

# 1. Malachi: The People who have Grown Tired of God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, shall we turn together, friends, to the book of Malachi? And if you have our visitor's Bible on page 801. And God willing, we're to have a series, I think, over the next five Sunday evenings from this little prophet.

One of the minor prophets, but the minor prophets of the Old Testament are only minor in length, not in weight or importance. It's just that they're shorter than the others. But now, Malachi chapter 1, verse 2.

I have loved you, says the Lord. But you say, how have you loved us? Now, that's where we're aiming for this evening.

But it will take us a little while to get there because I need to introduce the book of Malachi as a whole, first of all, so that we can get some idea of what the whole thing is about before we look at particular sections of it.

Now, my guess is that hardly anybody here has read Malachi in the last few weeks. It doesn't feature in the top ten bedtime reading list of most Christians, does it?

[ 1 : 11 ] It looks perhaps a little bit like a hazelnut amongst the walnuts and the Brazils, a rather dry little thing that sits there and hardly gets noticed at the bottom of the dish.

But it's in the Old Testament for a very good reason. It contains a message from God which needed to be heard not only by God's people then, but continues to be needed by God's people today. Now, in this book of Malachi, there are 55 verses. And it's an interesting statistic that 47 of the 55 verses in the book of Malachi are addressed by God himself to the people.

And you'll see as we work through this book over the weeks, almost all of it is direct speech from God himself. Now, that statistic, 47 verses out of 55, should immediately alert us to the full-on nature of this material.

Now, of course, all of Scripture is fully the word of God, but Malachi is a particularly direct word from God to a people who needed to hear what he had to say.

[ 2 : 17 ] Now, friends, a little history. We need a few details so that we can get an idea of where Malachi fits into the Old Testament period. So, a few dates, first of all. Abraham, 1800 BC, more or less.

Moses and the Exodus, something like 1440 BC. King David came to the throne in about 1000 BC. He reigned for 40 years. His son Solomon reigned for 40 years. And then in about 920 BC, the kingdom was split into Israel in the north and Judah in the south.

Now, the kingdom of Israel in the north continued for 200 years until about 721 BC when it was overrun by the Assyrians, whereas Judah carried on until 587 BC when Jerusalem was sacked by the Babylonian army.

And many of the people of Judah and Jerusalem were taken across the desert to Babylon and the exile began. By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept.

[ 3 : 21 ] And the exile was a terrible time for the Jews. But their great prophets, Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, all reassured them that eventually the Lord would bring them back to the promised land, which indeed happened.

And what happened was that permission was finally given to the Jews by Cyrus the Emperor. The Babylonian Empire was in charge for quite a long time. It was then overtaken by the Persian Empire and Cyrus was the first Persian emperor.

And it was he who gave permission to the Jews to begin to return to their land, to Jerusalem. Now, it was a very grim business for the Jews as they began to go back. They were few in number.

They were economically and politically weak. And the promised land, their country, God's land, was no longer an independent nation state. They were simply a little part of the great sprawling Persian Empire, which stretched almost from Egypt to India.

But they were able to make a start. They began to recolonize. Jerusalem was more or less in ruins, but they began to live in it as and when, as and how they could.

[ 4 : 33 ] Then some years later, after 539 BC, in about 520 BC, they began to rebuild the temple. And the building project was more or less completed five years later in 515 BC.

So they had then a new temple. Though unlike St. George's Tron, their new building wasn't a patch on the previous one. But they had the temple and they were able to reinstitute the temple sacrifices and the services and the priesthood and so on.

But it was all very difficult. And by the middle of the next century, by about 450 BC, the city walls had still not been properly rebuilt. Nehemiah came back from Babylon and he urged the people to take on that great task.

But it was all very difficult. Now, little is known of the life that went on in Jerusalem between about 520 and 450 BC. All we can be sure about is that life was very tough for the Jews.

They had opposition from their neighbors there in Palestine. So they needed the leadership, the administrative leadership of a man like Nehemiah to get the city walls rebuilt. And they needed the spiritual leadership of Ezra the priest who came back at about the same time and began to teach the law of Moses systematically to the people.

[ 5 : 50 ] And Malachi was their contemporary. So this book dates from about the year 450 BC. And the things that God says in this book through Malachi the prophet give us a good idea of the kind of things that were going on in Jerusalem at that time.

And friends, it was not a very happy story. There was nothing about the people's corporate life and faith that would have set the river Clyde on fire. They were listless.

Let me ask, have you ever felt like a listless Christian? Have you ever belonged to a listless church? I'll demonstrate listlessness for a moment.

Watch me being listless just now. You can even see my knees beginning to sag and knock, can't you? It's a wonderful pulpit, this. It's a good reminder not to wear shorts in hot summer weather because you can see everything that's going on.

It's a very revealing pulpit. Now let me show you how the listlessness, the half-heartedness of the people comes out in the very structure of this book of Malachi.

[ 7 : 01 ] Malachi presents his book in the form of a dialogue between God and his people. And at half a dozen different points throughout the book God says something to the people but the people immediately question his words.

So look at chapter 1, verse 2. I've loved you, says the Lord. Now if you were the people of God and you heard God say, I've loved you, wouldn't you say, well that's just wonderful, that's terrific, it's humbling, it's not what we deserve.

But Malachi's people don't respond like that. They say, how have you loved us? It's almost as if they're denying what God has said, as if they've lost the capacity to be delighted and humbled by the thought that God has loved them.

We'll look on to chapter 1, verse 6. Towards the end of the verse, the Lord says to the priests who he charges with despising his name. He says, well he tells them that they're treating him with contempt.

Now if you were one of those priests, wouldn't you fall on your face in repentance when you heard God saying those things? But these priests don't. They say, but how have we despised your name?

[ 8 : 09 ] Their relationship to the Lord has become so dulled and so desensitised that they hardly seem interested in whether God loves them or in the possibility that the priests might have been treating the Lord with contempt.

The Lord loves you. Does he? You're despising the Lord's name. Are we? Are these things really important? Why don't we go out and get a fish supper instead?

Look on to chapter 2, verse 13. The charge is, the Lord no longer regards the offering that you bring him and no longer accepts it with favour from your hand.

2.13. Now that, do you remember, is what happened to Cain. How the Lord didn't accept his offering with favour back in Genesis 4. But what's the response of Malachi's people to that charge?

Oh really? Why does the Lord not accept our offering? Or look on to chapter 2, verse 17. You have wearied the Lord with your words. But you say, how have we wearied him?

[ 9 : 13 ] Or turn on to chapter 3, verse 6. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, how shall we return? As if it's not obvious that we even have to.

Or look at 3.13. Your words have been hard against me. The authorised version says, stout against me. Your words have been stout against me, says the Lord.

But you say, how have we spoken against you? So do you see, in each of these moments of dialogue, the form is the same. God says something, but the people immediately counter what he says.

God says this, but you people deny his words. And the guts of the book of Malachi are expressed in that little three-word phrase, but you say.

It comes six times in the course of the book. God speaks, but you say, something which counters his words and refuses to accept them. Now, of course, we're in very familiar territory here, aren't we?

[ 10 : 16 ] Where is the first place in the Bible where God's words are questioned and countered? The answer, of course, is Genesis chapter 3. In Genesis 1, God has had a lot of things to say.

He has spoken. He's created the light and the world and the animals and the vegetation and everything else. He speaks again in Genesis chapter 2. But once we get into chapter 3, the first thing that the charming, delightful, beguiling serpent says is, did God really say?

The devil's fundamental tactic right throughout Scripture is to counter the words of God. So when we see God's people here in the book of Malachi countering God's words six times, it's not difficult for us to recognize whose hand is manipulating them and lies behind them.

So I think we have to say that they are more than listless and half-hearted. They're really rebellious. There are people who are losing the capacity to hear and respond to the word of God.

And that should give us pause for thought. Because if God's people then could be so dull and insensitive to God's words, equally, God's people today can slip into a rebellious hardness of heart.

[ 11 : 33 ] But these people in Jerusalem in 450 BC, they could be very thankful that God sent them the prophet Malachi. Now, nobody, the scholars, don't quite know whether Malachi is the man's name or whether it's simply a kind of title because the word Malachi means my messenger.

It doesn't matter really whether it was his name or not. But here is this man who is prepared to bring God's message to a rebellious people. We don't know anything about him. We don't even know his father's name. But we know that he was a brave man because he was willing to bring a hard-searching message to the people of Israel.

Some of them will have thanked him for it afterwards. Some of them will have paid attention to him. And we need to hear his message today.

Even if St. George's Tron were the most devoted, committed, hard-working, prayerful, evangelizing church in the United Kingdom, even if it were the best church in the kingdom, we would still need to hear this message.

Why? Because any church is only a step away from going into a nosedive of spiritual decline. Now, that's true of any individual Christian and it's true of any church.

[ 12 : 46 ] Now, look at us here today on this evening, the 1st of March. We're meeting in this spanking new building. We have beautiful paintings. We have the best coffee in Western Europe.

We have toilet accommodation that is fit for the Queen if she were to visit us. But much more importantly, we have redesigned this building with the prime purpose of maximizing its evangelistic ministry.

No wonder we have a smile on our faces this evening. We feel, I guess, a little bit like the Scottish rugby team did yesterday afternoon. Or perhaps how they might feel when they're singing the Flower of Scotland at Murrayfield just before winning the Calcutta Cup.

Again. In other words, ready for action. That's how we feel, isn't it? But the Lord's words through Malachi, if we will take them to heart, they will remind us of the dangers that God's people are always facing.

The dangers of slipping quickly into decline and listlessness and even rebellion. Now, let me say just one more introductory thing before we get to chapter 1, verse 2.

[ 13 : 56 ] And that is that we need to listen to the message of the book of Malachi as a body of people, as a congregation. Malachi's prophecy is addressed to the whole people of God.

Now, this is true of every book in the Bible. Of course, we must also listen to God's message with individual ears and act upon it as individuals who are responsible for our own lives before God. So, of course, it's going to reach us and shape us at that level as well. But we shall only fully hear the words of Malachi or any Bible book if we listen to them conscious that we are a company of believers who take responsibility for each other as well as for ourselves.

Now, let me try and develop this a little bit. The burden of Malachi's message, as we shall see, is that the people of God had grown tired of loving him and serving him.

They were going through the motions of the believer's life and duty. So they were offering their sacrifices at the right time in the temple. They were attending temple worship. So outwardly, it seemed as if their religious observance was okay.

[15:05] But somehow, the heart had gone out of them. They were not okay. And Malachi's message to them is a blast from heaven. God looked down at the people in Jerusalem with indignation and grief and he has to lay serious charges against them.

And Malachi too, as he looked around at his own people, was filled with indignation. Now, just imagine that you, as an individual Christian, let's imagine that you are a person who is living the Christian life with great vigor and joy and commitment.

That's going to be true of quite a number here tonight. I know that. You're a wholehearted servant of the Lord. In fact, your Christian friends admire your devotion to Christ and the zeal of your service.

Now, if you listen to the message of Malachi purely as an individual, you may feel relatively untouched by it. You could read chapter 1, verse 2, for example, and you could say to yourself, well, I'm not questioning God's love for me in the way that the Old Testament people were.

I know how much he loves me and I rejoice in it and I love him too. So your eye would simply skate over the message. You'd feel, it doesn't really apply to me because my Christian life is going on well.

[16:20] And then you could read through the whole of the prophet Malachi and as you realize that it's addressed to sluggish, half-hearted believers, you might say about the whole book, it doesn't really apply to me because I know I'm not sluggish and half-hearted.

If, on the other hand, you read the message of Malachi very conscious of your brothers and sisters in the church and not just of your own congregation but of the wider church as well, you're not going to feel nearly so comfortable or complacent because you'll realize that Malachi's message applies very strongly to the church and the churches as a whole.

You'll realize that the church of Scotland, for example, and the wider church in the United Kingdom displays many of the same characteristics as God's people were displaying in Jerusalem in 450 BC. And if you really are zealous for the Lord, you will see that you need yourself to take responsibility for the state of the Lord's people. Each of us has our own part to play in energizing God's people for devoted service.

I just think of those or look at those who are sitting immediately around you here this evening. They need you to help them to be more loyal and devoted servants of the Lord. You're not just a Christian for the sake of your own personal Christian life.

[17:43] If you're truly converted, a converted man or woman or boy or girl, your job is to serve the Lord by serving his people. Now just think of this prophet Malachi.

We have just these four short chapters here, these snippets of prophecy. They are the result of how much he cared for the people of God.

He's not writing about his own personal prayer life or his joyous inner experiences of being a believer. He is deeply concerned, he's passionately anxious about the state of the people of God. So if we're to learn the message of this book, we need to allow Malachi's concerns for God's people to become our concerns. In fact, we will only grow as Christians as our hearts and our minds become more and more like the hearts and minds of the prophets and the apostles and the evangelists.

It's as we learn to see the world and the people of God through the eyes of Malachi and Isaiah and Peter and Paul and John and Mark. It's then that we develop God's mind and values inside ourselves.

[18:53] So if we can learn on these few Sunday evenings to see God's people as Malachi sees them and to love God's people as Malachi loves them, we'll be making real progress as a people whose mind is corporately formed by the scriptures.

But if our view is limited by the boundaries of our own personal needs and experience, we will never learn to think as the prophets and the apostles thought.

All right, well let's turn to chapter 1 verses 2 to 5 and we'll dip our toe in the real water. The fundamental characteristic of the way that God relates to his people is that he loves them.

Now he does much else as well. He guides them, he disciplines them, he instructs them, he judges them, he rescues them, he protects them, he encourages them.

But the fundamental way in which he relates to them is that he loves them. I have loved you with an everlasting love is what he says through the prophet Jeremiah, Jeremiah 31 verse 3.

[ 20 : 04 ] Or think of John 3 16. for God so loved the world that he gave his only son. Now you would think, wouldn't you, that by 450 BC, nearly 1500 years after the call of Abraham, that the Jews would have understood what God meant when he said, I love you, or I have loved you.

But when he says it here, in our verse 2, all the people can do is to look mystified and to say, well how has he loved us? Their hearts seem to have become so estranged from him that they have forgotten the ABC of their relationship to God.

Now it's possible that their recent history sheds a bit of light on this. Think of it, only a small number, a trickle of Jews had managed to return to Jerusalem. Many of them stayed in Babylon and in other parts of the Persian Empire.

Almost, only a few tens of thousands I guess had made it back to the beloved city. And although they had managed to rebuild the temple, this new temple, this second temple, wasn't a patch on the original glorious temple that had been built by King Solomon.

It was far smaller, it was far less grand. And in addition to all this, there was no restoration of Israel or Judah as an independent nation-state. They were simply a little province in this vast, straggling Persian Empire, rather like a country like Estonia or Lithuania would have been in the old Soviet Union.

[ 21 : 38 ] And the Jews had no military muscle and no political bargaining power. So the glorious scale of the restoration, which appeared to have been prophesied by Isaiah and Ezekiel, simply hadn't happened.

So it may be that they felt that God to some degree had let them down. Yes, he brought them back to Jerusalem and yes, he'd helped them to build a temple of sorts.

But the glory days of David and Solomon were 500 years in the past when Israel was united and independent and strong. But all that was long gone and by comparison they must have felt like a shadow.

How have you loved us? Have you really loved us? They ask. Has your love grown a bit thin? Have you three quarters forgotten us over all these centuries? Now it's God's answer to their pained and sorry question that sheds brilliant light on the truth, on the reality of their situation.

Look with me at verse 2. The people say, how have you loved us? And God replies, is not Esau Jacob's brother?

[ 22 : 50 ] Yet I have loved Jacob but hated Esau. God is the kernel of God's reply and I'll try to unpack what God means by that slightly odd sounding statement.

It does strike us as odd doesn't it? We would expect God to say when they say, how have you loved us? We would expect him to say, but I have loved you and I do love you.

I love you passionately and deeply and madly and tenderly. Now we understand that kind of language, don't we? The language of a passionate and emotional outburst. But what God says is actually much stronger than that and much more interesting.

Let me try to come at it from a homely kind of angle. If you're a young man who falls in love with a girl and you begin to think about marriage and wedding bells, you'll probably begin to say various things to your sweetheart which express just how much you love her.

Maybe you're a young man who wants to begin to say something to somebody. I'll just give you one or two ideas of the kind of things that you can say. You are the best thing since Cleopatra.

[ 24 : 00 ] How about that? Or the sun shines out of your very fingernails. Or how about this one? I think I used this one once. I worship that square foot of axminster carpet because you're standing on it.

It's a good line, isn't it? Don't you think? Now, friends, that kind of talk is sweet and passionate and heartfelt and true. I'm sure you could devise a few similar expressions of your own.

But in a way, that kind of talk is simply fizz and froth. It expresses what you truly feel for your sweetheart. Yes, certainly it does. But in the end, what your sweetheart needs to hear from you is just two words.

I will. I will. As you and she stand together before the minister or the registrar on your wedding day. The love that sustains and undergirds a marriage is not just emotional froth. It's an ongoing commitment expressed as a covenant. It's a promise that is solemnly and publicly given.

[ 25 : 08 ] Now, in our verse two here, God is speaking covenant language. As soon as he mentions Esau and Jacob, he's turning the people's minds right back to think of the patriarchs some thirteen centuries before.

They knew, the people of Israel knew, even if they had half forgotten it, what God had promised to Abraham and how through Abraham's family, God would take a people for himself upon whom his special choice and blessing would rest forever.

And they knew that God had restated that covenant promise to Isaac, Abraham's son, and he repeated it again several times to Jacob at different stages in his life. And they also, because they knew their history well, they knew that Isaac had had twin sons, Esau the elder and Jacob the younger.

And they knew that the inheritance, the promised blessing, was not granted to the older boy, as perhaps it ought to have been, but rather to the younger. Esau, you remember, valued it very lightly. He valued it less than a plate of lentil stew. And it was Jacob, whose name became Israel, and who became the father of the twelve tribes. Those twelve tribes who went down to Egypt, who multiplied there wonderfully under God's hand, who were then enslaved, rescued from their slavery under the leadership of Moses.

[ 26 : 26 ] Those people who received the law at Mount Sinai, which taught them how to live a distinctive and different life as God's holy people. And it was those people, every one of them, a descendant of Jacob, not one of them, a descendant of Esau, who crossed the river Jordan and colonized the promised land, whose King Solomon finally built the temple and completed the arrangements whereby God's people could live in God's land under God's rule in safety.

Malachi only has to say to his listless and drooping contemporaries, I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated, to remind them of the whole of their history, which was the history of God's loving, covenanted commitment to them.

So Malachi is saying to his contemporaries, think back, my brothers and sisters, over the last 1400 years, if you want to be reassured of just how much God loves you.

God's declaration of love is not just some kind of fizzy, emotional, believe me that I love you passionately. Not at all. He turns their minds back to the great covenant.

They, the Israelites, have often been unfaithful to God during that long period of history, and for that reason their enjoyment of the blessings of the covenant has often been withdrawn from them.

[ 27 : 46 ] But God, for his part, has committed himself to them forever. Now you'll see that in verses 3 and 4, the Lord unfolds his meaning further.

He says there, I've laid waste Esau's hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert. If Edom says we're shattered but we will rebuild the ruins, the Lord of hosts says they may build but I will tear down and they will be called the wicked country and the people with whom the Lord is angry forever.

Now the people of Edom were Esau's descendants. Edom was a little country, about the size of Yorkshire I think, that was lying to the south of Israel and Judah. Whenever you read Edom in the Old Testament, think Esau.

Now throughout Old Testament history, there was constant hostility between the Israelites, the descendants of Jacob, and the Edomites, the descendants of Esau. David, you may remember, defeated the Edomites in battle and several of his successors who were kings of Judah did the same.

And then eventually, over a number of centuries, Edom dwindled away and finally disappeared. Now think of what God is saying in verses 3 and 4.

[ 29 : 03 ] Jacob and Esau were brothers. They were twins. But I chose the one and discarded the other. I loved Jacob and I hated Esau.

I've chosen to cause my blessings of salvation to be upon Jacob and his descendants forever, but not upon Esau's. Now this is a very remarkable thing for God to do because when you think of the

actual story of Jacob and Esau, certainly to my mind, Jacob was rather the less attractive of the two brothers.

You remember what Esau was like? He was muscular and hairy-chested and straightforward. He was a little bit like an Irish second row forward. Whereas Jacob was like a cunning little English scrum half.

He got his way by skeeving and deceiving. If God's choice were dependent on the moral qualities of the two brothers, he would never have picked Jacob, surely.

Did Jacob deserve to be the patriarchal ancestor of the chosen race? Not in a million years. He was a bounder. He was a rascal. In fact, Paul explains to us in Romans chapter 9 that God chose Jacob rather than Esau to demonstrate that throughout history he does not choose people to be saved because they've been good.

[ 30 : 21 ] It was just the same with Jesus, wasn't it? He came to rescue sinners. In fact, he was known as the friend of sinners, which means that he's my friend and yours.

So Malachi is saying to his people, his contemporaries in Jerusalem, remember the way in which your founding father, Jacob, was chosen. His brother Esau was cast aside.

Esau's people, the Edomites, are dwindling away and they have no future. Even if they proudly assert that they're going to rebuild their cities, God will tear them down. God has rejected the Edomites, the people of Esau, who have so fiercely opposed his own people.

But he's chosen Jacob's people for an everlasting future. He has brought you people back to Jerusalem and you are now, even now, rebuilding your city by his grace.

Now we people who have the New Testament as well as the Old, we know much more clearly than even Malachi could know how God's plan and purpose is to prepare an eternal Jerusalem, the heavenly dwelling place which will be the everlasting home of all who have been graciously and undeservedly chosen by God.

[ 31 : 36 ] And the practical lesson for us today is clear and lovely. Here are God's people in 450 BC, bowed down and listless, their faith half extinguished.

And they ask God, how have you loved us? And his reply is, in effect, I have covenanted, I've promised my love to you. And if you look back through history, you will see how I have been utterly faithful to the promises I made to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob.

I have loved Jacob and my saving love to him and to his descendants I will never take away. Now friends, think of ourselves as the Lord's Church in the UK in 2009.

The British Church is not strong. Only a few percent of our population are active, committed Christians. Many churches are doctrinally at sea and hardly know even what the gospel is. And society, British society, is decidedly less friendly to Christians and to the gospel than it was a generation or two ago. Legislation these days in London and in Edinburgh is increasingly anti-gospel.

[ 32 : 52 ] The modern political correctnesses, backed very often now by law, seem determined to gag Christians and the message that we preach. Moral and spiritual darkness encroaches upon us.

And sometimes we want to say to the Lord, are you still there? Do you still love us? Now Malachi would reply like this, remember the covenant.

God has committed himself. He doesn't just say, I love you passionately, believe it. What he says is, I will. He is faithful.

And his covenant, since the coming of Jesus, is now wonderfully extended to include people from every tribe and language and race and nation who come to Christ.

And this covenant, the old covenant which is now made new, has been sealed, assured to us by nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ as the ultimate demonstration of how much God loves his people.

[ 33 : 58 ] I'm conscious that our church is on a bit of a high today. We have this lovely restored building and it makes me grin just to look at all your faces there. I can see them so much more clearly. I mean, this is a high day for us, isn't it?

We have these wonderful new evangelistic opportunities opening up for us. We have a congregation that is relatively strong in numbers. There's much to be thankful for. We have gifted people throughout the congregation.

We have vigorous leadership. There's much to put a smile on our faces today. But friends, it won't always be like that. We'll have our lows in the years to come as well as our highs.

We'll have battles to fight. We might even seriously behold before the secular authorities and charged with so-called crimes. We shall need then to remember that God has covenanted his love to us.

And what is true for the people of God as a whole is also true for individuals. In personal life, Christians will sometimes wonder if God still loves them. Now, God has never promised to make our individual lives easy.

[ 35 : 04 ] All of us, all of us, sooner or later, will face bleak experiences. We will have tragic bereavements. Or perhaps we'll lose all our money. Or we'll be knocked sideways by some horrible illness.

When these things happen to Christians, it is not because God has stopped loving us. We know his love for us, not because he gives us pleasant personal circumstances, but rather because of the covenant.

I have loved you, he says. How so, say we? By the covenant. Esau I've set aside, but Jacob, undeserving Jacob, I have loved.

Let's pray together. Dear God, our Father, we do pray and long that you will enable our hearts to become more and more like the hearts of the prophets and the apostles and the evangelists.

We pray that the Bible and its great truths may so fill our understanding that we are able to be strong in the face of opposition, and that we're able to live a life that joyfully and gloriously brings honour to your name.

[ 36 : 29 ] And we thank you, our dear Father, that you have love to your people and you continue to love your people. And we thank you for covenanting your love to the end and beyond.

We praise you in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.