

## I Have Loved You Malachi 1:2 / Thanksgiving Sunday • 2001

### I. INTRODUCTION • TURN TO PHIL 4:6

#### A. *The Horse*

1. Many of you have heard the story of the man who decided to buy a horse.
2. He did some research and discovered there was one particular farmer who raised the best horses – so he drove out to his place.
3. He and the farmer walked out to the barn where there were three horses available for sale.
4. As the man was looking them over, the farmer suggested he take one of them for a ride.
5. The man picked one and helped the farmer put the saddle on him.
6. Then he put his foot in the stirrup and mounted.
7. Leading them out of the barn into the field, the farmer gave some instructions.
  - a. he said, “I’m a God-fearing man and have trained these horses to respond to my voice.”
  - b. “You don’t need to spur him or use too much rein.”
  - c. “All you need to do if you want him to go faster is say, ‘Praise the Lord.’”
  - d. “If you want him to go into a full gallop, just say, ‘Hallelujah!’”
8. With these instructions he turned the horse toward the open field and said, “Praise the Lord,” and the horse began to walk.
9. After walking for a minute or so and making his way around a couple fences, the man again said, “Praise the Lord” and the horse picked up speed.
10. After a couple minutes of this, and out onto wide open ground, the man said, “Praise the Lord,” and then again, “Praise the Lord.”
11. Now the horse was moving along at a pretty fast pace but still short of a gallop.
  - a. the gait was smooth and steady
  - b. and the man was surprised at how well it rode.
12. Wondering what a full on gallop would feel like he yelled into the wind, “Hallelujah!” and the horse shot forward like a bullet.
13. It was so exhilarating the man broke out in a wide grin and

- decided right then and there he had to have this horse and would offer the farmer whatever he asked when he got back.
14. That's when he realized they were heading straight for a cliff; a large canyon lay just in front of him and they were going at far too great a pace to turn the horse away from the edge in time.
  15. And that's when it dawned on him – the farmer had not told him the command for slowing or stopping the horse!
  16. He pulled on the reins, but nothing happened. He yank back on them, but again, it had no effect.
  17. He shouted “Whoa!” Again – nothing
  18. “Hey! HALT! Slow Down,” he tried everything he could think of to get the horse to stop but all to no avail.
  19. In desperation he thought of jumping off the horse but realized it was going far too fast to allow that – so he just clutched the reins and resigned himself to his fate.
  20. And that's when it hit him – The farmer was religious and used religious remarks to train the horse. “AMEN!” he shouted at the top of his lungs, and with that, the horse came to a stumbling halt – right at the very edge of the cliff.
  21. The man leaned over in the saddle, wiped the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand and breathed out a hearty, “Praise the Lord!”

## **B. Clichés**

1. *Clichés* – nearly every one uses them.
2. The problem is, the constant use of a cliché can trivialize the thing being spoken of.
3. One of the 10 Commandments is the prohibition of trivializing God's name by turning it into a cliché.
  - a. when God's name becomes merely a slogan,
  - b. it isn't long till God Himself becomes trivial.
4. There are a lot of Christian clichés.
  - a. *Praise the Lord*
  - b. *Hallelujah*
  - c. even “*amen*” has become cliché
    - 1) if you've been here for a while, you know that I often encourage the congregation to say “Amen” during the study or message.

- 2) there's a reason for that – far from it being a cliché, I intend the affirmation of “Amen” to be a way for you to enter in to the message *itself* and participate in it's proclamation.
- 3) our listening must not be passive but active!
- 4) the word “Amen” means “Truth” and when it's uttered, it's a way for a person to register their agreement.
- 5. There's one particular cliché that many people use that I want to talk about today; it's the cliché, “Thank God!”
  - a. our thankfulness must never become trivial
  - b. rather, being *thankful* is the *follow-up* to genuine faith in God.
- 6. In Philippians 4 the Apostle Paul writes . . .

**6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.**

- a. the answer to worry and anxiety is faith in God
- b. and here the Apostle Paul tells us that this kind of faith will look to Him first for help, and then with thanksgiving – all before we have what we need.
- c. it's like this: If I need some calls made, I send Charley a message via email and say, “Charley, will you get in touch with the elders and tell them this or that. Thanks!”
- d. I couple thanks to my request – why? Because I have absolute confidence that Charley will do what I've asked -
- e. not because I'm his boss, but because I know Charley! He's a man of integrity and one who delights to serve.
- f. when we come before God with requests, we can have the utmost confidence He hears us and will move to answer our prayers in the absolute best way – even going *beyond* what we've asked to do even better.
- g. so giving thanks is the follow-through on the faith we invest when we make request of God.

**C. Thanksgiving**

- 1. This week our nation is celebrating *Thanksgiving*.
- 2. It's a holiday firmly rooted in the tradition of Scripture.
  - a. the nation of Israel celebrated several feasts that memorialized God's faithfulness.

- b. *Passover* and the *Feast of Tabernacles* were thanksgiving festivals.
  - c. Pentecost was a feast of thanksgiving that *anticipated* the fruits of the harvest.
3. The fore-parents of our nation, steeped as they were in a Biblical and Christian worldview, established the celebration of Thanksgiving as a way to memorialize God's faithfulness and to declare that all they had was the result of God's providence and provision.
  4. As our culture has become more and more secular, revisionists have re-written history and erased the influence the Christian Faith has had on our origins.
  5. And the result is that many people, especially today, in light of the recent events that have taken place in our nation, are questioning God's goodness and faithfulness.
  6. In doing so, they are unwittingly repeating the mistake of the ancient Israelites that we read about in Malachi 1

## II. TEXT

### A. V. 2

**“I have loved you,” says the LORD. “Yet you say, ‘In what way have You loved us?’”**

1. The prophecy of Malachi opens with a tender expression of the love of God for His people.
  - a. there's intense passion here as God extends His hands and heart to them
  - b. He's not only telling them of how He feels toward them, but inviting them to remember all the times in their history where He's demonstrated His love.
  - c. “I have loved you,” He says; meaning His love has been manifested to them again and again.
  - d. of course He had – the OT is one long story of how God had moved all of history to single them out as the object of His love and affection.
2. But the reaction of the people of Malachi's day to this tender expression of love is bitter sarcasm.
3. They reply, “Really, You love us? How? What have You done for

us lately?”

4. Instead of responding to God with praise and thanksgiving, they're hostile and sarcastic.
5. As we prepare to celebrate the national holiday of Thanksgiving this week, I thought it would be good for us to stop and think about the ways God has loved us, and shown us His favor and blessing, lest we fall into the trap of cynically repeating the sarcasm of the people of Malachi's day.

## **B. The First Thanksgiving**

1. Our modern observance of Thanksgiving, though not made an *official* holiday until President Lincoln's time, was begun in the days of the Pilgrims.
2. They were a people who had determined to live in *full obedience* to God's Word.
  - a. and because of their *uncompromising* stand, they were opposed and oppressed in Europe.
  - b. when things became unbearable, they departed for the New World,
  - c. determined to establish a society governed completely by the principles of the Bible.
3. There were 102 men, women, and children who jammed the hold of the Mayflower for the trip to the New World; that *besides* the ship's crew.
  - a. of the 102 passengers, only 50 were Pilgrims.
  - b. the rest were families seeking a new life in the New World.
4. The trip across the Atlantic took over 3 months.
  - a. think of it; 3 months with 102 people jammed into the hold of a rather small ship.
  - b. the space was about the same as our fellowship hall.
  - c. the crew didn't like the Pilgrims and demanded they stay below deck.
  - d. all their belongings - farm equipment, furniture, animals, food, drink and even the ship's small shore boat were jammed into the hold – rocking & rolling in the stormy seas.
5. Despite the terrible conditions, not one of them died.
  - a. the only death on the crossing was one of the ship's crew who

- regularly abused the Pilgrims.
- b. he mysteriously took ill and died in one day.
6. They arrived in Plymouth in December, 1620.
- not the best time of year to try and build homes and start crops.
  - remember, this was virgin wilderness.
  - the region they landed on had even been *abandoned* by the Native Americans.
  - they later learned that a mysterious plague had wiped out the tribe which lived in that area a year before.
7. Life was so hard that first winter 52 of them died;
- more than *half* their number!
  - they came down with fever and pneumonia and at one time only 6 were well enough to tend to the needs of the rest.
8. In March, while they were gathered for a meeting, a lone native American walked into their settlement.
- his name was *Samoset*, and he spoke English, having learned it from English fishing boats which sailed further north.
  - Samoset introduced the Pilgrims to another English-speaking Native American named *Squanto* who had been to England and was living with the nearest tribe - the *Wampanoags*.
9. Squanto's story is the kind of thing that if given in a novel, would seem too far-fetched to be true.
- years before, he'd been lured aboard an European ship and kidnapped.
  - sold into slavery, he was eventually ransomed by some monks and taught the Christian faith.
  - making his way to England, he learned English, and eventually found passage back to his home by working aboard an English ship.
  - but as he approached his village, he realized it was empty – in fact, his entire tribe was gone!
  - they had been mysteriously wiped out by a plague.
  - so Squanto went to live with the nearby Wampanoags.
  - he was deeply depressed and wondered why all of this had befallen him.
  - when Samoset appeared and told him some Englishmen were living in the same place as his native tribe and that they were struggling to survive, him took it as the will of God that he was

- to help them.
10. Squanto introduced the Pilgrims to the chief of the Wampanoags, a man named Massasoit.
  11. While it's true that many Europeans were brutal to the Native Americans, such is not the case with the Pilgrims.
    - a. they looked upon them as men created in God's image, whom God loved.
    - b. the Pilgrims were deeply concerned to establish peaceful relations with the Native Americans.
    - c. they even tried to *purchase* the land they had settled,
    - d. but the Wampanoags had no concept of the ownership of land and told the Pilgrims they were free to live there and build all the homes they wanted.
    - e. the Wampanoags actually believed the Great Spirit had removed the previous tribe, well-known as a brutal and immoral lot, to prepare it for the arrival of the Pilgrims!
    - f. as evidence of their integrity, the Pilgrims would not just take the land without giving some kind of property in exchange and convinced Massasoit to take some goods.
  12. Relations between the Pilgrims and the Wampanoags continued to grow.
    - a. Squanto taught the Pilgrims how to plant and harvest native American crops
    - b. and by harvest time, there was plenty for all.
  13. As the Pilgrims reviewed their first year, they could see how the hand of God had preserved them.
    - a. for instance - before they landed at Plymouth, they sent an exploration party around the inside of Cape Cod.
    - b. at one place, they discovered a mound of sand that had clearly been packed down by human hands.
    - c. they dug into it and discovered a metal kettle filled with seed corn which they took with them.
    - d. it's a good thing they did, because all the seed they had brought from Europe was bad and *not one bit* of it sprouted the next season.
    - e. the seed from that kettle is the **ONLY** seed that grew and produced the bounteous crops of their *first harvest*.
    - f. by the way, they later returned to the same spot where they

- discovered the kettle, leaving it filled with the beads and other items the native Americans held so dear.
14. Seeing God's blessing so clearly, their hearts overflowed with appreciation - this though nearly *every* family had lost someone that first winter.
    - a. so they called for a feast of thanksgiving.
    - b. they invited Massasoit, who arrived with some of his own guests, but they had brought their own provisions.
    - c. for 3 *days* they feasted on turkey, venison, pumpkin, and popcorn.
  15. While Thanksgiving continued to be observed by the majority of Americans, it wasn't until 240 years *later* that President Lincoln declared it an *official* annual holiday.

### **C. Our Giving Thanks**

1. Such is the background of our Thanksgiving.
2. It was meant to be a time to reflect on the blessing of God – on how He has demonstrated His love to us.
3. Unfortunately, for many people this Thursday will be nothing more than a day off from work to gather with friends or family and stuff themselves.
5. Like the Jews we read about here in Malachi, they look at recent events in our nation and say, “Where was God on Sept. 11<sup>th</sup>?”
6. They are unmindful of the multitude of ways God has protected and blessed our nation throughout its long history!
  - a. having lived so long in the midst of blessing, they’ve become blind to it and have come to believe it’s the norm,
  - b. they think blessing is what we *deserve* and have a right to *expect* from God.
  - c. this is one of the reasons I think every Christian needs to go on a short term mission trip to some *needy* area of the world.
  - d. there’s nothing like it to make us realize how incredibly blessed we are to live in the time and place we do!
  - e. I’m an advocate for having every teenager take a Summer Missions trip to some other country.
    - 1) the bored and sarcastic attitudes disappear
    - 2) and when they get home, they have a whole new perspective on what’s important

- 3) they tend to be a whole lot more appreciative of what they have!
7. I was struck by the pictures of the people in Kabul after the departure of the Taliban.
- a. though their city has been ravaged by war and the economy is in shambles =
  - b. they were smiling and celebrating!
  - c. heavy handed religious tyranny had been lifted – for who knows how long
  - d. but they were thankful for that brief moment of freedom, and joyously celebrated – dancing in the ruins of their once fair city!

### **III. CONCLUSION**

#### **A. Be Thankful**

1. Every one of us has ample reason to give thanks and praise to God.
2. What God said through Malachi, the Spirit says to us today, “I have loved you!”
3. Rather than answering back as ancient Israel did, let’s respond with Thanksgiving –
4. “Indeed you have O Lord.”
  - a. we see Your love in the Cross!
  - b. we see Your love in the preservation of Your word throughout the generations so that we might have it today!
  - c. we see Your love in the blessing of this nation and the freedoms and prosperity we enjoy today!
  - d. You are faithful O Lord!

#### **B. This Thursday**

1. This Thursday, as you’re seated around your feast – take the time to go round the table and have each person think of something *specific* to thank God for.