

GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS

Malachi 1

Quite some time back I was walking through the church and one of our young men was standing in the hallway going through all kinds of gyrations. I thought at first that he was having some kind of fit or something. I asked him what he was doing and he said “I am playing the guitar.” “Really? Where is the guitar?” “Oh, I don’t really have a guitar. I am just pretending like I am playing a guitar.” I don’t think he had a clue how ridiculous he looked. I turned to leave and he went right back to going through the motions of playing his pretend guitar.

You ever just go through the motions? I don’t necessarily mean the motions of playing a guitar.

- Maybe it is going to work every morning ... but you really are not into it
- Maybe it is going through your marriage day in and day out ... but you really are not sold out to your mate
- Maybe it is your walk with Jesus ... maybe you are not nearly as excited about your faith as you once were. You have found yourself just going through the motions lately.

Isaac and I are starting a new sermon series this morning titled “The Real Thing”. It is a study of the book of Malachi. And it is about that very thing ... just going through the motions of faith ... but no real commitment.

The Jews who were living in Jerusalem were just going through the motions of worship. Their faith had turned cold ... or if not cold ... very lukewarm. The Jews had been exiled to Babylon and were there for 70 years before they returned to Jerusalem and Judah. The temple had been rebuilt and there was a Persian governor reigning over the country. That is the scene in which the book of Malachi is interjected.

Malachi ... the prophet ... is one of those men who just shows up on the scene but very little is known about him. We do know that his name means “my messenger”. Not a bad name for a prophet or a preacher ... don’t you agree?

I believe there were two driving forces for Malachi to write this letter to the Jews.

- 1 ... He believed that God's people need to have a deep, radical, and overwhelming conviction of God's love for them and their need to love him just as deeply. The Jews were not doing that.
- 2 ... Man's greatest sin is sin against God. It is bad enough to sin against ourselves or against other people. But sin against God is serious business. And when we live out our relationship with God in a haphazard way ... it not only leads to sin ... it is sin.

Malachi would be the last prophet to show up on the scene for 400 years. Those 400 years have become known as the 400 silent years. They would not hear from God again through a prophet until John the Baptist enters the scene. Can you imagine that? We get anxious if we ask God for something and he does not answer right away.

Turn with me to **MALACHI 1** and we will walk our way through this chapter this morning.

The book of Malachi is actually a compilation of seven arguments that the Jews have with God. We find that first argument in **VERSE 2** of our passage ... ² **"I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?'**

Maybe you have had that same argument with God. He tells you that he loves you throughout the Scriptures ... and then something does not go just exactly the way that you think it should go and you say something like "God, if you really love me then why don't you do this for me ... or do that for me?"

I can hear the Jews now ... "God, if you really love us then why did we have to spend 70 years in Babylon as slaves?"

VERSES 2a-6 are interesting ... and controversial for some. **READ.** Does God really hate people? That seems to be what Malachi says in **VERSE 3** ... right? I think if we took a look at what Christ says in **LUKE 14:26** we might have a better idea of what is going on here. ²⁶ **"If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.** If God tells us that we are to love, honor, and respect our parents ... then why would Jesus say hate them. Because he is making a comparison here. He does not want us to really hate our family ... he wants us to love him so much that our love for parents would look like hate.

God loved the Jews so much that compared to them ... it seems as if he hates the Edomites. And especially since the Edomites liked bullying the Israelites. And that bullying would bring the wrath of God on them.

Here is the point Malachi is making here ... Jews ... God loves you more than he does any other nation, that is why he chose you above everyone else ... and yet you question his love. Get your act together. Love God back! Don't take this relationship flippantly.

The rest of **CHAPTER ONE** is how they are to love God ...

1 ... TREAT GOD WITH GREAT HONOR

VERSE 6a ... ⁶“A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty.

The Hebrew word for “Honor” is *kabed*. It literally means heavy. God is to be a heavyweight in your life! He is to be of extreme importance. He is to be huge in your life.

How huge is God in your life? Is He a heavyweight? Or is he someone that gets your attention only when it is convenient?

Years ago, Henry Ward Beecher, was one of the most famous preachers in America. People from all over the nation came to worship at his church. One Sunday he was absent, and a visiting preacher substituted for him. When the visiting minister came to the pulpit the people realized that Henry was gone. Some of the people started for the doors. The minister said, "May I have your attention. All those who came this morning to worship Henry Ward Beecher may now withdraw from the church. All who came to worship God may stay."

One of my dad's favorite songs is “How Great Thou Art”.

Oh Lord my God
When I in awesome wonder
Consider all the worlds
Thy hands have made
I see the stars

I hear the rolling thunder
Thy power throughout
The universe displayed
Then sings my soul
My Savior, God, to Thee
How great thou art
How great thou art
Then sings my soul
My Savior, God, to Thee
How great Thou art
How great Thou art

When we think of God ... is that the respect he gets? OR is he simply a Celestial Bellboy for us ... do we only give him the slightest of your attention unless you need something from him.

That is what the Jews who Malachi is talking to here had come to. And God was not happy with it. "I brought you out of slavery in Babylon and this is the way you treat me?"

If we are truly going to be followers of Christ ... if we truly want to please God ... then God deserves our greatest honor!

2 ... BLESS GOD WITH THE VERY BEST

VERSES 6b-9 ... "It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' ⁷ "By offering defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. ⁸ When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. ⁹ "Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"—says the LORD Almighty.

Let me share a story with you ... it has been a secret for a long time! When it comes time for a meal, Vicki fixes this phenomenal meal ... sits down and eats it

... then she gives me the leftovers from her plate. Pretty disgusting ... right?
Well, any of you that know Vicki ... you know that is not true. She feeds me well!

But that is exactly what the Jews were doing with God. They were eating of the best of life ... and then they were giving God the leftovers. And yet the Bible tells us that God is to get our best!

Obviously, God did not appreciate such a practice ... and he still doesn't. When God gets our left-overs he recognizes that he is not the heavyweight in our lives that he ought to be.

Scriptures give us three standards for what we give God ...

A ... Give my best

A couple of years ago ... a gal came to the church needing food. We sent her to a food pantry that we supported ... and she was glad to go. A couple of days later she came back to the church to tell us something that she thought we should know. She said that as she began to unpack the canned goods that most of the cans had expiration dates that were way past due. Obviously, people had cleaned out their cupboards and gave their rejects to the pantry.

The Jews had given God their rejects. They used blind and diseased animals for sacrifices rather than the perfect animals that the Law of God demanded. Seems to be pretty thoughtless ... right? But before we accuse them of giving God less than their best we need to examine our own lives ... Do we give God our best?

VERSES 12-14a gives us a clear view on what God thinks about not getting our best ... "But you profane it by saying, 'The Lord's table is defiled,' and, 'Its food is contemptible.' ¹³ And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. ¹⁴ "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord.

B. Give to God first

What does it look like to not putting God first in our giving?

- It's when I spend an hour or two in an evening watching TV and then in the five minutes before I fall asleep I read God's Word. That's offering God the leftovers.
- It's when we bring to our careers our best energy, our best talent, our best motivation, but when it comes to serving the body of Christ we either sit on the sidelines or look for something that requires the least amount of energy.
- It's when we spend a lot of money on ourselves for a summer vacation, but when it comes to giving God an offering we look at the budget and say, "What's left over here?"
- It's when we watch the Colts score a touchdown and leap off the sofa in jubilation, but in worship we sit passively with our hands on our lap.
- It's when we love our kids so much there is nothing we wouldn't give them, but if we're honest our heart doesn't beat that fast for God.

God deserves first place in our lives.

C. Give sacrificially

Giving should be sacrificial. In **2 SAMUEL 24:24** we see that David wanted to offer a sacrifice to God. He wanted to buy a man's threshing floor to build an altar to the Lord. The man offered to give oxen for the offering and wood for the fire. Instead of looking for a shortcut, David said, "No, I insist on buying it from you for a price, for I will not offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." A sacrifice that does not cost us anything is not a sacrifice ... right?

NOTICE what **VERSE 10** says ... "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands.

Wow! Did you catch that? God would rather you not even come to church if all you are going to do is give him apathetic worship and the leftovers of life! He wants ... and deserves ... our best and our first. He deserves sacrifice on our part for him! He certainly sacrificed for us!

And here is something else that we need to NOTICE ... Look at **VERSES 11 and 14b** ... ¹¹ My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. And ... For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

Whether we give God our best or not ... God will be worshipped for who he is. Christ put it this way ... “Even the rocks will cry out in worship.”

CONCLUSION

When our focus is on God in worship ... when we show him great honor and give him our best ... God will be gracious to us and accept us. He will be blest by our worship. But if he gets less than our best ... if we do not show him great honor ... then we will be in the same situation that we find the Jews of Malachi ... in danger of God being greatly disappointed with us!

Do we dare just go through the motions? Do we dare give him less than our best? Do we dare show him less than great respect? He deserves our honor and our best ... let's see to it that he gets it.