lord, great is the Lord. And let me close with a story, I've told this story before, but I feel inclined to share it again. When my kids were little, they'd play this game, kind of, hey dad, chase me. And they'd, look, daddy, you can't catch me. And they'd run and they'd look back, and I'd, you know, pretend to be slow, even though now I am and I'd chase my kids. I'm gonna get you, I'm gonna get you, I'm gonna get you. Where there was, we lived on a very busy street, lanes of traffic flying by. My beautiful little girl, she thought it was time to play daddy, chase me. And she looked back, and she started running, but she was looking at me. She wasn't looking at the four lanes of high speed traffic, right on the other side of our driveway. My daughter is running to her death. She doesn't know it. Parked in front of our house, there is a car. I could see vehicles, including a large box truck, barreling down the road. I see my little girl with her ponytail, running in front of the vehicle. The truck cannot see her, she cannot see it. She thinks we're playing a game. She doesn't know that she's in danger. She made a free will choice and so did I, because that's what dads do. I looked at her, I said, "No, no, stop." She said, "Ha ha, daddy, you can't catch me." Yes I can. I did not have a philosophical debate about the free will of my daughter. I did not say, "She makes her choice, I make by choice, who might override her choice." I took a philosophy class reaching to independent autonomous individuals with a free will choice in her. I chased her. I chased her and here's what I did, I ran, and my daughter was beyond the bumper of the parked car, into traffic. I grabbed her by the back of the coat and I pulled her out of harm's way. If you are saved, that is your story. You may not know it, you may not see it, you may not believe it, but you are headed toward death and destruction. You made your choice and then your Father made His choice. You're gonna be loved, you're gonna be saved, you're gonna be

blessed, you're gonna be adopted, you're gonna be protected, you're gonna be provided for. Great is God, great is God. We need to worship Him, amen? Father God, thank You, thank You, thank You. We say great is the Lord, great is the Lord, great is the Lord. God, You are great. We're a bunch of foolish, rebellious, wayward, self-destructive, arrogant kids, who have an awesome Dad, who loves us and pursues us and forgives us and blesses us and speaks to us and endures with us and will never leave us, betray us, abandon us or forsaken us. So, God, we come today to sing. And this is a declaration against principalities and spirits, this is against demonic forces and realms of rebellion and religion. And we say, great is the Lord, great in my life, great in my family, great in my legacy, great in the past, great in the present, and great for the future. God, You are great. And out of that, we respond because we are glad, amen.