

The Brothers Grimm tell the tale of an old man who lived with his son, daughter-in-law, and grandson. Age had taken a toll on the old man – his eyes were dim and his hands lacked dexterity. More and more, he became the target of his son and daughter-in-law’s anger. They were always yelling at him during dinner, one moment for spilling his food, another for spilling the milk.

After yet another broken bowl, they finally exploded. They told him that since he eats like a pig, from now on, he’d have to sit in the corner and eat out of a feeding trough. So every meal, while his son, daughter-in-law, and grandson ate at the table, the old man sat on the floor in the corner, eating out of a wooden box.

One day the parents saw their 4 year old son playing with a piece of wood. When they asked what he was doing, he replied: ***“I’m making a feeding trough for you so when you get old you’ll be able to have something to eat out of.”***

In that moment they learned a lesson that had been lost on them. The old man was welcomed back to the table by his family, and treated with proper respect.

I’m sure their hearts hardened slowly by tolerating a few bad attitudes, which then became cemented by harsh treatment. Before they knew it, their hearts were like granite. It wasn’t until their son’s words hit them like a sledgehammer that they realized their sin, repented, and changed their hearts and behavior. They finally came around to giving their father the honor due him.

It’s possible for us to behave like the son and daughter-in-law in that story. We can fall into the trap of, even despising, God, our Heavenly Father – and be oblivious to it.

That couple was delivered from their sin through the words of their son – and we can be protected against – or delivered from – sinning against God through the words of Malachi.

**[Turn to Malachi 1]**

As we noted last time, Israel had grown *calloused* to God’s loving touch, *blind* to His loving actions, and *deaf* to His loving words. And their failure to was reflected in how they treated Him.

Remember how Malachi began – with a declaration of God’s love:

**Read v.2a**

**\* “I have loved you,” says the LORD.**

God’s love for His children makes their apathy and moral laxity stand out. Though they were the objects of God’s love, they failed to respond in kind – they failed to honor give God – and that failure showed itself in their worship.

Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: ***“And what greater calamity can fall upon a nation than the loss of worship.”*** Such was the calamity that fell upon Israel, and the Lord follows His declaration of ongoing love with a statement and two penetrating questions:

**Read v.6a**

**\* <sup>6</sup> “‘A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name.**

If you were to interview Israel regarding the appropriate response of a child to a parent, and of a servant to a master, you’d get the same answer: **fathers must be honored and masters respected.**

They knew the fifth commandment:

**Read Exodus 20:12**

**\* <sup>12</sup> “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.”**

And they knew the Lord had likened their relationship to Him as that of a son to a father, as Moses learned when the Lord instructed him on how to confront Pharaoh:

**Read Exodus 4:22,23a**

**<sup>22</sup> “Then you shall say to Pharaoh, ‘Thus says the LORD, “Israel is My son, My firstborn.” <sup>23</sup>**

**“So I said to you, ‘Let My son go that he may serve Me’;**

Because of that relationship, the Lord was able to chastise them this way:

**Read Deuteronomy 32:18**

**<sup>18</sup> “You neglected the Rock who begot you, And forgot the God who gave you birth.**

Israel was God’s son – God’s child. What did God, this loving father and gracious master expect of those who owed Him their very existence?

**Read v.6b**

**\* ... Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?’ ...**

As a **father**, God expected **honor**. **Honor** [kabod] literally means *heavy* or *weighty*, and is figuratively used of God's "weightiness," as in His *glory* or *splendor*. Here it's used to refer to *our recognition of or response to* God's glory and splendor. And that response is expressed in things like praise, gratitude, and obedience.

**Honor** include such things and more.

As a **master** [*adonai*, can also be translated *Lord*], God expected **respect** [*mora*, which can also be translated *fear*, or even *terror*]. He is due great reverence and respect because He is our divine **master** – our Lord.

If a child is to **honor** his/her *earthly father* (who, though perhaps good, is still imperfect), how much more are we to **honor** our *perfect heavenly Father*, whose great love has just been confirmed?! And, if an earthly servant is to **respect** his/her *earthly master* (who, though perhaps good, is still flawed), how much more are we to **respect** our *perfect heavenly Master*, who is righteous in all He does?

Lest you think this applies only to Israelites in Malachi's day, consider that if you're a Christian, God not any less *your* Father and any less *your* Master. And what does He expect *and* deserve? Respect, honor, obedience.

God is the Father of those who have come to faith in Christ. As John notes in his gospel:

**Read John 1:12**

\* <sup>12</sup> **But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name,**

And it's also that we are can be seen as slaves of a new master. That's why Paul describes believers in Romans 6:22 as:

**Read Romans 6:22**

\* <sup>22</sup> **... having been freed from sin and enslaved to God...**

We are both God's *children* and God's *slaves* – and rightly and blessedly so. And what God expects and deserves is **honor** and **respect**.

Israel was guilty of **despising** the One they should have honored – and the behavior of the priests as exhibit A:

**Read v.6**

<sup>6</sup> **"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My**

**respect?'" \* says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name.**

**Despise** means *to hold in contempt, to view as unimportant*. It's a participle, suggesting it was an ongoing attitude. The same word's used in Genesis 25:34b (**Thus Esau despised his birthright**). You may recall his birthright included spiritual status and material blessing through inheritance. But Esau **despised** these greater, long-term blessings for a pot of stew.

Esau was not just despising his birthright, but the Lord. So were the priests in Malachi's day. They **despised** the Lord's **name** – they despised Him, since His **name** represents who He is.

The priests who were leaders in worship were making a mockery worship in the Temple. But their response pleads ignorance of their failure:

**Read v.6b**

\* <sup>6</sup> **...But you say, 'How have we despised Your name?'**

As we noted last week, they pleaded ignorance of *God's love for them*. Here, they plead ignorance of *their lack of love for God*. So the Lord explains how they've been despising Him:

**Read v.7**

\* <sup>7</sup> **"You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled You?' In that you say, 'The table of the LORD is to be despised.'**

The issue was *what* they were offering as sacrifices upon the **altar (the table of the LORD)**. As the next verses reveal, they failed to follow God's instructions. They should have been offering *their best*, but instead they were offering *their worst*.

By offering **defiled** (*unclean, unacceptable* according to the Lord's standard) sacrifices, they were in essence **defiling** the Lord. Their disobedience showed they **despised** Him.

**Read v.8**

\* <sup>8</sup> **"But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?"**

God told them He wanted perfect animals – those that were the most valuable to them:

**Read Deuteronomy 17:1**

\* <sup>1</sup> **"You shall not sacrifice to the LORD your God an ox or a sheep which has a blemish or any defect, for that is a detestable thing to the LORD your God.**

### Read Deuteronomy 15:21

\* <sup>21</sup> "But if it has any defect, *such as lameness or blindness, or any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God.*

It was the duty of the priests to inspect animals and make sure the people were offering sacrifices that met God's standards:

### Read Leviticus 27:11,12

\* <sup>11</sup> "If, however, it is any unclean animal of the kind which men do not present as an offering to the LORD, then he shall place the animal before the priest. <sup>12</sup> "The priest shall value it as either good or bad; as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be.

By offering sub-standard sacrifices on behalf of the people, they were perpetuating evil. To show how pathetic their sacrifices were, he compares what they were offering Him to what they'd never think of offering the governor of Jerusalem (who *may* 've been a Persian at that time).

### Read v.8b

\* <sup>8</sup> "...Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.

They wouldn't dare think of offering the governor what they were offering their loving and gracious God! If such gifts would be displeasing to a human leader, how much more displeasing would they be to God?!

### Read v.9

\* <sup>9</sup> "But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the LORD of hosts.

If they thought their leftover, unacceptable sacrifices would **entreat God's favor** (lit. *to soften the face*, hence *appease*), they were mistaken. Their sacrifices intended to gain God's favor were in reality blocking it. Sacrifices intended to build a bridge to God only served to erect a wall. God could not be pleased with such a lack of honor and lack of respect!

Their commitment was halfhearted, and halfhearted commitment is not commitment at all, but convenience. Their best animals were kept for themselves – perhaps for breeding or for the "all temple picnic." But they'd not "waste" their best on the altar of the Lord. God was only worthy of leftovers – what they no longer wanted.

Aren't you glad that God provided for us His very best? As Peter noted:

### Read I Peter 1:18,19

<sup>18</sup> knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, <sup>19</sup> but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

Jesus was *the perfect* sacrifice. He was dying not for His own sin, but for ours. His payment was sufficient because He was a **lamb unblemished and spotless**. And the animal sacrifices of the Old Covenant anticipated and prefigured Christ's sacrifice.

While we no longer need to offer animal sacrifices (the once for all sacrifice of Christ was enough to cover our sin), as believers we are still called to offer other sacrifices to God, such as:

1. Praise and Thanksgiving

### Read Hebrews 13:15

\* <sup>15</sup> Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name.

When we praise and thank God we please him – we offer Him a sacrifice.

2. Doing Good and Sharing

The next verse in Hebrews reads like this:

### Read Hebrews 13:16

\* <sup>16</sup> And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

When we do good deeds, engage in ministry, or share what we have, we are offering sacrifices to God (assuming our motives are good).

3. The Fruit of Evangelism

People who come to Christ through our witness are sacrifices to God. Paul said as much:

### Read Romans 15:15,16

\* <sup>15</sup> But I have written very boldly to you on some points so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God, <sup>16</sup> to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, ministering as a priest the gospel of God, so that *my offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.*

Paul viewed the converts through his ministry as offerings to God.

4. Our lives.

We are living sacrifices, as Paul points out:

### Read Romans 12:1

\* <sup>1</sup> Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, **to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.**

Our lives are to be lived as sacrifices to God. That gives meaning to all we do! And every sacrificial act we offer to God is acceptable to Him through Jesus. *Our* sacrifices are only acceptable on the basis of *His* sacrifice for us.

Do you give God your best when you worship? Do you give Him our best when we serve Him? Do you treat Him as the loving Father and gracious Master that He is?

Have we come here today to *participate* in worship, or to *spectate*? Do we serve God with just enough effort to get by, or with a passion and eagerness to please Him? If not, we may be no better off than the Israelites in Malachi's day.

What *they* needed to do was to repent. As long as they continued to offer unacceptable sacrifices, they'd miss out on the fullness of God's grace and kindness. They'd be subject to His discipline, as they had in the past.

God was so displeased by their ongoing failure that He'd rather have *no* sacrifices than the ones they were offering:

### Read v.10

\* <sup>10</sup> "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle *fire on My altar!* I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you."

One of the harshest things a coach could say to his players is, "*I'd rather have no effort than the effort you are giving.*" What a put down! That's what God told the priests. As important as sacrifices were to the Lord under the Old Covenant, He'd rather have *none* than the ones they regularly offered.

To drive home their failure, God earlier (v.8) compared what they were offering Him to what they'd offer the human governor. Now He draws another contrast to show how they failed to measure up. He contrasts what *they are offering* to Him with what *Gentiles* (who were considered inferior and unclean) *would one day offer* Him!

### Read v.11

\* <sup>11</sup> "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be great among the*

nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations,*" says the LORD of hosts.

The Israelites would be shown up by those they considered pagans! He paints a picture of universal recognition (**from the rising of the sun even to its setting**, which speaks of the whole earth) – recognition of the greatness of the Lord. While Israel was offering defiled sacrifices (which reflected the condition of their hearts), there was coming a day when *even Gentiles* would outperform them! Compared to future Gentiles, Israel was failing:

### Read v.12

\* <sup>12</sup> "But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.'

By their actions they were **profaning** (a synonym for **defile** used in vs.7,12) **the table of the Lord**. They treated their holy service *and* their holy God as unholy – as ordinary duty for an ordinary being.

### Read v.13a

\* <sup>13</sup> ... "You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it," says the LORD of hosts,

Fulfilling their holy duty was a **tiresome**, annoying burden, not an act of joyful service. That they **disdainfully sniff at it**, refers to their contemptuous attitude toward their ministry and the Lord Himself. It makes me think of Benjy (our dog who's *not* "our dog"), who when given food not up to his standards, sniffs at it with disgust and walks away, mumbling under his breath. The Israelites (and the priests in particular) were treating their ministry (and their Lord) with similar disgust.

Once again, the Lord thru Malachi brings up their failure to give as God desired:

### Read v.13b

\* <sup>13</sup> "and you bring what was taken by robbery and *what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering!* Should I receive that from your hand?" says the LORD.

People were so reluctant to give God His due and so eager to make as little sacrifice as possible, that they were not only giving Him **the lame and sick**, but were willing to steal from others so they wouldn't have to part with what was their own!

I wonder if similar thinking filters into the church, when we expect others to give in our place. We passively stand on the sidelines, counting on what others have to be *our* sacrifice to Him. It doesn't work that way. God wants *our* sacrifices, of whatever variety and form, to be from *us*. No one else can honor, worship and serve God in your place. What you can uniquely offer to God is what He desires of you.

The offering of unacceptable sacrifices is not without consequences:

**Read v.14a**

\* <sup>14</sup> **"But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord,**

Some were promising to offer one thing to the Lord, but substituting that which was inferior. The Lord does not take kindly to that:

**Read Numbers 30:2**

\* <sup>2</sup> **"If a man makes a vow to the LORD, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he shall not violate his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.**

They are using the old "*bait and switch*" of worship and service." You know, "*Lord, I promise to serve you in this way at this time...*" or "*I promise to give you this gift...*" or "*I promise to honor you with obedience in this area...*". But when the time comes to follow through, we make excuses and offer God *what we didn't promise* – and *what He doesn't want*.

Some in Israel were not following through. God says such a one is **cursed** – under judgment. And why can God judge us?

**Read v.14b**

\* <sup>14</sup> **...for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."**

If He is to be **feared among the nations** (even Gentiles will one day worship Him), should He not be **feared among His own people**? Israel's failure stand in contrast to worship that is to come, as suggested earlier:

**Read Malachi 1:5**

\* <sup>5</sup> **Your eyes will see this and you will say, "The LORD be magnified beyond the border of Israel!"**

Then he amplified that:

**Read v.11**

\* <sup>11</sup> **"For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name *will be* great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering *that is pure*; for My name *will be* great among the nations," says the LORD of hosts.**

**Read v.14b**

\* <sup>14</sup> **...for I am a great King," says the LORD of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations."**

If He's to be honored and respected by "outsiders" one day, why not by His own people right now?! Why not by those who know Him to be a loving Father and a gracious Master?! Why not by us, here and now?! Why not wherever we are and whatever we are doing, each and every day?!

One of Peter's hens and one of his pigs were talking about the problem of poverty in the world (they were animals with a social conscience). The pig asked the hen what they should do about it. The hen suggested they provide a free bacon and egg breakfast. To which the pig replied, "*That's Ok for you to suggest, because for you it only requires a contribution, but for me it requires total commitment.*"

God doesn't just want *a few contributions* from our lives, but *total commitment*. And isn't that what He deserves? Isn't that what you are going to give him this week...every day?