

GOD AWAITS OUR EMPHASIS - Malachi 1:6-14 - "A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?' [7] By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. [8] When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts. [9] And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the Lord of hosts. [10] Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. [11] For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. [12] But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. [13] But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord. [14] Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations."

- 1) **FIRST, LET'S LOOK AT SOME OF THE BACKGROUND OF THE SITUATION AS IT EXISTED IN JUDAH AT THAT TIME** - The people were back in their home city and temple, but with very little of their original wealth and prosperity. The land hadn't been farmed in years. They were starting all over again. They would have paid a heavy tax to the governor of Persia.

And it wasn't easy making ends meet. The crops were a little lean, the herds were smaller and thinner than before. All of this created a problem for their worship of God. God had always made it clear that when they went through their herds for the sacrificial slaughter victim, they were to pick the most *perfect* animal they could find.

To the farmers this made less and less sense. It wasn't too bad when the pastures were crammed with beautiful, healthy livestock. But it got increasingly hard to justify when *there were very few good, strong animals left*.

But having said all this, God's real complaint is with the *priests in the temple* - **Malachi 1:6** - "son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the Lord of hosts to you, *O priests, who despise my name*. But you say, 'How have we despised your name?'" The priests found it increasingly difficult to uphold the Word of the Lord. The people weren't happy with the *cost* of obeying God.

- 2) **TWO TERRIBLE EVILS GREW OUT OF THIS SITUATION**

- a) **God said the priests were sharing in the contempt that the people were showing God.** God said they were offering to Him what they wouldn't even give to the governor: **Malachi 1:8** - "When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the Lord of hosts."

Of course, the answer to those questions is an assumed "No." So both the people and the priests cared more about *a visible influence* than an *invisible one*. They were wounded at the thought of displeasing *men* far more than they were by the thought of displeasing *God*.

This is entering the realm of a huge theological principle. This has always been a massive threat to spiritual life: **John 5:44** - "How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?" Notice the drama in that opening question - "How can you believe....?" The answer is, you can't.

- b) **Surprisingly, the people were getting bored with their religion** - Malachi 1:11-13 - "For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. [12] But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised." [13] "But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the Lord."

I said this boredom was a *surprising* boredom because one would think we would get the most happiness out of a religion over which we set the terms of performance. But clearly, by the people's own admission, this was not the case. And we need to discover the reason *why*.

First, the message of the Word of God was shaped to the tastes of the people by a faithless priesthood. The priests caved in to democratic pressure. The tastes of the seekers swayed the content of the message. The message of the living God is massaged into a slightly different shape to suit what seem to be the felt needs of the masses. But then something very unexpected happened:

Second, because the Word of God was bent out of shape - even just slightly - the presence and power of God evaporated from among His people. And here's the important bottom line thesis here. Even for people who don't want to obey God, there's nothing more boring than religion with the Spirit of God drained down the sink.

- 3) **WHEN GOD WANTS A "FOR SALE" SIGN ON HIS CHURCH - Malachi 1:10-11 - "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the Lord of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. [11] For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts."**

Are those not incredible words?"You priests ought to be concerned enough about the **glory of God** among the nations and the **spiritual correction of the people** to lock up the temple." **Why?** Because their perverted offerings aren't being accepted anyway. Their prayers are a chronic waste of time. If the temple doors were locked they would have a more accurate picture of what has **already happened to their relationship with God. He's closed to them!**

- 4) **LET ME CLOSE WITH THE FUNDAMENTAL ISSUE OF THIS PASSAGE** - We see people coming before the Lord on **their terms** rather than **His**. By that I mean they think they can determine the **extent** of their commitment and the **cost** of their self-surrender. In the context of Malachi this manifested itself in this specific way - they came as God commanded. And they brought **something** as God required. And doing **something** always feels so much more righteous than doing **nothing**. And that's the deceptive part. Because what they **offered** was not **exactly** what God **required** and that didn't bother them any more. They probably contented themselves in the fact that at least they did **something**. And they could **rest** in their own worship even though it wasn't what God required. They came on terms of what suited them - what was convenient - what they felt they could afford.

And God was furious with the priests for not making clear to the people that He **doesn't take partial sacrifice** from His people. Not because He **doesn't** love them, but because He **does** and knows their own religious ideas will never quench their thirsty hearts. And He's insulted and broken-hearted that they can't put it together. They can't make the deduction that if He can deliver them from Babylon and rebuild their temple and their city, then He can be trusted to multiply their flocks if they sacrifice on His terms.

So the passage is fundamentally about **worship**. It's about coming before God with a heart prepared for full obedience. It's coming to the Lord in a way that's pleasing to Him. And, bottom line, it's about caring **more** about pleasing God than pleasing **anyone else**. And that does relate to us today. That's what we're doing here today. This building is set apart - like the temple was - for that purpose.

Let's reacquaint ourselves when something that has become all too familiar to us. **I'm making a massive statement about my life whenever I walk into this church.** And I'm making it to a God who knows whether or not I'm being truthful. True, I come on the basis of a totally different sacrifice - Jesus Christ's death on the cross - the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the whole world. There are no other sacrifices being accepted by God today. But while the sacrifice is different, I am still saying the same thing when I come before Him. I'm saying, **"You're my God. You have delivered me. I am your servant. My life is not my property. I've made that kind of commitment to You and I am aware of it."** This is what it means to worship God in Spirit and in **truth**.