

Text: Malachi 1:6-14

Title: Rebuke of the Priests

Truth: God is worthy of only our absolute best, not the leftovers.

Date/Location: Sunday April 7, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

In our last message, we worked to resolve the tension between Jesus' command to love our enemies and the statement God makes in Malachi that He "hated Esau." We saw how God's hate is not a sinful human form of hate. We reminded ourselves about God's love for the world in common grace and in the cross of Christ. God's love for Jacob (Israel) resulted in his favor upon Israel, whereas there was no such favor for Edom. Despite this national situation, individual Edomites could turn to the Lord for salvation; and individual Jews were required to do so in personal faith because national favor does not translate directly into individual salvation. Bottom line: God loves in one sense and hates in another very real sense. But that love cannot be presented as if it is a global, unconditional, universal-salvation, no-regard-for-holiness kind of love, which is today's popular (but not Biblical) notion of God's love.

The text reminded us that the Lord will be magnified outside of the borders of Israel, even among the nations like Edom. But Malachi is not all about other nations. It is mostly about the nation of Israel. The prophet now sets his sights on Israel and its corruption. He starts at the top, with a rebuke of the priests.

I. Summary of the Dispute: No Honor for God, v. 6

A. General truths: sons honor fathers, and servants honor masters. Obviously this is not universally true, but in a righteous world, it would be. Children would be righteous and honor and obey their parents (Eph. 6:1-3). Parents would be righteous and thus worthy of honor (Eph. 6:4). Unfortunately, our world is too often the other way, with deadbeat fathers, lazy mothers, rebellious children (1 Timothy 1:9), and a culture that doesn't care.

- B. The questions in the middle of verse 6 are rhetorical, indicating the fact that God is the highest Father, and God is the greatest Master, *and* that He is not receiving the honor and reverence that is due to Him.
- C. But from the priests, He is not getting anything close to His due respect. Undoubtedly, many of the lay people are following their example and just living the way they wanted. The remnant saw the hypocrisy of the priests and were distressed that God's worship was not conducted properly. We will see later that all the people came to detest the priests because of this.

II. Backtalk from the Priests, v. 6-7

We saw an example of this in 1:2 where the audience responded with a kind of doubt and unbelief that God's words were true about His love for them. Now, the priests are responding with a similar dullness or unbelief.

- A. The Lord has said that the priests, perhaps most of the priesthood, despised the name of God (v. 6). They were doing something or thinking somehow that was "despising" toward God.
- B. They either feigned not knowing their fault, or they were actually so spiritually dull that they didn't get it. "How have we despised you?" they ask at the end of verse 6. This may amount to a plain denial of the charge. "Not guilty," they plead.
- C. God answers (v. 7a) by saying that they were despising His name by offering defiled food on the altar in Jerusalem. Something was wrong with the offerings ("food") that they gave to God on the altar. It doesn't have to be that you consciously think, "I despise God" for you to be guilty of that very crime. The priests showed it in their actions.
- D. A second time (v. 7b), Malachi records the response of the people. If this is not a record of their actual response, it is an objection that God knew they would raise when they read the prophecy or heard it proclaimed. This time they ask "How have we defiled you?"¹ You

¹ Note that I did not put a capital Y on the pronoun here nor in the comment on verse 6. The people were not thinking of God as worthy of a capitalized pronoun.

would think that, given what we will read in the upcoming verses, they would have at least a twinge in their conscience that what they were doing was wrong. But apparently not. That is a very dangerous place to be.

We need to evaluate ourselves in this. If someone tells you that you are not doing right (say your parent or a dear friend), and you look at them with a quizzical look in your face and put your palms up and ask, “What do you mean...?” (or you *think* that way) then you very well may have the Malachi-priests problem. To remedy this, stop and ask yourself if there possibly could be any truth to what you have been told. Look at it from an outsider’s perspective. Don’t pretend that you are all righteous. Instead, honestly acknowledge your fault and gain wisdom by the rebuke instead of remaining in foolishness.

- E. At the end of verse 7, God answers their second query. They not only have despised the name of God and offered defiled food, but their attitude is that the table of the Lord is *contemptible*. Think of that word—and *despised*, and *defiled* above. These are strong words (think *deseccrated*, *polluted*, *hateful*). These are not indicative of a mild aversion to the work, but a heavy and deeply unsatisfied attitude on the part of the priests.
1. The *table of the Lord* refers not to the communion of the church, but to the priestly service in the temple. Particularly, they had an altar where animal sacrifices were offered. It was a place of much animal blood and death, and a place of hard work.
 2. The priests despised this work. They were not of the volunteer sort, but had to do the work because of their ancestry and perhaps also by lot for a period of time (1 Chronicles 24:5, 19). They felt conscripted instead of privileged to serve God and God’s people.

III. The Profanity of Blemished Sacrifices, v. 8-9, 12-14

- A. The nature of the defiled offerings is detailed in verse 8. The priests were finding the blind, lame, and sick animals to offer to God, in clear violation of Leviticus 22:22. These were worth less money

than unblemished animals, so the priests considered them preferable to “waste” on worship of God.

- B. The idea that this could fly under God’s radar is utterly foolish. Perhaps the priests didn’t even believe that God knew or was aware of their sacrifices. Perhaps they treated the true God of Israel like all the other idols of the world—unseeing, unknowing, unmoving, unintelligent, and even non-living. In any case, the damaged animals were a measurement of their honor to God. They didn’t think He was worth much, and certainly not worth their best effort and expense.
- C. Try that out on your governor, and see if he would be pleased or accept you. By an argument of lesser to greater, if that is how the governor responds to you (and he would be right), how do you think God should respond? This line of thinking is just one that could be offered against the sacrifice. It is a kind of argument of practical consequences. If the offering would lead to a bad outcome for you from the governor, then it is not a good idea to do it to him, and much more to God.
- D. Another line of argumentation has to do with the absolute morality of the blemished sacrifice. And that is what verse 8a focuses on. Not only are blemished sacrifices displeasing, unacceptable, unable to curry God’s favor, and dangerous for the offerer: they are actually *evil*. God calls them evil twice in this verse. He means it is *wicked*. It is morally wrong to do that. It is not “almost good enough” or “OK” or “a grade of C.” It is a total failure, a sin. It is worse than offering nothing at all (see v. 10). This is what I mean in the title of this section: the *Profanity* of blemished sacrifices. They are profane not just in the sense of being common or worldly, but they are vulgar and despicable things to God.

The solution is far more than just offering better quality meat on the altar. The real problem in the priests was an uncircumcised heart and a sinful attitude about their relationship with God.

- E. While the priests are doing this evil, they are also desirous of God’s favor and graciousness (v. 9). While you are sinning, do you think God will listen to your requests (1 Peter 3:12)? Obviously not (another rhetorical question).

F. Malachi returns to ideas of verses 7-8 in verses 12-14. The people complained that the table of the Lord was contemptible. It was a weariness or hardship to them to continue serving at it. They sneered at it, meaning that they “sniffed,” showing their bad attitude through body language. They not only brought the blind, lame, and sick animals, they also brought *stolen* property to offer to the Lord. Completely unacceptable.

What heightens this is that some of the offerings brought to the temple were the very food that the priests ate to sustain themselves. They were almost literally biting the hand that feeds them. They had no thankfulness for the people who brought the animal sacrifices, or the God who ordained that way for the priests to have their living.

G. Verse 14 highlights a person who has a proper sacrifice in his flock (a male, understood to be unblemished), and promises it to the Lord, but then goes back on his promise. This person is failing to recognize that God is a great King and He deserves fear among the nations. Certainly from an Israelite God should receive the proper respect. You might understand how the Gentiles disrespect God, but not an Israelite! The final condemnation is that the person who does such a thing is *cursed*. The person is bound with a curse by God to be punished. He will receive the penalty due his error.

I won't say if every person who did this was an unbeliever and destined for Hades, but I will venture out only a short distance on a very strong limb to say that most of them were unbelievers. If this was any kind of pattern and there was no repentance associated with past indiscretions of this nature, the priests must be unbelievers.

IV. Shut it Down, v. 10

A. What does it mean when the text says “shut the doors”? The point of it is that God prefers no sacrifices be offered on the altar. It would be better to shut the temple down, turn out the lights, and close and lock the doors—than to continue the way it is. No sacrifices are better than blemished ones. That is a strong statement. But God doesn't desire sacrifice: rather, He wants a

repentant heart (Psalm 51:16-17). Without that key heart attitude, God doesn't accept anything.

- B. God reemphasizes in the first person that He has no pleasure in the priests, and He will not accept an offering from them. Their offerings were worse than useless.

Conclusion — The Greatness of God, v. 11, 14

We despise the name of God and don't show due honor to Him when we ignore His word and invent our own corner-cutting and cheap ways to "worship" Him. We might not *think* of it as despising God, but that's only because of our spiritual and mental blindness.

God is great. He is the greatest king, the highest Lord, and worthy of the worship of all nations. This is not evident many places on the planet like it should be. But it must be evident in the household of faith. That's us. God is worthy of our best offerings, efforts, time, love, ministry, everything.

MAP