

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2021**  
**Malachi 1:1-5**  
**Rev.Scott Burton**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word

Holy Spirit, come among us and soften our hearts to the word of God.

Holy Spirit, draw near and reveal to us the heart and ways of almighty God,

Come Holy Spirit, with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen

so in our reading today we find God's people waiting, waiting in the time of Malachi and even cynical there were those great leaders Zerubbabel and Joshua whom both Haggai and Zechariah said were the men God's chosen men for the new age and yet they've died and sure the temple has been completed but nothing momentous has occurred like Ezekiel said would happen that the temple would be filled again with the glory of the lord and what is more the day of miracles has passed with Elijah and Elisha and yes religious duties continue but it's done without much enthusiasm whether by priest or by people and so the people are asking where is the God of our fathers does it really matter whether we worship him or not and they're asking these questions because they see generations dying without receiving the promises God made there's injustice there's poverty there's corruption and so the people are in this downward spiral feeling forgotten by God losing their faith such that some are apathetic and others are just downright antagonistic and belligerent towards God on the whole the people feel distant from God and are choosing to distance themselves even further from him because they think their attitude is more justified than that of faith and obedience so when God starts by saying I have loved you the people are quick to respond they take exception and say but how have you loved us how have you loved us the people doubt God's love for them their whole situation undermines their confidence in God's love and from that starting point all the rest of their issues all the rest of their sins and waywardness which God will challenge in due course all of these stem from this central problem of doubting God's love you probably know you've probably experienced that living in difficult times or in times of waiting can be so very hard it can raise all sorts of issues all sorts of questions those times can places under strain it can raise temptations that we normally just shrug off and most often it those times of difficulty and waiting just undermine faith and can lead us to a place of cynicism because it feels like God just doesn't care that maybe God's not even there and so God's people were doubting God's love in their present and I wonder friends is that you is that you have you experienced something and hardship that has maybe broken your faith maybe broken you

or maybe in your faith you've just got to that point where it's routine you maybe had glory days in your youth where faith was alive and vibrant but as time has gone on it has waned I know it's just a tick box exercise most days maybe we're waiting maybe we're doubting in our lives we might feel neglected we might feel just a bit more apathetic than we once were is that you friends is that maybe someone you know I'm sure we've all been there at one time or another but it's not where God wants to leave you it is not where God wants to leave you and it wasn't where he wanted to leave his people in Malachi's time either it's striking that the first words of the lord are to affirm his love for Israel it's not a long list of what they've done wrong or what they have done it's not a long list of things that they have done to God he starts with his love for them he has loved them and the Hebrew terms here convey an ongoing action the ongoing love of

God towards his people and this is going to be a central theme for this book as proof of his love as a counter towards their cynical question the lord draws upon both his name and historical evidence to remind them that he has covenanted himself to them he is in this committed relationship to them and so in verse 2 here you'll see that the name of the lord is in capitals it's not an accident we do this in our English bibles so as to make it stand out for us a little bit and say hey hang on a second this is a special name of God this is not like lord like a boss or a king this is the lord Yahweh in the Hebrew and that's a name laden with meaning and history no other people no other religion used the term Yahweh it was the special name of God revealed to his people by God alone and so he uses it here to get their attention rather than just a general term like God or such like he wants to get their attention he wants to draw their minds back to the past to what he has committed himself to doing and has done and so he goes on to say was not Esau Jacob's brother yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated and here he begins to go into historical evidence to back up his claim that he has loved Israel now on first read I suspect if I did a quick poll most of us would struggle with this language we struggle with the idea of God hating Esau but there's a lot we need to understand in these words here because God is still trying to communicate his love that he is a God of love so first of all we need to understand that God mentions Jacob and Esau as a way of speaking about the two nations that would come from those family lines so we have Jacob from whom came Israel and we have Esau from whom came Edom and the back story is that God did make a choice God did choose Jacob and the nation that would come from him and he did that so as to achieve his purposes so as to achieve his plan of redeeming and saving the world his plan through which a messiah would come God made a choice by which to achieve all this so when God is speaking of love and hate here it's not about emotions it's not about emotions it's about choices and you know Jesus uses very similar language he says if anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother wife and children brothers and sisters yes even their own life such a person cannot be my disciple and yet Jesus also says love your neighbor as yourself which is it Jesus love our hate come on and in this we're meant to see that God is not talking about the hatred that we call to mind hatred here is not about absolute hatred in either Luke or in Malachi it's about ranking priorities it's about preferring one towards a goal God's love for Jacob was about choosing him to achieve God's purposes so God's hatred is not a desire for revenge and it's not about God's disdain or disgust with Esau and Edom and in fact if you look through the old testament books in the book of Obadiah God tries to reach out to the Edomites and through the prophet Amos we're told that the Edomites will share in God's deliverance in the end times so he's not writing them off completely what is more there are many passages where God says he hates Israel because of their wrong choices because of their wicked ways at those times and so God's hatred is not permanent or absolute it's not about unbridled rage and all the emotion we attach to it because let's remember God is the God whose anger passes quickly but whose love endures forever so let's not misunderstand God and these verses he's simply drawing his people's attention back to what he has done and what he has promised he has promised to protect them to bless them to care for them now you may see in these next verses well what about them Scott they seem pretty harsh and yes they are uncomfortable reading but again let's remember the context here God has promised to protect Israel so as to achieve his purposes because he has loved them and yet Edom

has chosen to become one of Israel's chief enemies they have attacked Israel because Esau and his descendants nurtured resentment and it led to outright hostility towards the line of Jacob and so as a result God must act he must act because of what he's promised and God is always faithful to his promises he is duty bound to act what is more as we've sung this morning God is lord of all he knows the wickedness that is present in Edom they're both they're called in the old and new testaments both immoral and Godless and so God judges them as any truly holy and loving God must God's love and goodness means he cannot tolerate evil he is opposed to it completely and so he must judge and in verse three there uh he's talking about a historical event that something has happened to impact the land to impact where the Edomites live and history tells us that that area was conquered by Nabataean invaders they were used of God to remove this threat to Israel and so again God points to a historical event that shows he has been faithful to Israel he has loved them it's an ongoing love a love which has not given up on them though they have given up on him and in both these examples his name and historical events God is showing has committed love his faithful love to his people so what about us what about our day maybe you're asking has God love does and what has this got to do with me

What about in our circumstances?

well just like God gave them a couple of examples I want to give us a couple of examples that apply to every one of us I'm sure you can guess the first it sounds like a bit of a Sunday school answer but let's not belittle it or take it for granted because God sought our protection and salvation just like he'd sought it for Israel and so the apostle Paul can say but God demonstrates his own love for us in this while we were still sinners Christ died for us for the wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our lord the cross the cross that we have here to remind us every Sunday why we gather that is where Jesus died that is which that is the event that reminds us of God's love for every one of us for this whole world for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life now friends none of us are due eternal life none of us you're all lovely people but none of us are due eternal life neither am I we've all gone astray we've all sinned the wages of sin are death eternal separation from God at one time or another all of us have told God to take a hike and yet God still loved us enough to die for us Israel could point to a historical event but we can point to an even greater historical event this is the pinnacle the prime display of God's love for you and for this world and the invitation into a new covenant in a better covenant but Israel could also point to God's ways that he had brought them out of situations how he had nurtured them how he had intervened in their life to ensure that they existed at all and the same is true with your faith in my faith back in June we had a teaching series on grace and in the fourth week you can still get a copy on our website or YouTube channel or we'll get your cd and DVD if you want to go back to that in the fourth week we explored the reality that without God's help we're all spiritually dead and part of spiritual death means we can't we don't seek God without his help again the apostle Paul in roman says there's no one righteous not even one there is no one who understands there is no one who seeks God so if you have faith the only reason you have faith no matter how small the only reason you can count yourself

a Christian is because God's grace has been at work in your life God's grace opened your heart to respond to the good news about Jesus your faith exists because God's loving action was at work in your life you wouldn't be here you wouldn't have any faith no matter how small if it wasn't for God's grace being given to you and at work in your life and so just as Israel could point to two events and more that would show that they were loved by God we too can point to that we can point to the death of Jesus in the fact that we have any faith at all it's all of God it's all a gift of God's grace and like Israel we need to remember that when times are tough when things undermine our confidence in God's love because friends if we simply assess God's love if we weigh God's love on how much he meets our need

then our greedy hearts will always find God wanting our greedy hearts will always find God wanting yet God has loved you his love is not changing towards you he does not change he is not fickle this love is steadfast and true and he has lavished upon each of us a love none of us none of us deserve

let that sink in friends let it sink in you don't deserve this love and yet he died for you he chose to lay down his life for you

for you such as his love

so God has addressed Israel's doubt of his love in the present by pointing them to history and his action in the past but he also calls them to look forward to look to him for the future and so he says in verse 5 you will see it with your own eyes and say great is the lord even beyond the borders of Israel God is wanting to restore their confidence and his love such that they reach that point where they are overwhelming with praise towards the lord he wants them to look to the future and to look to him for the future and rightly so because God's covenant relationship is not just some words on an old document or an old stone or parchment it's not just a contract that he's appended his name to and kind of gets on with things God's covenant we're told in scripture is very akin to a marriage indeed often God uses the marriage analogy to speak of his love for Israel and C S Lewis takes this up as he thinks about God's love and C S Lewis says God's love is akin to the love between a husband and a wife wherein each is willing to forgive the most because that love is willing to love beyond any faults while condoning the least in the other partner because that love while continuing to forgive nevertheless never ceases to coax urge wish and hope for the best in the other partner

so if God's love towards us is akin to the love within a marriage why would God ever settle for a tepid relationship after all how many of us like having a friendship or a more committed relationship that is perfunctory dutiful or cynical wouldn't we much prefer to have something that's full of adventure and life and passion and commitment well so too does God. God wants that kind of relationship with his people both then and now and so this final verse is a God's call to a better relationship a better place in that relationship with himself he said it here and he'll say it again throughout Malachi he wants to do things and say things that will stir up the love of his people for him he wants to move them from that place of apathy and of doubt and cynicism and move them to a place of

commitment that is passionate and renewed he wants to bring them on that journey and in the coming weeks Malachi is going to show us the way back to an enduring and faithful faith in the lord the God who is does not change who invites all to return to him and never forgets friends he never forgets those who turn to him

as that is going to take us a number of weeks to get through what could we do in the meantime what could we do this week to nurture our own trust in God's love well sticking with the marriage analogy just like in marriage we sometimes need outside input and also marriages don't improve without time being invested in them I want to give you two ideas two outside sources to aid you maybe in the coming week or weeks that you could use to invest in your relationship with God and the first is a book I've been reading I know a number of people have both here and elsewhere called gentle and lowly and it seeks to communicate the heart of Jesus for his people and friends it is powerful weighty reading you need to take your time in reading it this isn't about your rush but it is one to be savored it is so rich and I encourage you to pick up a coffee and dig into that it will really reveal the heart of Jesus for you and the second is a music resource it's a new music album just released a week ago by emu music and it's titled joy and sorrow and I've basically had it on repeat the whole of the last week and it is really quite powerful in capturing some of the tensions and difficulties around faith by helping us to maybe express that or think about that and even find faith and keep finding faith in the hard times and so before we finish today I want to play as one of those songs it's called unchanging and during that I invite you to reflect upon the words you'll see them on screen but you might just want to close your eyes and in the playing of the song you might want to just take a moment to express quietly your own struggles of faith to God you might want to just call out to him you might want to weep it's up to you but I encourage you to use this to exert what faith you have as we listen to this song

### **Unchanging**

*Where are you Lord, in the depths of my anguish?*

*Where are you Lord, when I war with my mind?*

*Loud are the devil's taunts, as he surrounds me.*

*Where in the dark will I find you?*

*But you have not changed and you are not changing.*

*And your promises, they will remain.*

*Your sacrifice is never undone.*

*For you are my faith when I have none.*

*Where are you Lord, when I lie awake weeping?*

*Where are you Lord, when I endure pain?*

*Weak is my anxious heart, fear all around me.*

*Where in the night will I find you?*

*But you have not changed*

*and you are not changing.*

*And your promises, they will remain*

*Your sacrifice is never undone.*

*For you are my faith when I have none.*

*You are my faith, Jesus, you are my faith.*

*You are the Lord, who endured suffering.*

*You are the Lord, who went to the cross.*

*Dying a sinner's death for my redemption.*

*You are my hope and you are my song.*

Let us pray:

Lord, some of us are in those broken places

and it feels dark and lonely and you do seem distant

but you are unchanging

and so may you

be close and reveal yourself to folks

may they know your presence and comfort and peace even amidst the ongoing  
darkness and brokenness

lord be that bam to the heart and soul that only you can be

and if we can be a conduit of that lord help us to do so to be your arms and hands

to be an expression of your love and action

to be a support of faith when faith is crushed and broken and so small

lord help us to know the truth that when often faith is at its weakest it's actually at its strongest

that that holding on in faith at the toughest of times is actually the exercise of the greatest of faith and I'd ask that you'd hold those people fast

and sustain them that you'd be the one that upholds them they don't have to struggle and strain themselves because it's all a gift Lord a gift of your grace and you never let go

so to you the unchanging God

we come in you we trust and then you we ask to be with us in the days to come

in your name Jesus amen

If you want a copy of the album you'll need to go online um the link is in the YouTube video description and we'll maybe get it put up on our Facebook page this afternoon too and I do encourage you to listen to the rest of the album is very powerful and helpful in my experience this past week.