

**THE
BON AIR
PULPIT**

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September 12, 1999

Sermon: *God's Love For Us*

In the next several months we are going to be focusing in on the last book of the Old Testament. It bears the name of a prophet by the name of Malachi. What is so fascinating about the book is that it talks about family, it talks about worship, it talks about stewardship, it talks about the issues of right or wrong, and you are going for find it a fascinating walk through a portion of God's word. I have entitled this message as God's word to cynical people. The word cynic comes to us out of Greek roots. Dogs in the Mediterranean world were never treated as household pets. They were not pampered objects of families. Rather, they were the scavengers that lived off of the garbage of the community. They were the frightened beasts just outside the community. When you would reach out to them, they would snarl at you. And when the Greeks looked at a dog, they would call them cynics. Cynics. Cynic is a person who, when you tell them something they look at you with almost insolence and say, "oh yeah?" "Can you prove it?" "I've heard that before, tell me something else". What you have in the book of Malachi is that seven times the prophet gives a message and every time it comes back like this: "Oh yeah? Tell me more. Is that all you have to say?" In this first message he is dealing with the basic truth of the gospel, and that is that God *really* loves us. The answer that comes back to him is the answer "Oh yeah? Is that really true? Can I depend upon that? Is it

something that I know is so?" You need to be aware of where the Bible always begins. We have the impression that the Bible begins with what do you think about God. Not so. The Bible begins with what does God think about you. And what God thinks about you is that God loves you. The God of the Bible never comes and says,

"This is what you ought to do!" He comes and says, "I love you—now what do you think you ought to do?" Where it starts is this heart of God who reaches out and says, "I love you". These people, as you are going to see in the scripture we are getting ready to read, turns and says "Oh yeah?" Then he is going to try to tell them that they can really build their life on God's love. Let me begin reading in verse 2 of Chapter 1: I have loved you said the Lord. But you ask how have You loved us? (Oh, yeah?). Then he goes on to talk a little about history. He says, "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? said the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated". The terminology is, one I chose and one I didn't choose. Choose for service. I have turned his mountains into a wasteland and left his inheritance in the desert jackals. Esau may say, "though we have been crushed, we will rebuild our ruins." This is what the Lord almighty says, "they may build but I will demolish. They will be called a wicked land, a people under the wrath of God. You will see it with your own eyes and you will say great is the Lord, even beyond the borders of Israel.

A few years ago you gave me time off to do some additional study. I was sitting in a class listening to a professor telling the high moments of his culture. He talked about all of those times of creativity and contribution and when he was over, the man sitting next to me raised his hand and said, "I noticed you jumped from peak to peak. What about all those valleys? What about all those times you did not mention?" And he said those were the times that people lived off the momentum of the past. Those were the times where people took but did not give. Those were the times in which people

received from their ancestors but never made any contribution to their own children. Those were the dark periods of our society. Now every time that you read through the Old Testament and the history of the Jewish people, you will see there are mountain peaks. Times in which there were great movements of God, but also there are a lot of valleys, a lot of dark periods. The time that I am reading about today is one of those dark periods. It is the time in which they are trying to turn away from God, the time in which they are making no contribution, but they still haven't quite turned their back. They are kind of like that phrase in the classic song OLE Man River, I'm tired of living but scared of dying. Well, they're tired of God and they don't know quite yet if they're going to turn their back on Him. God comes and says let Me start at the very basic. Let Me see if there is a message that will reach your heart. This is the message: I have loved you. They turned and said You are going to have to do more than tell us. You are going to have to prove it. He starts off by trying to help them to understand how much He deeply loves them. For you today, some of you are here today wondering that same thing. You've really wondered whether God has gone off and left you. You really wonder that maybe you've done some things that surely that's changed God's attitude about you. Maybe one of the reasons you came to church today is to wrestle with one of the basic issues of you and God—does He really love me? So let's notice what God said to them and it will be a message to you. First thing God said was, you need to have a correction.

You see, here were a group of people who had come back from being in captivity. They came back to a war devastated country. Their fathers had built their houses, and the temple, and the walls again. God had told them all the big wonderful things that were going to happen in their life, and they looked around and wasn't too much happening. I mean they were still small. They were still poor. It didn't seem like the promises of

God were coming true. Here is God saying I love you, and they say well if God loves us then why are we in the mess that we are in? Ah, that's the problem! That's the correction that needed to be made in their mind and in ours. Never judge God only by the outside circumstances. We have the impression that God loves us "if" we have more than enough money, our health is good, and our children are doing fine. There is today among us an American style gospel that says serve Jesus and you will drive a Jaguar. Serve Jesus and you will never have to worry about cancer. Serve Jesus and your children will get a full scholarship to UVA. If you just serve Jesus, everything will wonderfully happen to you. Because we have been raised in a very materialistic society, when we hear all of this we say Oh, wonderful! Religion is a barter deal. I do for God and God does for me. God is my servant. God is my bellboy and my provider. What we think is, if He doesn't...well God must not love me. I was reminded of this not long ago. My wife and I took a little day trip. She wanted to go to an outlet store. Those of you men who have done that recently know what that means. I love the one we went to. They had had so many men who went, they actually had benches for the husbands to sit. I loved that. I was sitting there on one of the benches talking to the other men, wondering whether you would be able to put your MasterCard back in your wallet because it was so hot. I looked ahead and saw a little section that interested me, and I walked over. There was a man in there who was buying a piece of clothing for his wife. His wife had just come out of the dressing room and they were talking about it. A little toddler came up. He had found something in the store that *he* wanted. He was pulling on his dad's shirttail and said, "Daddy can I have this?" Now I think daddy gave a very good

answer. Daddy said, “Son, I don’t have any money. Everything that I have today I’m spending on your mother. Now children, that’s good to learn that mother and daddy are not money trees. They don’t print money at home at night when you go to sleep. So sometimes mother and daddy do not have money. The little fellow threw it down (which meant daddy was probably going to have to buy it anyway) and stomped his feet and he looked up at his daddy and said, “You meany! You don’t love me!” Now what was the basis of the little child’s thought? Unless you keep on giving, you don’t love me. That’s often what we do to God. We say to Him, if you don’t keep on giving, and if everything isn’t smooth in my life, You must not love me. Here is the correction. We ought to worship God, not for what He does for us, but for who He is. We ought to recognize that God’s love is not dependent on the circumstances but on the fact that God wants to make us somebody. It’s not that He gives us *something* but He wants to make us *somebody*. If you judge God always by just the circumstances, you’re always going to run into trouble and difficulty. Once you begin to understand that you have a relationship with God not because you look at His hand, but you look at His heart. All of us know the story of the prodigal son, the little boy who grew up in a home where he knew his dad had a lot of money. He kept waiting for daddy to die. Every day he would go in and say, Daddy how are you feeling? Daddy just kept living and finally you remember the prodigal son came to his daddy and said give me, give me. You remember the story. He went out and lost everything he had. Then he came back and said, “Daddy, make me, make me, make me.” The correction comes in my life and yours when I stop saying give me and start saying make me. Do with me what you will. I worship You for who You are. Only then can I

really understand that God loves me. Second thing that he said is that you not only need a correction, you need to have a good comparison. Notice the comparison. He said look at your life and look at your distant relative named Esau. Look at what I’ve done for you. I have called you to be my servants. I have provided you the prophets. I have given you the scripture. You have the temple. Look at Esau. He doesn’t have anything compared to you. Have you ever sat at home and complained that things are going to well. Then you got a call. Your best friend was in the hospital and just diagnosed with cancer. You got in the car and got back and you said forgive me Lord for my cheap shots at you and complaining. When I look at what others have, I don’t have any right to say anything. Would anyone in this room like to dispute the fact that we are the most blessed people on the face of the earth? You got in your car this morning. Most of you live in very nice houses. You were able to walk out to a very nice automobile and come to a very nice building to worship. You are aware that around the world most people cannot do that. Would anybody like to issue a complaint to God when you begin to compare yourself with others? I’ve often reminded people about our trip this summer when we went to visit our family in southern Africa, Mozambique. Mozambique is the poorest country in the world. Many of you gave glasses that Judy and I took in our luggage. We became opticians. We gave away about 600 glasses. You know what it is when a nurse comes from the hospital and says I understand you have glasses. She reached in the box and said now I can read what’s on the chart. Someone rode a bicycle for five hours so he could get some glasses to read the Bible. My family laughed because every time I saw a church I would find out what time the service was and I went. Mozambique was for many years a Portugal colony. Portugal is largely a Roman Catholic country. They build huge cathedrals over Mozambique. One of those was in the little town where my daughter and son-in-law live. I found

out they had mass at 7:00 so I went to mass at 7:00. In the huge cathedral there are no seats. Everybody stands up. When I walked in the whole place was packed. People were down to the street. I said well, I won’t be able to find a place and no one spoke my language. I decided to sit there and about that time someone came up and poked me on the shoulder. I realized he was an usher. He did this, (motioning to come with me). That translated into any language so I followed him. He must have figured out I was a preacher. Don’t ask me to figure out why he figured out I looked like a preacher. He took me up and sat me next to the priest. I could see everything going on in the service. I was raised in south Louisiana and been in Roman Catholic churches many times, so I knew what was going to happen. After everything happened, the priest comes down with his altar boys. They start handing out the communion wafers. I was standing up here and the priest was down there. After a while I noticed he got down like this. I knew they didn’t give the wafer to little children. I wondered why is he bending down? I got up to stand by him. You’re curious aren’t you? I was the most curious fellow there. I was the only one with a white face in the whole crowd. I had already caused my commotion, so I got up and walked down. Do you know what the army crawl is? An army crawl is that you walk on your elbows and bring your body with you. There was a man who had army crawled all the way down the aisle. The priest reached down to put the wafer in his mouth and he army crawled back. Any comparison you want to make? Anybody here, when you think about what the rest of the world is doing, want to raise your hand and say God I don’t know if you love me? When you begin to recognize how blessed we are in comparison to others surely we know God loves us. He said a third thing. He said make the right judgements on the right things. Make sure you know God loves you when you compare yourself to others. He said you know I will love you because of My constancy in all the

areas of your life. Let me tell you how you know God loves you. Because, when you leave this place, He’s going with you. In every experience that you face, He’s going to be there with you. Every time there is a difficulty and there is a problem, He’s going to be there with you. He didn’t birth you, leave you an orphan, and go off without you. He’s there with you. He used the illustration of the people who lived next to Israel who were always causing them problems. He said I’m greater than your enemies. Whatever your problem is, I’m greater than all of them. If you believe that I am greater than your problems, then you’ll know that I will always be with you. Will you take a hymnal in front of you and turn to page eight. If you will look down at the bottom, you will notice this hymn was written by Martin Luther. Martin Luther was a man who stood up against a whole empire. He spoke about the freedom to interpret the Bible and religious freedom. I wanted to read the second stanza. *Did we in our own strength confide; our striving would be losing. Were not the right man on our side, the man of God’s own choosing. Do you ask who that may be, Christ Jesus it is He. Lord Saboath is His name, from age to age the same. He will win the battle.* Let me tell you what the word Lord Saboath is. It is this work in Malachi. It is the Lord Almighty. Do you know Martin Luther could stand up and say I will stand for right regardless of what happens to me. Because he believed in a God who loved him, the Lord Almighty. I want to tell you today that regardless of what difficulty may come in your life, what problems may come into your life, Lord Saboath, the Lord Almighty is with you. You can know that He loves you. Some of you think, well Pastor you don’t know what I’ve done. I love the story of Bart Starr. He used to be the all pro quarterback for the Greenbay

Packers. He has a wonderful son. When his son was small, every time his son would bring home a good paper, he would give him a dime. One Sunday the Packers lost. Starr said of himself, "I stunk." He came home late at night, got in his bed, and on his bed from his son were two dimes. It said I love you dad. Do you understand regardless of what you've done, regardless of the circumstances in your life, that on your pillow are two dimes from God that says I love you? Regardless of what you've done. Regardless of who you are. I love you. You can walk out of this building today and build your life on Lord Saboath. You can build your life on the Lord God Almighty who is going to be with you in the middle of every experience of your life. Some people have said that maybe the greatest theologian who ever lived was Carl Barth. He came to New York one time to give a lecture. A reporter said to Dr. Barth, you have thought of great things about God. Tell us the greatest thing you've ever thought about God. Without hesitation Carl Barth said, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." The greatest thing I can tell you about God is that even when you don't think it, He still loves you. Maybe when He reaches out to you, you have had enough harm and hurt that you want to pull back. I want to let you feel His hand reach out to you again and say I do love you. You can build your life on it. Won't you accept it? There are people in this room today who need to open your heart up to Saboath the God of love. You need to say Father I love you and I want to serve you and I want You to forgive me. If you have never given your heart and life to Christ, you ought to do that today.