

Malachi 3:7

“Finding our Way Home” (The Means of Grace)

Today is Father’s Day. In preparing for this morning’s message I spent some time reflecting on the ways my Dad has shown his love for my brother and I. Until Dad retired Dad pretty much always worked two jobs to support our family and my Mom worked. Dad’s day job was as an intake officer at the Juvenile Detention Center in Huntsville. We always called it the D-home. Dad start out working third shift, and then moved up to second shift when there was finally an opening. I was in the third grade by the time Dad finally made it to first shift. When Dad wasn’t at his day job he painted houses for our land lord. When I started high school Dad started teaching at a local community college. While my brother and I were involved with Scouting Dad was always one of the leaders. When I was a rising senior we won the lottery and my Dad, my brother and I went to Philmont Scout ranch. It is the largest Boy Scout reservation in the world. Dad had to quit smoking and start jogging just to be able to go, and we backpacked 63 miles on that trip ranging from 6000 to 12,441 feet above sea level. When I would come home from college Dad would drag out the hose and a bucket of suds and wash my car. We would fight about it. “Dad. I can wash my own car.” Dad would hand me the hose and say, “Good. You can rinse.” As I thought about all of this I am reminded of God’s love for us.

John 3:16 says, **“For God so love the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”** My sisters and brothers God loves you. God loves everyone in this church, and God loves everyone not sitting in this church this morning. God sent God’s only Son, Jesus Christ, to die on the cross so we would not have to perish, but have eternal life. God shows God’s love for us while we were yet sinners. That proves God’s love for us. We talked last week about how God always acts first. The reason God always acts first is because we are not able to act on our own. But we need to be clear. God is not trying to earn our love, or sell us on how great God’s love is. God just loves us. That’s why God sent Jesus Christ before we were able to do anything to show our love and appreciation for God.

My Dad is older now. In many ways his physical strength has left him. He was recently diagnosed with congestive heart failure which makes it harder for him to take care of my Mom. My brother takes care of watching over my folks. I don’t make it back to Alabama very often. When I do go back to Alabama Dad no longer tries to wash my car. Now I wash Dad’s car, or look for other chores around the house I can do while I am there. I don’t try to help out because I have to. I am not earning an allowance or anything crazy like that. I do it because I love my Dad. This idea of doing things for my Dad just because I love him, and not because I am trying to earn something is important to me. I think this concept applies to this morning’s verse from Malachi.

“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statues and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return’ (Malachi 3:7)? (pause) Last week I mentioned a quote from C.S. Lewis. “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’ All who are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. To those who knock it is opened.”¹ (pause) Perhaps our response to this verse from Malachi is to ask some questions; “How are we to return?” “How are we to knock?” “What does it mean for us to seek God with all of our heart, with all of our soul and with all of our strength?” (pause) Into these questions I offer the means of grace.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*, (Geoffrey Bless: UK 1945) ch9 pp72-73.

Now the means of grace have been misunderstood, misrepresented and misused for a long long time. Some people have thought of the means of grace as a way to earn a better mansion in heaven. Some people have thought they could earn their salvation if they just prayed hard enough, learned the Scriptures well enough, or celebrated Holy Communion often enough because these are the means of grace. **(pause)** But salvation does not work that way. We cannot earn salvation. We cannot earn salvation. Salvation is a gift from God. What we can do is show our gratitude for all God has done for us. We can stay open to being connected to the vine of God's love through Jesus Christ (John 15:5-6).

John Wesley had three rules for the class meetings. Do no harm. Do Good. Attend to the ordinances of God. John Wesley's third rule meant attend to the means of grace. The means of grace are prayer – both public and private. The searching of Scriptures is a means of grace. What Wesley seems to have meant is we are to read Scripture for ourselves. We are to listen to Scripture read out loud by other people, and we are to meditate on what Scripture says. Basically we are to read Scripture with a curious heart so when we come to a verse we don't like or a passage we don't understand we are to dig into God's word to try to understand God's will better. The searching of Scripture is how we come to better understand who God is and how God works. We are also to celebrate Holy Communion which is a means by which God extends God's grace.² The means of grace are not about trying to earn something. The means of grace are tools through which we can at first wait upon God for salvation, and then later grow into entire sanctification.³

So let me ask y'all this morning. How are you showing your thanks and appreciation to the fathers in your lives? How are you showing thanks and appreciation to your Dad, your Father-in-law, your grandfather? What are you doing to say thank you for all they have done for you? How do you say thank you for all they do every day? Do you wait for one day a year, or do you show them all the time? It's the same thing with God. Should we wait for Christmas and Easter to come to church and worship the Lord? Should we wait for a convenient Sunday when we have NOTHING else going on? Or should we make a God a priority every day? **(pause)** I'm willing to bet money I don't have that everyone in this room knows what answer I want to hear to those questions. My question to you is, what is your answer to those questions? Better yet. How do you show your Dad that he is a priority everyday? **(pause)** How have we set up our lives so that God is a priority every day? Think about it this week. I would love to hear how the people of this church show their love for God every day, and what that looks like in their lives.

In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.

² Wesley, John, "The Means of Grace," II.2. John Wesley's Sermons, an Anthology. Edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) 160.

³ Wesley, John, "The Means of Grace," II.7 & III.8. John Wesley's Sermons, an Anthology. Edited by Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991) 161, 164.