

I. Introduction and Personal Reflections

Jim helped me move out in 1976. We have been lifelong friends. Joe and his wife, and Jim and his wife, we just, I love them very much, and they mean the world to me. I always enjoy hearing them preach, both of them. They just really do a good job. So he is no stranger to us. He has been here before, but let us give him a good Kansas City welcome. Jim, you come and preach to us.

Well, thank you. Of course, I will tell you what, I feel a little inadequate this morning. First, we had this Italian gumball this morning, jumping up and down and screaming and hollering and running around like a crazy man. I have not done that in years. I have not turned off the fan. I said, "Turn that fan off! I am freezing!" I do not have any blood circulation anymore. And then, as you know, a guy comes up here and sings. I am thinking, "Give me a break, guys."

Before I get started, I have to share something that is really, really important to me. There are two things in my life that transformed my life. First was, of course, when I got saved, and that was 1958. So last April, I turned, I liked his birthday better, I turned 60. And I liked that birthday better than the one I have in August. In August, it was 69.

But then this day, 41 years ago, this little girl over here married me. Joe was talking about Karen, and I had already planned this. I told my girls, I said, "I am going to make a big fuss about it because I did not buy her anything." When she married me, she was 21, I was 26. It was not until I had daughters that I understood why her dad did not like me.

But she followed me all the way up to Vermont, took a three-week-old baby, our first child, a three-week-old baby, and dragged her up to Vermont. Her parents' prayer was somehow we would get out of there. Everybody was worried about us. Bobby even sent us money. Everybody thought she was going to starve and I was going to kill the kid. We have been up there now, it will be 39 years in November. Besides God and the Holy Spirit, it is because of her. Stand up. Go sit down. I have to preach.

All right, first of all, let me say this: our friend Tiffany is here. She is a great gal. We met her when she was about, well, how old were you, about 10? I would guess 10 or 11, maybe 12, 11. Her parents are missionaries in Brazil, and we have supported them all those years, and we have watched her grow up. Now she is a doctor of dentistry. I did not call her doctor. But anyhow, I am glad she is here today and appreciate her coming.

Take your Bibles and turn to Malachi chapter 1, if you would. Now, I spent 12 hours yesterday in an airport, and I did not know I was coming back to sit on these chairs and watch a Kansas City Chiefs football game this afternoon. But Barb said she is bringing a recliner, so that is good because I need a place to sleep. I plan on taking a nap this afternoon.

I use more notes the older I get because when I am preparing a message, God gives me something, and if I do not write it down, I forget it. Then a lot of times, I forget my notes. But that was Brother Joe, that was a great message. It really was. It is a tough act to follow, talking

about the Christian life and how exciting it is. And it is exciting. I have been in Vermont for 38 years; we do not get too excited up there. I mean, you all clap and holler everything; they just sort of say, "Uh-huh," and we go on.

But I always find it interesting when I am preaching in a place like this, how God ties messages together. I want to put my message before and synchronize them before you get to the Christian life and why we have a Christian life. A bunch of Christians get together like this, and we are fortunate. We are fortunate. I mean, all over this town, there are believers getting together. Now, we know they are all wrong and we are right. That is how it is in my town. They would all be better off if they came to my church.

But the truth of the matter is, in this country, all over this country, believers are getting together and praising the Lord and listening to God's Word. We are very fortunate people. There are a lot of places in the world that does not happen very easily. We are fortunate that God has given us a place where we can do that. Now we get together, and abundant living is great living. It really is. There is a reason for that, and the reason for that is the love of God.

II. The Unchanging Love of God

One of the men that most influenced D.L. Moody was a young preacher named Henry Morehouse. Now I have to tell you, I hate young preachers. We have six young preachers out of our church, and they come back and preach, and everybody fawns all over them. "Oh, you are so wonderful! You are so good! You have grown so much!" And I am the guy with all the wisdom. I am the gray hair. Come on, give me a break.

But Morehouse preached one time for Moody for seven nights. For seven nights, he used the same text, John 3:16. According to Moody, Morehouse's preaching was a lot different than his. In fact, a lot different than most preachers. He said, unlike most preachers who stand behind lost people trying to beat them into submission, Brother Morehouse, Henry, preached the love of God.

What he said when he got done with that week, he made this statement: "I never knew how much God cared for me." I want to talk about that this morning. In the closing service, Morehouse said this: "I have for seven nights preached to try to tell you how much God loves you." He said, "And in the process of that, my old stammering tongue could do it no good." He said, "If I could climb a ladder to heaven and there meet Gabriel and say to Gabriel, 'Gabriel, tell me, explain to me the love of God.'" Henry Morehouse said, Gabriel would say this:

John 3:16

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

I want to look at Malachi chapter 1, verses 1 through 5, and preach about God's love. Let us pray.

Father, God, this is a time that we look forward to, not hearing a preacher, but hearing Your Word. God, this morning, if we do not hear from the Holy Spirit, then this will be for naught. We

will have spent this day, this morning, coming here, sitting, pretending, if we do not hear from God, if we do not hear from You this morning. So my prayer today is, may You, through Your Holy Spirit, lift up the name of Jesus. Meet each one of us where we are. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

You know, the love of God is the constant message in the Word of God. Now, do not get excited, I did not say it was the theme. The Bible will even get all nervous about that. The theme, of course, is the kingdom. We know that. But even in understanding the kingdom, all through that is the love of God.

III. Addressing the Paradox: God's Love and Hatred

What makes it difficult for most people is when they read this passage. Let us read it, starting in verse 1.

Malachi 1:1-5

The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi.

I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,

And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

Whereas Edom saith, We are impoverished, but we will return and build the desolate places: thus saith the LORD of hosts, They shall build, but I will throw down; and they shall call them, The border of wickedness, and, The people against whom the LORD hath indignation for ever.

And your eyes shall see, and ye shall say, The LORD will be magnified from the border of Israel.

By the way, how would you like to get a word from the Lord to be a burden? We are not looking for burdens, are we? God says through His prophet Malachi, "I have loved you, saith the Lord." Yet they say, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" By the way, people like to change that word "dragon," but if you watch TV, that is all they talk about today, is dragons. Anyhow, moving on. That was free.

A lot of people take this passage and try to say, "Well, there is a contradiction," because in 1 John chapter 4, the Bible says God is love. Now, some of you, but most of you, were not there in the late 60s when the peace movement was coming through. I always thought that was funny because the peace movement always rioted and burned things down. They went around and said, "Peace," and then tried to kill you if you were not on their side. We always talk about the love of God, the love of God. And they would take and say, a lot of times they would say, "Well, if 1 John 4 says God is love, how in the world can God hate Esau?"

Now, I am going to admit to you, I have a problem with this passage. I really do. But my problem is not with Esau. My problem is, how could He have loved Jacob? Not how could He hate Esau? That is pretty easy to see. But how could He love Jacob? And I propose this to you

today: How could God love us? How could He love us? God is love. But how in the world could He love us?

The prophecy of Malachi begins with a great affirmation for us. It says, "I have loved you." Now, I have said that phrase to my wife, I do not know how many times, countless times. "I love you. I have loved you. I love you now, and I will continue to love you." That is the affirmation here. God is talking to the nation of Israel. Let me remind you, Israel was far from God at this time. And He said, "I have loved you. I have loved you." It is a simple statement.

Sometimes we sort of lessen the value of that, and people say, "I love you, man. I love you, man." You do not love me. Give me a break. If you love me, you would give me something. Do not just say, "I love you." My wife expects more from me than just, "I love you." True love expresses itself. True love is a love that gives. That is what true love is. And God says here to the children of Israel, "I have loved you." And then they say, "Really?" This is Lake's translation. You can say that, King James: "Really? And just how have You loved us? How have You loved us?"

Understand what God has done for Israel. And here they are, who knows why, and they argue with Him. They say to Him, "Wherein hast thou loved us?" Do you know if you get into your marriage or any other relationship that involves love and you begin to say, "You did not love me," you have a problem with your relationship. You have a serious problem with your relationship. Israel had a serious problem with their relationship with God. They lost their love for Him. And now they were questioning God's love.

So as a concrete proof of His love, God said to them, "I have favored you over the whole world." This is not talking about individual salvation. He says, "I have loved you as I have chosen you as a nation to bring into this world the greatest act of love that will ever occur. I could have chosen Esau, but I did not. I chose you. Here is how I love you."

Let me say this, and some of you may understand, probably in both my messages, where I am coming from this. I will tell you about the Bible: if you are a student of the Word of God, if you love God's Word, I do not mean just trying to figure out how many hairs the Antichrist has got on his big toe. I am talking about hearing from God. You open the book and you want to hear from God. He will meet you where you are, and He will speak to your circumstances. I found that to be very true.

You know, too often we reason with God why things happen in our lives. We have a lady in our church. She got saved several years ago. I do not know how long Kathy got saved. She has been praying for her husband, her son to get saved. And she has cancer. I traveled down to Dartmouth Medical Center to see her. Now she has had breast cancer twice. She was in the hospital because the pain was so terribly bad. While she was there this time, they said, "It is metastatic. It has gone to your brain."

As I talked with her, her husband left the room when I came in. She and I sat and talked. She said to me, "You know, my son is going to have his first children. He is going to have twin boys. I am just asking God to let me live long enough to see those twins." And December 22nd, they were

born two weeks early. But here is what she said to me. She is laying in the hospital, and she says to me, "How is Kathy doing?" My wife. "How is Kathy doing?" I said, "Well, she is struggling, but she is okay." And she made this statement: "It is just not fair." Now the context was Kathy, but I think it was also her.

We often feel that way when things go bad in our lives, when circumstances bring us to a point where we say, "I do not understand, God. This is not fair." If you have never said that, then you have a problem because everybody's things are yummy. Come on. "This is not fair. This is not fair." I encouraged Kathy Goven to know that the God who saved her when she was well is the same God who loved her now. And that is true as well for my wife and for myself. But it is easy to let circumstances get in the way of wondering sometimes, "God, do You really love me?"

We Bible believers, we make a big deal about this. "Oh, how could God really love me?" We really want Him to, and we wonder if He does. We do not usually say, "God, I understand why You do not love me because I am no good." We say that a lot, but we do not mean it. We actually think we are pretty good. Hey, we are King James people. We are pretty good. We are Bible-believing Baptists, and we are not afraid to say that. We are pretty good. It is those guys that are not bad. But then we get down and down, so we say, "God, do You really love me? Do You really love me?"

IV. God's Love is Not a Response to Our Merit

I want to give you, as my brother said this morning, three short points.

1. God's love has never been in response to you.

It has never been in response to you. Look at verses 2 and 3 here again.

Malachi 1:2-3

I have loved you, saith the LORD. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob's brother? saith the LORD: yet I loved Jacob,

And I hated Esau, and laid his mountains and his heritage waste for the dragons of the wilderness.

I am sure you know this: this was not a reference to salvation. Everybody talks about all the, Calvinism has swooped in now, and that is a big deal. Reformers. Listen, people do not need to be reformed; they need to be saved. I got reformed when I got saved. There is not enough to reform me from. People want to be reformed. But listen, this does not have anything to do with being saved.

In fact, go to Genesis chapter 25. God, in His grace, and let me say this, without an ability to understand His decision, chose Jacob over Esau. It was not because Jacob did anything good, because do you know when this decision was made? It was made while they were in the womb. Look at Genesis 25:21.

Genesis 25:21-26

And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived.

And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD.

And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger.

And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.

And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau.

And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob.

You see, if this had to do with salvation, God choosing Jacob over Esau had to do with eternal salvation, every Jewish person would be saved right now. They would automatically be saved. I said that to a friend of mine who has become a follower of this false doctrine. And I said, "Well, then if you are going to use that as an example, you have got to, every Jew is saved, because they are all from the tribe." I mean, they all come from Jacob. They are all saved, even if they do not talk about Jesus, even if they do not believe in Him, they are saved, because they were chosen then.

This has nothing to do with salvation. This has something to do with two nations, and God chose a nation. And He chose that nation to bring forth His Son, who would bring salvation to the world. God, in His foreknowledge, knew the character of each of these boys. There is no doubt about that. But it was of grace nonetheless. Neither could have done anything to merit God's favor before they were born.

Do you think God did not know you before you were born? Do you think God did not know about you? God is omniscient. I sometimes am not too happy about that. Really, God knows everything. Yeah, I used to talk about when my mom died, I was worried, because now she would be in heaven and she would know everything. She thought she knew everything, but she did not. Trust me, I probably would not stand here if that was the truth. But even more concerned should I be that God knows everything. Do not you think God knew you before you were born? Of course, He did. And He knew Esau and Jacob. There is no doubt about it. He knew their character. And He knew who would follow and who would not follow. But this does not have anything to do with salvation.

But understand this: all of God's dealings are by grace. It is not merited because of us. We are saved by grace.

Ephesians 2:8-9

For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

Not of works, lest any man should boast.

How many of you gave a Christmas present this year? How many parents gave a Christmas present this year? How many of you told your kids, "If you are not good, you are not going to get..." Santa Claus was a great invention. I mean, people say, "Oh, Santa Claus is a lot of hell." Hey, listen, man, you get three or four years old, you tell them, "If you are not good, Santa Claus is not coming." That is a great invention. At least for a few weeks. Santa Claus is real, man, and age greater works fine.

But in the morning of Christmas, when the children come down, good or not, the presents are there. I found that out quick. I learned that lesson. "Sure, Mom, I hear you say, 'Yeah, yeah, I am wise to that.'" You know what that is? That is grace. Those kids did not deserve a present based on how they acted. I have got four grandchildren. Based on how they acted that morning, they did not deserve it. I said, "We are going to read the Christmas story." Before I knew it, paper was flying everywhere. They had already been to their other grandparents. They had already heard the story two or three times that morning. They were tired of the story. "Give me the presents!" Man, they ripped into those things.

Listen, those kids did not deserve... They deserved it because I loved them and my wife loved them, and she made me buy it. Those kids did not deserve it. I will tell you what, when my granddaughter, one of my granddaughters, Jasmine is her name, and my grandson Ben come, I just go in the back room and close the door. I praise the Lord. One lives in North Carolina, one lives in Vermont, because I would have to move to another state if they both were there. But I love those kids. And when Mom and Dad start to correct them, I try to stop it. And my daughter says, "Where did my dad go?" I say, "No, no, no, no, no, that is a big deal. That is not, it is no big deal."

You know what? God loves you not because of who you are. We are going to find out why He loves you, but He does not love you because of you. God's grace is never merited.

1 John 4:10

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

You see, God did not send Jesus because you were good. You know, when Adam and Eve sinned, God did not go down there and deal with them because they were good. He went down there and dealt with them because He loved them. When He clothed them with undoubtedly, in my mind, wool clothes from a couple of lambs. When He took those skins and sacrificed those lambs in front of Adam and Eve, in my mind, the Bible does not say that, but in my mind, sacrificed those and covered their nakedness with those skins. He did not do that because they were good. He did it because they were bad, and He loved them. He loved them. He could have just said, "Forget the whole shebang. Just forget it. Cast you to hell. We will start all over."

Titus 3:5

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

V. The Privilege of Serving and Being Kept by Grace

Oh, God saved us by His grace. But you know what? Brother Joe is talking about serving the Lord today. Do you know what a privilege it is to serve God? Do you know God calling me to preach and putting me in the backside of nowhere, Barre, Vermont? Nobody knows me except Bob Alexander. Nobody else called me to preach. Everybody else that likes me is dead. They are all gone. Bob is still alive, and I worry about him.

Listen, God put me there as a privilege. I used to say, "Of all the people God could have called to Barre, Montpelier, to preach the gospel, He called me." I served by grace. Now somebody asked me one time, "What did you do to get stuck in Vermont?" It was a good question, but I did not do anything. You see God's grace. It is grace that allows us to serve Him.

Listen to what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:10.

1 Corinthians 15:10

But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.

Paul was a tremendous preacher. He is a tremendous man. You know what? We talked about him almost as much as we talked about Jesus. "Paul said this, Paul said that." Well, let me tell you something. Paul said, "It is only because of the grace of God that I am what I am." And his grace, which was bestowed upon me, was not in vain. Listen to that statement. Paul said, "When God called me, it was not a waste of God's time." He said, "I labored more abundantly than they all." Yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me.

You want to serve God, young families. You want your families to grow up and love the Lord. You know what I have noticed about the last century of preachers or the last group of preachers? How many of them have lost their kids? And you know why they did? Because everything was the ministry and not their kids. I have told my church from the very beginning, "I will not lose my kids to save yours. I will not." I told my church just a few weeks ago, I stood up and I said, "Listen, things are changing in my life. But my first, God called me to be a husband before He called me to be a preacher. My job is to take care of her."

Listen, to serve God, it was not in vain. He says, "I did." He said, "I did more than everybody else. I labored more abundantly." But do not give me any credit. We give him too much credit. We give Paul too much credit. He said, "Do not give me any credit." He says, "It was but the grace of God, which was with me." The privilege to serve God as a parent or as a young adult or as a teenager or as a child or as an old person, the privilege to serve God is because God looked at you and said, "Oh, that is somebody I want to use." It was because of His grace that He uses us.

We serve the Lord by His grace. And you know what, folks? We are kept by His grace. I have some cousins that are Assembly of God preachers, and they are always sliding in and out of grace. I feel bad for them. One of them said to me one time, he said, "You know what, Jim, if I

believe what you believe, then I can be saved and go out and live any way I want to." I said, "You know what your problem is, Clayton? Dean from Texas, Phillips, if you are listening. Your problem is this: you want to do those things, and you are afraid to. I can do it. I do not want to. That is the difference."

See, I am kept by grace. I am not kept because I am good. I am not kept because I have some quality of my own. I am kept by God's grace.

2 Timothy 1:12

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Again, the apostle Paul writes, "For the which cause I also suffer these things. Nevertheless, I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed." Think of this for a minute. Do you know who you have believed? You know about Him. You come to church a lot of times and hear about Him. But do you know Him? He says, "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded." I am persuaded. I am persuaded that He, and I am going to stick this in, only He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. Listen, folks, I am going to heaven whether I want to or not. Amen. And God has got to kick me all the way. I am going not because of who I am, because I am nothing. Absolutely nothing, but because of His grace, because of His grace.

VI. God's Love Never Changes

God's love is never because of us. Here is something else: God's love never changes. You know, I have done a lot of weddings over the years. Some of them worked out too well. Something changed. Amen. That is right. Somebody's love changed. Because when they were wanting to get married, they were, "I love you. I love you. I cannot wait. Please." I had somebody say, "I have got six weeks counseling before I will do the wedding." "Oh, six weeks." They spent six weeks, they spent three months figuring out which cake to buy. Give me a break.

And these starry-eyed kids. I said one time, "You do not know what love is yet." Oh, that kid got mad at me. I was actually preaching, and I walked down the aisle, and he was going to get married, and he was married, just growing up at church. And I said, "These kids do not know anything about love. They are just not getting married. They do not know anything." He met me. He is crying. He said, "I love her." I would like to talk to him now. He has got seven kids. They have got seven kids. I bet he loves her different now than he did then. I bet he does.

And you know what? When those kids grow up and move on, you better have a good love because this is all there is right here. Me and her. That is all there is. Now my girls love me and my grandkids love me for what I give them. They all love me. They all love me. But I am going to tell you something. When it gets right down to the brass tacks, it is her and I crawling in bed tonight and praying. It is her and I that opened the Word of God together. It is her and I that are saying, "We do not understand, but we trust You no matter what." Just her. Just her and me. You

know what that is? That is love. That is love. Hey, you talk about loving God. Do you love God like that?

Malachi 3:6

For I am the LORD, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.

The sons of Jacob. God was eternally for eternal security. He said, "Listen, folks, Jacob's guys. Listen, you folks." I mean, we have a Jewish guy in our church that came up from Brooklyn. He was, his mom and dad are dead and gone, and he is disabled. He has some challenges. He came to Vermont because our taxes are high. We have more stuff. And he got invited to our church. You know what he told me? He said, "The rabbi used to say to the people in my synagogue, 'Just okay with Allen. He is a little slow.'" He used to say that about him. He said, "I came to this place, and everybody loved me." And then he got saved. He has not changed physically at all. He sits in the front row. He wears his little beanie. You know, I could think, "Take that thing off. Have you read Corinthians where you do not cover your head when you pray?" I am not going to do that. I am not going to do that.

Listen, sons of Jacob, you do not deserve to be saved. Listen, you know what? These unsaved Jews today, if they get through the tribulation, there is going to be a kingdom set up here of the sons of Jacob. And it will not be because of who they are. It will be because of God's grace. He said, "I could have thrown you out." Little King James version. "I could have thrown you out, but I did not." You know why? "I loved you." You know what? I know God could throw me out of the family. He has plenty of reasons to throw me out of the family. Boy, oh boy. But He says, "I am the Lord. I change not. I do not change. I love you. I have loved you, and I will love you."

That is not a license to sin, folks. That is a license to serve Him. That is a license to get it. I want to get on that bandwagon. There is nobody ever loved me like that. I mean, even my wife has questions sometimes. We have to get it straightened out. Well, I have to get straightened out. And then we continue on. God is that way too, is not He? Sometimes you have to get things straightened out. Sometimes God is going to come down and say, "Okay, this is not going anywhere." And you sit down, and we say, He says, "Shut up and listen to me. This is how it is going to be. And if it is not, I have a room back there, and I will take you back there, and we will get it straightened out there." But He says, "I change not. You are still My son."

Listen, if God would not have, one man in Malachi, it was so bad. God could talk to him for 400 years. They were in such bad shape. They were so far away from Him. He quit talking to him. And then one night in Bethlehem, He showed up, and He showed up because He loved them. And He loved us. And you know, the real Christmas was not about presents. It was not about presents. And by the way, if I pop anybody, I am not here. Those three Kings did not show up to exchange Christmas presents because it was His birthday. They showed up because He was King, and they knew it. And you know what? You worship the King. You worship the King.

We have the same promise in Hebrews.

Hebrews 13:8-9

Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

Jesus Christ the same yesterday. I have loved you today. I love you and forever. And I will love you. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace, not with meats which have not profited them that have been occupied there.

Listen, folks, you come to church, you go out on the streets. You do morale. I tell people that believe, what is the name of this church? Old Paths Baptist Church. Sorry, I got too many churches rolling around in my head. Both my son-in-laws are preachers. I have churches. I just say, I forget who I am sometimes. Anyhow, you go out on the path. I tell people that that church is the most unique church I have ever been in. And it is. I did not say weird, although I have been tempted a couple of times, but it is unique. Nobody has an old preacher with this many young people in them. I am getting young people in my church because my son-in-law is doing it. Hey, listen, if you want to lie in church, that is your business. God does not change, but I do. Now I do not even know what the point was. We just move on.

Unique, unique. You guys come and serve God here. You do unique things. You do great things. You have a great family here. You love each other most of the time. You get along. You eat a lot. You watch stupid football games on the wall. You do a lot of good things, but let me tell you something. Those things do not save you. What you do or do not do has nothing to do with it. He says it is good that I change not. That you do not have to come according to the meat that you eat, the things that you do. God's love is always like that. It is eternal. It is unending. It is unchanging.

Spurgeon said, "God soon turns from His wrath, but never from His love." Our brother took us to Romans today. I love the book of Romans.

Romans 8:35-39

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

You know, as I read the Bible, all of a sudden, because of our circumstances, God starts jumping things out at me. I said, "Listen, brother, you are more than a conqueror. You and Kathy are more than conquerors. You cannot let this take you down." I am persuaded that neither death nor life

nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord. I tell you something, folks, if that does not tickle your fancy, your fancy is dead. Because there is nothing that can change God's love for you. Nothing.

VII. God's Love is Open to All

Here is the third point: it is open for anybody. It is open for anybody. God's choosing of Jacob and rejection of Esau had nothing to do with salvation or eternity; it had everything to do with the events of history. Israel's selection was for service only. And you know what Israel's job was? Israel's job was to be a missionary. They were to go wherever they went and tell people about Jehovah, and they dropped the ball. They dropped the ball.

I began this message by talking about the great preacher, Henry Morehouse. Let me remind you of what he said: "If I could have ascended Jacob's ladder and asked Gabriel, who stands in the presence of the Almighty, to tell you how much God the Father loves His poor and lost world, all that Gabriel could say is, 'For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.'" Greatest verse of eternal love in the Bible.

The truth of Malachi speaks, folks, to the inevitable, eternal, sovereign God love has for us. God's love for us is. Jesus said, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." There is no rest in this world. There is no rest in things. There just is no rest. That is why most people, when they get to our age, have no rest and are looking forward to retirement so that they can rest. The Bible says, "For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."

If you are here this morning and you do not know Jesus Christ, it does not make any difference who you are, what you have done, what you say, what you think. It does not make any difference. Jesus, God loves you. Jesus died for you. He shed His blood for you, and He will save you right now if you will ask Him and make you His child. And if you are His child, do not go out here big-headed thinking you serve God because of who you are. You serve God by His grace, and the abundant life that was so eloquently presented to us this morning is by God's grace and His mercy.

VIII. Concluding Thoughts and Church Announcements

Rachel, you would make them sleeping. Bob, wake up. I am done. That is great, amen. I will tell you. This is, you know, it is just, I do not know, it is just something about you guys loving the preaching of the Word of God, and it is a great, I just really appreciate these guys coming in. It is tough getting them here with the travel and everything, but I knew that, Lord, we are going to work it out, and we would have a great time. And it is just, it is the beginning today. Today is just a, tomorrow night is going to be, it is just going to be a great time.

I am telling you, we have got 18 some people to be baptized. We are going to be singing. We are going to be testimonies. We are going to have some great preaching again and just looking

forward to spending the New Year together. God has been so good to us this last year, and He has been good to us every year. But I mean, looking back over the last year, all the things that He has done for us, all the good people that He has brought in. And most important of all, I look at you, how God has stretched you, grown you, matured you. It is an amazing thing. It is something that, for a pastor to be able to have the people that actually love the Bible and grow and want to learn and to actually watch it happen in your life. It is the greatest blessing on the planet.

And it all goes back to Jim said this morning, and Joe said when he was speaking to us, he said, "We do not deserve any of it." Just because God loves us. And the great thing about it is, is that you love Him back. And I know we all fall short of that most of the time in our lives, but it is that attitude of heart that you and I know that at the end of the day, it is just you and you and God in that book. It will get you through everything in life. And that is the key.

Most people in life, they go through their whole life. They fall in love with things. That is just why marriages do not last a day. People fall in love and then a little bit later on get a better deal and fall out of love. And they do the same thing with the Lord and church and the Bible. They will go to a church service, and somebody will preach a great message, or they will have a moving moment in their life, and they will go forward and give their life to the Lord. But nothing ever really changes. And it is because if you can be talked into the love of the Lord, and that is why we do not give, in most Baptist churches you are at, they give an invitation every time you turn around, and I get that. And I understand that behind it. I grew up in it.

But I much rather have a time where we get a lot of people say, "We are baptized in 18 tomorrow." We get a lot of people say that we, I would rather have you come to it on your own terms. I would rather have you come to the point where you decide that for yourself just because you see the changed lives around you. Most people witness, they go through their life telling people what God will do for them. And I get that. But the greatest witness on the planet is not telling somebody what God will do for them, but telling them what God did for you. And that is the difference. But it takes a changed life for that. It takes a difference in your life.

Tonight as we get toward the New Year's, tomorrow New Year's Eve, most of God's people, many of them, they will be out partying with the world. They will have their little groups over, and they will be having all of their time and doing all their thing. And yet if you would ask them if they love God, if they really cared about the Word of God, oh, they would swear on a stack of Bibles, almost they love the Lord. You know what the Bible says: "If any man love God, the same is known of him." There are certain attributes about loving God that just go along with loving Him. And part of the world is not part of it.

So it is a thing where tomorrow night we will just have a time together as a family. We will praise the Lord. We will sing. We will rock this place. We will have the Old Paths boys that we play in. We will have some great testimonies. And I just want to thank God for what He has done for us. We get busy around here, and I understand that. There is a lot going on. Most of you are working with multiple people. You are a disciple in one, discipleship two, you are doing all those things. That is good. That is the ministry. But we cannot ever, ever get so busy that we forget

what God has done for us and where we are at. And the reason why we are so busy is not because we are so good, it is because God is good, and God saw fit to use us when He should not have.

So, I just want to thank the guys for this morning. It is a great start. I am so, so, so looking forward to everything this weekend, but I am looking forward to tomorrow night. I want you to bring visitors if you can. You bring somebody that you know that does not have any place to go, bring them. It will be a great time for us to get to know them and you have to see what is going on around here. And just, we will just take our time and then let God do what God does best. Do things in His timing, not ours. And the Holy Spirit of God will walk up and down these aisles tomorrow night as He has did today, and He will speak to each one of us. And when we leave here by the end of this time, we will know exactly where we are at with the Lord and what we need to do.

I am going to come back the following Sunday, and I am going to preach, since I was, have these guys in here for New Year's, I am going to preach my New Year's message next. We will be out of the Book of Proverbs for one week. I am going to preach my New Year's message to you the week after that. And then we will be, we will be good to go. But I just want you to know, I love you. I love you being here today. I look forward to, I was looking at the list back there, just everybody is involved in this weekend. And it is just a great thing.

So we will be dismissed here in just a few moments. I do need the people who are going to be baptized to meet over here with Phil and Barb. Some of you guys, I want to set up for the ball game this afternoon. We will move things up. I want to bring those couches in, and Daniel, get everything all set up the way he wants it. We will get it done quick and be out of here. Good to go. Be back here at three o'clock. And we just have a fun time. If you have not signed up yet or saw Jamie for the food, we need to do that. You know what you need to bring.

Now, let me just say one thing. I have never asked this church for anything. In all my years being here, I have never asked you for anything. But I need your help. We had a progressive dinner last night. It was one of the greatest things on the planet. I mean, I did not get to be at all of it because I had to get Joe, and they were late, and Jim had to get back up to get him. But everybody did a great job. It was packed out. I think we had more people in your house. And if you have structural damage, let us know. We will help you pay for it.

But we came back for the dessert. And I am just, I do not need, I just need one woman. That is all I need. I do not need two. Do not need three. One lady who is dedicated to this will be the one. I just, somebody needs to be responsible. We are bringing an apple pie for dessert. I went light on the food because I wanted a piece of apple pie. And usually there is, oh. Okay. Bible says that Jesus was the apple of God's eye. So, okay. You go where you want to go with it. But you know, we are not bringing dessert today. We will have to, I will suffer through today. I am going to stop at QuickTrip and get an apple fritter on the way home just to get an infusion of it.

But you know, New Year's Eve, just one woman. That is all. Whoever loves God and wants to serve the Lord. I mean, on New Year's Day, I cannot think of a better, a better testimony for this church than to come to the Apple Center bringing an apple pie. And we will have a great time.

Five o'clock tomorrow night, be here. We are going to eat shortly thereafter. Get everything ready.