MAJOR ON THE MINORS | SERIES FINALE | HOPE CHAPEL

THE BOOK OF MALACHI

"I Have Loved You"

Andrew Cole | Sunday 27 September 2026 | 9AM Gawler | Part 12

Big Idea: *Before one complaint, before one correction, the first thing God said was: I have loved you. That is who he is, it is where everything else starts, and it is still the first thing he says to you today.*

Closing Out the Series

This message brings Major on the Minors to a close. Over the past two years, Hope Chapel has walked through all twelve of the Minor Prophet books - six last year and six this year. Every book carried the same thread underneath the prophecy, the warnings, and the strange imagery: God loves his people, God moves toward his people, and God is not finished with his people.

Malachi is the last voice in the Old Testament - and then God went quiet for 400 years. No prophet. No new word. Four centuries of silence before John the Baptist walked out of the wilderness. Knowing that makes the last conversation before that silence all the more significant.

Here is what God chose to say before the silence fell:

I have loved you. - Malachi 1:2

And here is what his people said in response: How?

Not these were people who had abandoned God. They still attended the temple. They still knew all the words. They had simply gone cold without ever making a decision to do so - and somewhere along the way they had quietly stopped believing that they were loved. The book of Malachi was written for people who know exactly how that feels.

Background - The Book of Malachi

Malachi is the final book of the Old Testament and the last of the twelve Minor Prophets. His name means my messenger - and that is all we know about him. The book is not about the man; it is about the message.

Written around 450 BC, Malachi's words come nearly 100 years after the exiles returned home from Babylon - the same homecoming Haggai and Zechariah had spoken into. The temple was rebuilt. The priests were back. Jerusalem was functioning. Everything they had prayed and waited for was in place.

And yet. A century later, the fire had gone out. Not through rebellion. Not through a dramatic falling away. Through the slow, quiet creep of ordinariness. The book is structured as a conversation: God speaks six times, and six times the people answer back with some version of how? or when? or what do you mean?

A.W. Tozer wrote: what comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. Malachi's people had let their picture of God drift. And everything else followed.

POINT 1 | He Loves First

The most striking thing about the structure of Malachi is the order. Before God names what his people have done wrong, before the lame animals and the broken covenants and the careless worship - the very first sentence is this:

> **Malachi 1:2** *I have loved you, says the Lord.*

Their love had cooled. His had not moved an inch. God does not open with what they have done. He opens with who he is to them. That is always how he works.

The New Testament distils it into six words: we love because he first loved us. You were never loved because you got it right. You were simply loved first. The love was there before the performance, before the effort, before the good seasons and the bad ones. It was there first.

When You Believe You Are Loved

Andrew made the connection clearly: what you believe about God's love decides what you give him. You give your best to people you know love you. You give your leftovers to people you feel obliged to. When Malachi's people stopped believing they were genuinely loved, the leftovers arrived as naturally as night follows day.

The answer was never to try harder. It was to believe more deeply. Because when you know you are loved, the leftovers stop making sense.

Leftover worship always starts with doubting his love.

This is the diagnosis for the whole book. Not laziness. Not rebellion. A slow, quiet drift in the picture they carried of God. A drift that meant they were still showing up, still going through the motions - but the fire was out, and nobody had noticed the room was getting cold.

> **Reflect:** *When you think about God, what picture comes to mind first? Is it the God who said I have loved you before the first complaint - or a version of him that is harder or more conditional? Where did that picture come from?*

POINT 2 | He Never Changes

The second thing Andrew drew out of Malachi is one of the clearest declarations in the whole of the Old Testament:

> **Malachi 3:6** *For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.*

Read the second half of that verse carefully. The only reason they are still standing is that God is not like them. Their inconsistency was the problem. His consistency was the rescue.

Some of us have been up and down with God for years - hot one day, cold the next, close one season and distant the next, sometimes within the same week. The word says: he has not been up and down with you. He has not been distant, not even once. It is us that moves. He does not.

What He Can Handle

Andrew named it directly: God can handle your complaints, your questions, your tears, your tantrums, and your joy. It makes no difference to his posture toward you. The God of Malachi is not an angry figure ready to scold you when you get it wrong. Even in the seasons where God is correcting and steering, it comes entirely from a love that has no comparison.

> *Betsie Ten Boom said this from inside a Nazi concentration camp: there is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still. Her circumstances changed everything around her. They did not change him.*

And Andrew added this: God's love is not soft. In chapter three, Malachi describes God sitting as a refiner and purifier of silver - and the story is told of a woman who asked a silversmith how he knew when the silver was ready. He said: when I can see my face in it. That is what God is doing in the fire. He is not destroying you. He is waiting to see his face in you - because you were created in his image.

Reflect: *Where have you been expecting God to have moved away from you - because of a bad decision, a cold season, a long silence? What changes if you take seriously that he has not moved?*

POINT 3 | He Remembers You

This is Andrew's favourite verse in Malachi - and it is easy to miss:

> **Malachi 3:16–17** *Then those who feared the Lord spoke with one another. The Lord paid attention and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and esteemed his name. They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession.*

In a whole generation going through the motions, a few quiet people kept the fire alive. They were not leading anything. They were not famous. They were just talking to each other about God. And God leaned in and listened - and wrote their names down.

My treasured possession - not tolerated, not put up with. Simply treasured.

Some people in this room have been faithful for years and nobody has ever noticed. You have served quietly, prayed quietly, kept turning up when it would have been easier to stay home. God noticed. He has a book. Your name is in it.

Max Lucado put it this way: if God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. That is the kind of love this is.

Reflect: *Do you believe you are noticed? Where in your life are you quietly faithful in a way that nobody claps for? Bring that before God this week and let him remind you that it is written down.*

The Silence That Was Not Absence

Malachi ends with a promise: God will send Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers. And then: silence. 400 years of it. Generations were born and died without a prophet speaking. It must have felt like God had finished with them.

Then a man in camel's hair walked out of the wilderness shouting: prepare the way of the Lord. And Jesus said of him: he is Elijah who is to come. God had not gone quiet because he was done. He had gone quiet because he was about to send his Son.

The last promise of the Old Testament opened the door to the first page of the New. And the God who had said I have loved you came to prove it in person - all the way to a cross.

> *Jim Elliot wrote as a young man: he is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose. He later gave his life taking the gospel to people who had never heard it. He understood what Malachi was saying: you cannot out-give a God who has already given everything.*

Whatever silence you have been living in - God has not stopped loving you in it. The quiet is not the end of the story. It never has been.

Three Ways to Respond

Andrew closed with the same three response categories he has used across this series. Which one lands for you today?

The Cold	The fire has gone out. Name one area where God has been getting your leftovers. Then give him the first of it this week - just one thing, first instead of last. Don't make a plan. Make a move.
The Unsure	You're not sure you're loved, or that any of this is real for you. Read Malachi 1:2 and 3:6: I have loved you. I do not change. Let those two facts settle before you try to do anything else.
The Faithful and Unnoticed	You have kept going when it would have been easier to stop. Read Malachi 3:16-17: he paid attention. He heard. He wrote it down. Your ordinary faithfulness is treasured - not just noted.

Before anything else, before every correction and every call,
the first thing he said was:

I have loved you. And he still does.

Reflection & Discussion Questions

Use these on your own during the week, or with your LifeGroup.

1. The last conversation before 400 years of silence was God saying I have loved you - and his people asking how. Have you ever been in a season where you couldn't feel or believe that God loved you? What was underneath that?

2. Andrew said: what you believe about God's love decides what you give him. Where are you giving God leftovers right now - your time, your attention, your Sundays, your generosity? What is one thing you could give him first this week instead of last?

3. Malachi's people weren't rebels - they were busy people who had drifted onto autopilot. Does that resonate with where you are? When did the fire start going low, and was there a moment you can point to, or did it happen without a decision?

4. Malachi 3:6 says God does not change - and because he doesn't change, his people are not consumed. Where do you need to hear that right now? Where have you assumed God has pulled back from you the way people sometimes do?

5. The book of remembrance in Malachi 3:16-17 records the names of people who were quietly faithful when nobody was watching. What quiet faithfulness have you been carrying that you have never told anyone about? Bring it to God this week.

6. God went quiet for 400 years before sending his Son. Is there a silence in your life right now that you have been interpreting as absence or rejection? What would it mean to read that silence differently - as preparation rather than abandonment?

Key Scriptures This Week

- Malachi 1:2 - I have loved you, says the Lord
- Malachi 1:8 - When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? Present that to your governor.
- Malachi 1:13 - What a weariness this is - sniff at it contemptuously (the sigh of weary worship)
- Malachi 3:6 - For I the Lord do not change; therefore you are not consumed
- Malachi 3:16–17 - A book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord - they shall be mine, my treasured possession
- 1 John 4:19 - We love because he first loved us