



Advent 2020

Wk. 2 "The Refining Love of God"

By Pastor Bill Alderson

Malachi 3:1-7

"Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. 3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.

⁵ "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.

⁶ "For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

It's the Christmas season, people, and Peace, Love and Joy abound.

Last week, Pastor Jody covered the topic of Hope:

Quoting Jody:

"Hope – elpis; the expectation of good, anticipation usually with joy, a joyful and confident expectation of eternal Salvation.

- The title of today's sermon, "The Refining Love of God" ought to fill our hearts with warmth and Joy. After all, we're being bombarded with messages of Love right now.



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- I don't know about you, but the Hallmark channel is on 24/7 in my home, and there's a lot of folks *falling in love* on these movies, let me tell you...
- They're not all bad, not all bad – but let's be honest they *are* all predicatable. 😊
- In all of them, love is what people are seeking.
- Unfortunately, "Love" in our modern society bears little resemblance to the holy, spiritual *Love of God*.

SO, it's important that we understand that love does not define God, but instead that God defines love.

- **Love as defined by the world (movies, media, etc.)**

- Love is strong and patient BUT when the going gets tough love leaves the building.
- Love is a given committment that ensures that personal happiness always comes first.
- Love is a fleeting euphoric feeling meant to be had with multiple parterns and multiple genders.

- **Love as defiend by the Bible**

- Love is strong and patient and when it gets tough it opverpowers desires to flee.
- Love is a commitment to us from God that ultimate joy can be found outside of yourself.
- Love is an eternal joy that is pure, loyal, and always fulfilling

- In fact, there are four unique forms of love that we find in Scripture.

They are communicated through four Greek words:

- *Eros*: romantic love,
- *Storge*: family love,
- *Philia*: brotherly love, and
- *Agape*: God's divine love.

- Of these, **Agape** (Pronounced: *Uh-GAH-pay*) is the highest form of love in the Bible.



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- This term defines God's immeasurable, incomparable love for humankind. It is the divine love that comes from God.
- Agape love is perfect, unconditional, sacrificial, and pure.
- See, God loves you with an unfailing, passionate, **Big-L Love**,
- He wants us to return his love by demonstrating faithfulness, integrity, purity, and justice in human relationships, especially in regard to the powerless.

We're going to start in scripture today in the book of Malachi, chapter 3, so open your Bible or your Bible app and follow along with me.

- While you're doing that, let's take a moment to talk about this book.
 - The last of 12 Old Testament books that bear the names of the Minor Prophets, grouped together as the Twelve in the Jewish canon.
 - The authorship of Malachi is a subject of some debate, and as with almost all the prophets, we know little about the prophet's personal circumstances. Scholars are somewhat divided as to whether the term "Malachi" is a personal name or a title – as "Malachi" literally means "my messenger."
 - Regardless, we know that Malachi was written to confront the ***spiritual complacency and indifference*** that had overcome the people of God, and the message he brought was from God.
- Hmm... Spiritual complacency and indifference... Sound like today?
 - The book of Malachi exposes Israel's corruption and offers hope. Malachi holds a mirror before you, helping you assess your relationship with God and your loyalty to him.
 - At the time of Malachi's writing, about 430 B.C., the Jews had returned to Israel from the Babylonian captivity (as merchants, not shepherds). The Medo-Persian Empire still ruled Israel, and the temple had been rebuilt.
 - Both the Law and the priesthood of Aaron's line had been restored, and the Jews had given up their worship of idols.



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- Nevertheless, Malachi's warning was not without cause.
- The Jewish people were mistreating their wives, marrying pagans and not tithing, and the priests were neglecting the temple and not teaching the people the ways of God. In short, the Jews were not honoring God.
- So Here we'll pick up in Malachi 3:1

Malachi 3:1-7

- *3:1a "Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me."*
 - So at the end of Malachi 2, Israel complained that God seemed to reward the wicked and did not exercise His justice in the world. God responds to their complaint by saying, "I will set things right with My Messiah, and before Him will come **My messenger**."
 - And who is this messenger that God will send?
 - **Well, we know him to be John the Baptist** – the only person who fits the description of the promised messenger, who we also seen prophesied in Isaiah 40:3
 - **And he will prepare the way before Me:** In an ancient royal procession the messenger went before the King to announce his arrival, to indicate the route, and to remove any obstacles in the road. John the Baptist fulfilled this exact ministry for Jesus. The same idea is indicated in Isaiah 40:3
 - **Important Language:**
 - **Before Me:** The LORD promises that **He Himself** will come - not merely a new or better prophet, **but the LORD Himself**, so great is his LOVE for us!
 -
- *3:1b And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; and the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.*
 - This second messenger is the LORD Himself - Jesus coming to **His temple** as the fulfillment of the old covenant and to institute a new covenant.
 - This second Messenger will also come with **purifying, refining** judgment, as we see in the next verse here:



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- *2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap.*
 - Malachi 3:1 spoke of two messengers to come - one to prepare the way of the LORD, and one to be the *Messenger of the covenant*. The **coming** that man must **endure** is the coming of the *Messenger of the covenant*, but it is **His second coming.**
 - Like most Old Testament prophets, Malachi, in his picture of the coming Christ, mingled the two advents.
 - We're all familiar with a refining fire, but what is *Fuller's soa*?
 - A fuller was the individual who would take the raw, filthy wool from sheep and **purify it** using a variety of techniques, including an extremely harsh soap that would ultimately help to make it clean.
 - So the coming of this second Messenger will be awesome and terrible, but with a purpose. Both the launderer and the refiner **work to clean**, not to **destroy**.
- *3 He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the Lord as in the days of old and as in former years.*
 - **He will sit as a refiner.**
What great comfort we should take that God bears this work **HIMSELF**, that he would make our purification a **personal thing**.
 - The great beauty of this verse is that when silver is refined, it becomes brilliant and reflective, so that when we looks at it we see our reflection.
 - The great theologian Charles Spurgeon said of this verse,
 - *"I think I see in the sitting down of the refiner a settled patience, as if he seemed to say, 'This is stern work, and I will sit down to it, for it will need care, and time, and constant watchfulness.'"*
 - So if you're looking for something to be thankful for, remember that God thinks of you as Silver and Gold – to be refined for sure, but with great care and love.



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- *⁵ "Then I will draw near to you for judgment. I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired worker in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, against those who thrust aside the sojourner, and do not fear me, says the Lord of hosts.*
 - God's ultimate purpose in these verses is to cleanse society, and to change the hearts of men.
 - When Jesus returns in glory and rules on this earth, evil will be quickly punished.

- *⁶ "For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷ From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.*
 - ***"For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.***
If it were *possible* for God to change His mind about us, He might very well do it and we would be **consumed**. Fortunately the LORD does **not change** in His love or His choice towards us.
 - ***From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. :***
God's unchanging love for Israel should have made them more obedient and submitted to Him, but they presumed upon His faithfulness and patience.
 - ***Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.***
In its most basic sense, repentance is turning away from sin and turning to God. It isn't so much *required* if we want to return to God; repentance describes what the very act of returning is.

And then, after Malachi, roughly 400 – Years – Of – Silence

That's Advent.

That's God's advent. It's preparation, it's what we're experiencing now.

Unfortunately, given 400 years to study Scripture, to seek God, and to prepare for the coming Messiah, the people did not put that time to good use.



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As the New Testament opens, Herod the Great, a descendant of Esau, was king, and the priesthood was politically motivated and not of the line of Aaron.

Politics also resulted in the development of two major factions, the Sadducees and the Pharisees.

- **The Sadducees** favored the liberal attitudes and practices of the Greeks. They held to only the Torah as regards religion but like all aristocrats they did not think God should have any part in governing the nation.
- **The Pharisees** were conservative zealots who, with the help of the scribes, developed religious law to the point where the concerns and care of people were essentially meaningless.
- **Additionally, synagogues**, new places of worship and social activity, had sprouted up all over the country, and religious and civil matters were governed by the lesser and the greater Sanhedrins, the greater Sanhedrin being comprised of a chief priest and seventy other members that handed out justice – sometimes by many lashes administered with full force.

In fact, those years blinded and deafened the nation to the point where most of the Jews could not even consider the concept of a humble, LOVING Messiah.

Their view of love had been skewed.

With humanity so confused about love, then, who was to say what love is?

Remember, the Agape Love as defined by the Bible

- Love is strong and patient and when it gets tough it overpowers desires to flee.
- Love is a commitment to us from God that ultimate joy can be found outside of yourself.
- Love is an eternal joy that is pure, loyal, and always fulfilling.



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One of the simplest and yet most profound definitions of love is found in 1 John 4:

1 John 4:7-21

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. ⁹ In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰ In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. ¹¹ Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.

¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit. ¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. ¹⁵ Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God. ¹⁶ So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. **God is love**, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. ¹⁷ By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. ¹⁸ There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. ¹⁹ We love because he first loved us. ²⁰ If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. ²¹ And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

To break this down, I want to dig deeper into four key characteristics of God's love that John indicates in these verses:

I. God's refining love is PERSONAL (Verse 7-8)

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.



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- **Brothers and Sisters, we MUST recognize what John states in these verses – that love is a fundamental mark of the one who has authentic faith.**
- **V. 4:7:** The one who loves has been *born of God and knows God*
 - Therefore the opposite, the one who does not love has *neither* been born of God, nor does he know God.
- **V. 4:8:** "God is love" – love is essential to God's nature.
 - Our ***transformed hearts*** must respond to God's call that we love others as He loves us. If we truly have become partakers of this nature (2 Peter 1:4) and increasingly reflect God's holy and loving character, then we have no choice but to love other people, especially fellow believers.
 - We will endeavor to love if we have been born of God, and we will repent when we find ourselves not loving as He has commanded
- ***God's love for us is personal – and therefore refining.***
 - ***Back in Malachi:3:3***
HE will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the Lord.
 - ***Personal example:*** Smelting aluminum with the boys.
 - *The process of purification takes a lot of work, folks, a lot of work.*
 - ***Charles Spurgeon, who we quoted earlier, goes on to say,***
"Have you ever reflected upon the fact that when Christ's refining work is done upon us there will never be any need for it again? Blessed be God, there is no purgatorial fire. We need not dread that we have yet to pass through purging flames in another world."

II. God's refining love is PROVEN (Verse 9-10)

⁹In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. ¹⁰In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

- God's love for us was "made manifest" or proven to us – *through the life and death of His Son Jesus Christ*
- Love requires actions:
it is demonstrated through behavior, and the love of God is no exception



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- Romans 5:8 says, "*But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*"
- It doesn't do any good to talk about love and compassion **without demonstrating it!**
 - *God demonstrates His love* – it was made manifest among us in the form of the Son – in Jesus.
- **God's love for us is proven**
 - **John 10:14-15**
"I am the good shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep"
 - The image of shepherding is lost on many American's today, but when Jesus walked the streets of Jerusalem, shepherding was as common as farming is in this part of the country.
 - One of the outstanding characteristics of good shepherds was that they knew each one of their sheep by sight and often by name. And so Jesus says, "I know My own."
 - Jesus knows you. **He knows you.**
 - Ever seen old videos of teenagers *screaming* about the Beatles, or other bands?
 - How they would shriek with excitement if a band member looked at them, or talked to them?
 - Let us have that sense of **excitement** and **ZEAL** knowing that **JESUS knows US!**

III. God's refining love is PERFECTING (Verse 12)

- ¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.*
- Since God's love is *already perfect*, the phrase "His love is perfected in us" actually has to do with perfecting **us**.
 - Another way to translate this phrase would be "**God's love completes us.**"
 - No Jerry McGuire jokes please...
 - Without the **love of God**, we will never be complete, never be perfect.
 - Romans 8:28 says, "*And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*"
 - God wants good things for us.
 - Bear in mind, good things are **not** material, **they are spiritual**



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- That's what "*agape love*" means -- wanting what is best for another person. And God's love is such that He will supply us with all we need in order to grow spiritually

IV. God's refining love is PRESERVING (Verse 14)

¹⁴ And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world.

- God's love for us is one that wants to preserve us – to save us and bring us home
 - a. **2 Peter 3:9**
"The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance"
 - b. **John 3:16**
Jesus Christ demonstrated this kind of divine love to his Father and to all humanity in the way he lived and died: "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)
- God did not send Jesus to die on the cross just to prove that He loves us, **but to save us!**
- Because of God's refining love, we can be saved -- *we can have eternal life.*

CONCLUSION:

When we say "God is love" we must never think His Love is more important than His other attributes.

- God's love ***never operates*** apart from His holiness, mercy, justice, omnipotence, omniscience, or *any other attribute*.
- This means that it is ***loving*** to seek *justice* and demand *holiness*, though we never do so at the expense of *mercy*.



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So be comforted today to know that the truth – "God is love," and ask the Lord to help you learn how to apply His love to every situation you face:

God's Refining Love is Personal:

it is a love for individuals – you are important to God!

God's Refining Love is Proven:

it is a love that has been demonstrated – it takes action!

God's Refining Love is Perfecting:

He seeks the growth and development of the ones He loves.

God's Refining Love is Preserving:

Through God's love, *Jesus came to earth and died for our sin.*

What a thing to Rejoice in!

What a thing to take Hope in!

And what a thing to bring us Peace!

PRAYER

COMMUNION

BENEDICTION

Go in the name of the Father, *who is Love*, and whose love is perfect in all ways.

Go in the name of the Son, *who in Love*, was sent to be the propitiation for our sins.

Go in the name and the power of the Holy Spirit, whose fruit in our hearts is Love.
(Galatians 5:22)