

Study Prophecy – Become Prophetic (12) Malachi

Deep Cleaning (1) “How Have You Loved Us?”

Malachi 1:1–5

Over the past few months, we've journeyed through a sermon series titled “Study Prophecy – Become Prophetic,” walking through the twelve books of the Minor Prophets. Today, we arrive at the **grand finale** of that series with the book of **Malachi**.

Now, before we open the text, here's something important to notice.

The last three books of the Old Testament—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—are all post-exilic prophets.

They were written after the Israelites returned home from the Babylonian captivity.

But here is the difference between Haggai and Zechariah and Malachi.

Haggai and **Zechariah** were written *before* the temple was rebuilt. So, their message was simple but urgent:

It was “Finish the work.” “Rebuild God’s temple.”

Malachi, however, comes *later*. The temple had already been completed in **516 BC**.

So the question changes.

It's no longer:

“Will you rebuild God’s temple?”

It becomes:

“What kind of people will you become as you have the temple now?”

And I believe that question is not just theirs in ancient times.

It's ours, too, living in the 21st century.

Because it's possible to have the building... and yet, we can lose the fire.
It's possible to have the ministry... and yet, we can lose the heart.
It's possible to have the worship services... and yet, we lose Holy reverence
towards God.

Once the temple was rebuilt, it was meant to stand at the very center of a renewed community—not as a trophy of religious success, but as the place where God would be honored with true worship.

From that worship, their hearts were to be reshaped, and their everyday lives were to be marked by holiness and justice to shine the light to all other nations—to show the world what God is like.

But over time, the people drifted. And by the middle of the next century:
Worship became routine, society became unjust, and faith became shallow.
They had the building, but they lost the fire.

And when I read that, I think: this is not just Israel's story. It's humanity's story. It's the story of so many families, so many communities, so many churches—where we begin with a holy vision, holy fire, holy passion, but over time we drift. Our legacy mentality becomes survival mentality.

In fact, think about the founding story of this nation.

Many of the earliest founding fathers and mothers came with a vision that life should be built on a **solid and lasting foundation**, shaped by truth, faith, and virtue, by knowing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

Churches were planted everywhere.

Worship was central.

Schools were established to raise the next generations who can transcend this faith in Christ.

Harvard, Yale, Dartmouth, Princeton, Northwestern—and hundreds of other institutions—were founded with this vision.

For instance, consider the founding story of Harvard University. Founded by Puritans with the vision of raising up students who would know God and spread the gospel, Harvard's original motto was “In Christi Gloriam”—“For the glory of Christ.” It was a school designed to raise up faithful servants of God. But over time, Christ was removed from the center. The school's motto changed, and the shield that once symbolized divine revelation now merely reflected human reason.

Look at their original shield, the right picture on the top. In its early design, the shield displayed **three books—two facing upward and one facing downward**. The meaning was intentional: some truth can be discovered through human study and effort (the upward-facing books), but the **most important truth comes only through divine revelation** (the downward-facing book).

The present shield, however—the one you see today—shows **all three books turned upward**. Meaning, **all truth is accessible through human reason and academic inquiry alone**.

Now—just to be clear—I'm not saying every founder was perfect.

And I'm definitely not saying every college classroom is now a Bible study. (If you know the tuition bills, you know we're in a different era.)

But here's the point: **people can start with holy intention...** and drift. Just like Israel.

They finally had the building.
But they lost the fire.

They had religion.
But they lost reverence.

And here's the frightening part that this book reveals: the problem doesn't stay in the sanctuary.

Once worship gets casual, everyday life starts to unravel.

It's like when the water at the source gets contaminated—eventually everybody downstream is drinking that contamination.

When the “upstream” worship (our relationship with God) is polluted, the “downstream” relationships begin to rot.

And that's what happened in Malachi's time.

Once they lost fervor toward God, their relationships with one another got worse:

- moral corruption
- divorce
- broken families
- dishonoring and disobedient children
- injustice in society

Personal unholiness leads to public unholiness.

That's why John Wesley famously said: “There is no holiness without social holiness.”

In other words, if your personal holiness restores, it creates **ripple effects** towards your marriage, your family, and our society.

The name **Malachi** literally means “**My messenger.**”

Interestingly, Scripture tells us nothing about his background—no father’s name, no hometown, no résumé. Some scholars even suggest *Malachi* may not be a personal name at all, but a title: **God’s messenger**.

Look at how the book begins:

Malachi 1:1, “A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi.”

Note this: God sends His messenger not to pagans, not to atheists, but to Israel, God’s people—and his message is clear:

Honor God properly in worship and in life.

When worship is restored, relationships are healed.

When reverence returns, renewal begins.

One of the most striking features of Malachi is its **style**.

It’s a conversation.

The book is mainly composed of **six dialogues** between God and His people.

The pattern goes like this:

1. God makes a statement
2. The people respond with a question
3. God answers

For example, in our passage today:

- **God states:** “I have loved you.”
- **People respond with a question:** “How have you loved us?”
- **God answers:** “Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? … Yet I have loved Jacob.”

Before we dig into this book, I need to share one thing.

Originally, my plan was simple:

- Finish the Minor Prophets today
- Start something fresh next week as we begin the new year

But as the saying goes, **“Saying goodbye is often saying hello.”** Or, **“Closing one door opens another.”**

As I studied Malachi, I couldn’t shake off the feeling that I cannot walk away from this book after just one message.

Because each dialogue is too important to rush.

Each one speaks directly into our lives, our church, our moment.

So after prayer, I became convinced: God is inviting us into another series so that we can go deeper into God’s invitation through the book of Malachi.

The New Series is called, *Deep Cleaning*

The purpose is clear – to deep clean our souls.

Malachi 3 tells us that God sends His messenger to **purify and refine His people like gold and silver**, so that we may present offerings that are pleasing to Him.

So, the next several weeks may feel a bit like:

- **white-hot fire from a smelter’s furnace**
- **strong lye soap at the laundry**

In other words, this series is not a spiritual spa day.

It’s more like spiritual deep-cleaning.

It will scrub you.

It will refine our church.

It will cleanse our spiritual conscience.

And let me be clear about this.

It may unsettle you.

It may confront you.

It may make you uncomfortable.

But bear with me – by the grace of God.

Because the whole purpose of this journey is to purify and refine us by the help of the Holy Spirit so that you and I, and our church will be “fit” for God.

That is the goal of this new seven-week series, beginning right now, titled:

Deep Cleaning

As mentioned, Malachi is a **relational dialogue** between a faithful God and a spiritually tired people.

Each sermon will visit each dialogue, in which we discover a different way God's people drift, and yet God responds that echoes the same invitation:

“Return to Me”

“Return to the first love.”

“Return to one thing that is most essential.”

The movement of the series looks like this:

- Forgotten love
- Corrupted worship
- Fractured lives
- Cynical faith
- Misplaced trust
- Eternal blindness
- And yet, it will end with gospel hope

Before we dive in, let's pray.

(Prayer)

Spiritual decline always begins when God's love is questioned. (x2)

The very first word God speaks in Malachi is:

"I have loved you."

And the people respond:

"How have you loved us?"

You can almost hear the tone of their question, can't you?

It's not a curious question. **It's a skeptical question.**

More like: "Really? Are you sure? Prove it – because I don't get it."

First, I want you to know where they are coming from so that you'll understand why they sound so cynical.

They returned from exile.

They rebuilt the temple.

So now, they expected glory and flourishing.

Instead, they got struggle.

It's like finally finishing a big home renovation, stepping back, and saying, "Wow... it still leaks."

They were still under foreign rule.

The temple was unimpressive.

Life was hard.

So they began to measure God's love by their circumstances.

And when circumstances disappoint, cynicism grows.

But when you really think about it, we do the same thing, don't we?

“If God truly loved me, this wouldn’t be happening.”

“If God really loved me, life wouldn’t be this hard.”

“If God truly loved me, He would have answered my prayers by now.”

Let’s be honest.

We usually don’t say these things out loud—not because we don’t think them, but because we’re afraid they might sound unspiritual... afraid others might judge our faith.

So instead, we say them quietly, privately, deep in our hearts.

And little by little, without realizing it, our hearts become colder.

But God is not afraid of that question.

He answers it.

God’s answer was not with explanations.

He answers with **identity**.

“Was not Esau Jacob’s brother? ... Yet I have loved Jacob.”

This is covenant language.

Think about this.

God chose Jacob over Esau – Why?

- Not because Jacob was morally superior (he wasn’t)
- Not because Esau was uniquely evil
- But because God wanted to show that His love is grace-first, not performance-based.
- It was because of God’s **sovereign grace**.

So, Malachi reminds Israel:

“You are still here because God chose you—and God has not stopped loving you.”

And **“God is not done with His story through you.”**

So Israel is loved not because life is easy and thriving, but because they are **chosen by God**.

In the same way: you and I are here all because of grace.

Some of you might say, “Pastor, don’t you see me? My prayer hasn’t been answered yet. My life is not easier yet. I still struggle. How do I know God loves me?”

Hear me on this:

The fact that you can call God **your God**...

The fact that you can call Him **your refuge**—the place you can run anytime and cry.

That itself is evidence that you are His, not your own.

Friends, God’s love is not based on your circumstances.

It’s based on “*whose*” you are.

You are a child of God.

You are chosen—by grace.

This is where the **Drama of the Bible** helps us see this more clearly.

You see, the Bible is not random verses—it is one unfolding story of God with His people:

- Starting from creation

- To exile
- To Israel's calling
- To Jesus Christ
- To the church
- Until Christ will come again with power and glory to judge the living and the dead.

To be chosen by God is to be invited into God's ongoing drama of His salvation. And God says: **you are part of it.**

At the center of that drama stands Jesus Christ—the clearest evidence of God's love.

Romans 5:8 says:

“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

God's love is not proven by an easy life.

It is proven by the cross.

Sometimes we want God to prove His love by removing suffering.

But often, God proves His love by entering our suffering.

The cross is God's loudest “I love you.”

And if the cross is true, then your suffering is not proof of God's absence.

It may be proof that you are still in the story—still in the “already/not yet”—still in the palm of His hand that He is the potter and we are the clay.

Sometimes, we don't know what He is doing. But God is doing something – and it's always good and perfect.

A man once told a story.

It's about three boys running through a church.

One of them broke something.

The pastor came in and brought the boy aside and said, "Go to the prayer room.

Kneel at the cross. And say, 'Thank you for dying for me,' three times."

The boy thought, "That's easy."

He did it without much feeling.

The first time—nothing.

The second time—still nothing.

He even thought it was kind of funny.

But when he said it the third time, looking at the cross, something broke open inside him.

His heart stirred, tears came, and for the first time he felt the weight of God's personal love.

That man said, "I was that boy. And that was the moment I realized—Jesus didn't just die for the world. He died for me."

That's what Malachi is doing.

It's bringing a tired people back to the truth of the cross:

You are loved—not because life is easy, but because God chose you and Christ died for you. And God has not done with you.

God does not shame Israel for their question. He answers it.

Likewise, He is not ashamed of you.

He invites you back.

And saying, "Return to Me."

You are chosen.

Return—not to religion, but to relationship.

Before we close, I want to invite us into a **holy moment**.

I'm sure not everyone here is doubting God.

But perhaps, many are **tired**.

Some of you are still faithful—

but faith feels thin.

You still worship—

but joy feels distant.

You still believe—

but love feels invisible.

And God does not scold you for that.

He simply says:

“Return to Me.”

So I want to ask a few questions.

You don't need to answer out loud.

Just answer honestly before God.

- Have you been measuring God's love by your circumstances?
- Has disappointment quietly turned into cynicism?
- Has worship become routine instead of reverent?
- Have you been doing the right things... without joy?

If that's you, this invitation is for you.

And it's not condemnation.

It's **grace**.

You don't need to fix yourself.

You don't need to explain yourself.

You don't need to pretend.

You just need to **return**.

And come to the Cross.

Just like that little boy, say, "Thank you Jesus for dying for me." "Restore my heart, O God." "Rekindle my love for You."

If you feel led, I invite you—right where you are—to open your hands as a sign of surrender.

Quietly but with your true heart, saying,
"Lord, I'm coming back to You."

(Pause for 10–15 seconds)

Hear God's promise again:

"Return to Me, and I will return to you."

Not "I might."

Not "I'll think about it."

But **"I will."**

God will restore you.

God is not done with you.

God still says, even to weary people:

"I have loved you."

May our response be—not "How? Prove me!"—

but **"Thank You, Lord! I love you, too, very much!"**

Amen.