

Intro:

Lent: a season to focus on Jesus, to **return** and get our lives in line with Him and His purposes in the world. This is something relevant to all of us, regardless of where we're coming from today- all of us have a desire to live a connected life with God if He is there. And all of us have a desire to live purposeful lives.

We will be focusing ourselves on this theme of return, using the book of Malachi in the Bible. Malachi is an appropriate book to help us think about this theme of return. It's a book written by a prophet, and prophets back in the day specialized in not necessarily predicting the future, but on calling God's people to return to Him and to His purposes for them. And so going through a book like Malachi will be helpful.

But we'll be also taking a very practical approach as well, in terms of returning to His purposes, by getting involved in some service projects in San Diego. So we are hoping to return to God and His purposes for us during this time.

Returning to God- to His way of Life, to His Mission in our world. How do we get started?

It gets started with something that may surprise you. It gets started with a proper trust and embrace of love.

Read text: Malachi 1:1-5

There's a definitely a difficult aspect of this verse, in particular as it deals with God's love and hate. I'd like to start at the beginning, and work our way through it by focusing on two main points. We'll deal with the love/hate problem in the second point. The first point, then, in terms of how we get started with this journey of turning back to God, is simply this:

We need to trust God's love if we're going to return to living for Him and His purposes.

Text: This is what 1:2 is about.

Now, the thing to think about here is why Israel questions God's love. It could potentially be out of some type of innocent lack of knowledge- they just don't know. Or it may be out of some sort of fear or uncertainty. Those may be in play, but I think there's something much deeper and actually darker at play. As we read through this book in the next two months, we begin to discover that Israel questions God out of doubt and cynicism. And as it relates to God's love, they doubt God's love because they feel like He's not showing His love to them. They feel like they've been doing the things God has wanted, but He hasn't returned the favor. One example: Mal 3:14-15

Of course, we'll discover that they aren't really doing everything God wanted in the first place. But the point here is that there seems to be a nagging mistrust of God and how much He really loves them, and so God wants to make sure they do.

Our context:

We are the same- we doubt God and His love. And I think for the same reasons: God doesn't seem to return the favor. God- didn't you say life was going to be somehow better if we followed you? That is a huge question, one that comes in the midst of all sorts of different things- from a job cut to a death in the family, from a broken relationship to a debilitating cancer. I think of the CG I'm a part of where we thought about this in light of a rejection to graduate school and also cancer in the family. And the challenge at that moment is this: is God for real? Does he care, does He love? Will we trust in Him, or will we just let go of all restraint and say to hell with Him, I got to get mine and live my life?

But there's more that just trusting God's love. That can seem a little broad and general. There's another aspect of God's love toward us we need to embrace, and it's this:

We embrace our special role as God's loved ones in His plan.

This is what I think the love/hate discussion is about.

Some wrong ways to think about love/hate here:

a. Its about God's love/hate on people based on how holy or good they are. They think of Esau and his ancestors the Edomites and how they aren't good people, doing things that God doesn't like (Stories in Num. 20, Gen 25). True. But the Israelites are the same, if not worse, and especially in this book- it will talk about their shortcomings!! Further, in

Hosea 9:15, God says that he "hates" the Israelites because of their sin as well. And so this passage, while it does show us perhaps how holy God is, it isn't saying that God loves/hates based on one being good and the other bad.

b. This is about the degrees of love from God- God loves Jacob more. People look at Luke 14:26. This could be true, but I think there's more.

c. What this verse seems to be saying is that God loves Jacob in a special way as it relates to His purpose, His plan. Jacob, if you remember, was the one chosen by God to be the forefather of His people Israel. Israel was special in God's sight, not because it had exclusive claim to God or heaven per say (other ethnic groups in the first half of the Bible did as well). But Israel was special because God chose them specifically to show the world what God was like, through the way they loved Him, each other, and the world. In other words, God had a role for Israel to play, one that was based in love. Deut 7:6ff

This can free us up, can't it, to live the lives we are called to live?

And so God's love is here- it needs to be trusted, it needs to be embraced in light of our special role.

Romans 8:28 brings these themes together well: *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*

Where do we go from here?

- Embrace God's love. Not in some general way, but as expressed in Jesus.
- Trust in God's love right now in the midst of your circumstance.
- Know that you are chosen.