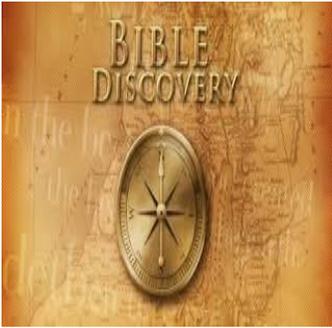


Bringing God our Best - Part II



In part I of our discussion on *Bringing God our Best*, we focused on several examples of those giving beyond their means, reaching into the community to right the wrongs they found, and especially focused on their trust in the Lord, their determination to remain faithful and true that because God is God, there's nothing He cannot do.

As we continue, asking what it means to bring God our best, I wonder if we're like the boy who, after restlessly enduring a seemingly long sermon, asked his dad what the preacher did when not preaching. "Oh, he's a busy man," the father replied. "He takes care of church business, visits the sick, prepares sermons, and counsels people...and he needs time to rest because speaking isn't an easy job." The boy thought briefly, and with head low, said, "Well, listening ain't easy, either!"

We gain 2 pearls of wisdom from this little story. First we often focus on our ordeals rather than God's glory. We don't recognize when God's using our circumstances to prepare us for His Service. The second, and perhaps more obvious is the reason some of you were nodding your heads as I told the little boy's story. It *ain't* easy to listen! Especially when it's something we don't really want to hear. Let me remind you of the situation Malachi's addressing. The Jews returned to their own land after captivity in modern-day Iraq for 70 years. The Temple was rebuilt, the worship of God reestablished. While outwardly everything seemed okay, within them a cancer of complacency had eaten away their commitment. Malachi comes on the scene challenging them, and us, to give God the best. Malachi accused them of wimpy worship, lightweight leadership, ruptured relationships, anemic offerings and no longer serving. Actually, because they failed to respond to God's love, things started going south for them. That's the way with relationships, isn't it?



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So what can we do? How can we thwart the enemy's attempts to destroy *our* joy, to vanquish *our* love, to bury *our* burdens for service to the One who's given us all things? God joyfully longs for us to give Him *our* best. Let's focus on a couple of ways we can do that.

1. **Embrace an authentic faith.** In Malachi 1:6, God asks "*so why don't you honour me, why don't you respect me?*" God isn't one to be trifled with. Not only is He all powerful - *He's all knowing!* We find security in His care for us *and* respond in reverence for His authority as we honour God through our faith as our Heavenly Father and as our Master, bought and paid for as bond servants through His Son Jesus Christ. Though the priests first hearing Malachi's message probably began saying, "*Amen, that's right God, bring it on, let the people have it*", God quickly challenges "*You priests do not respect me.*" Ouch. While they probably wanted their own children to honour them, they'd lost sight God expected the same from His people, including the priests. God deserves honour because He's holy – totally separate from our fallen nature, pure and right, filled with all power. Do you notice the phrase translated "*Lord All Powerful* in the NCV or *Almighty God* or *The Lord Almighty* in other versions." Many times in Malachi, including several in these verses, God calls Himself, "*The Lord All Powerful.*" We've lost that sense of God's might and power, we've lost His holiness, we've lost His right to our worship; we've lost our compulsion to bring God our best.

Now it's time for the elect of God; those who profess Christ as their Saviour and acknowledge God as the Lord; those called as "*holy priests offer-*

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-ing spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God” [1 Peter 2:5], to hear and respond to the truth. Showing “contempt” for God: despising our duties, bringing scorn against God because our honour to God has become wearisome, taking God for granted, indicates how the modern church has shown contempt for God’s glorious grace and mercy! For the priests confronted by Malachi it was “by bringing unclean food to my altar.” Bringing what they wouldn’t miss, just going through the motions like we sometimes do allowed intimate familiarity with the Holy One to lead to a humdrum spirituality. If God bores you, you’re in trouble because nothing else is going to satisfy you either. If we’re to give God our best we must embrace authenticity in our faith; we must stop just going through the motions, refuse to play church; we must rediscover God’s grace given at the cost of His Son Jesus who died for us, saving us from our sins and find the intensity to do whatever it takes to keep faith’s fire burning.

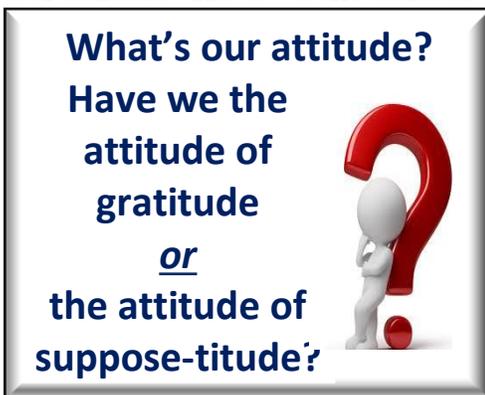
2. **Giving God an Attitude of Gratitude.** Israel’s problem could be summed up saying they suffered from SARS (not that which made headlines a few years ago) but

Severe Acute Religious Syndrome

It’s highly contagious – and deadly even. It’s the severest form of letting religiosity replace faith in our Lord and Saviour leading to trusting in our own works, our own righteousness, our own salvation – and it never works! Look again at Malachi 1:8,

“When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled 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.”

The priests weren’t accepting just second best; they offered God sick sheep and goats – animals not worth anything from what they wouldn’t miss! Imagine diseased animals stumbling blindly into the Temple, amid oozing sores covered with flies. Some collapsed before getting inside! Little wonder God in effect is saying, “**That’s just wrong!**” The people, and certainly the priests, should’ve known better - they had the Law of Moses; given as instruction to them on their attitude toward God. What’s our attitude? Have we the attitude of gratitude or the attitude of suppose-titude?



Some of us fail to see the need to bring God our best, choosing instead to live as Pastor Charles Swindoll writes, “Some of us would love to buy three dollars’ worth of God. Not enough to explode my soul or disturb my sleep, but just enough to equal a cup of warm milk or a snooze in the sunshine...I want ecstasy, not transformation. I want the warmth of the womb, not new birth. I want a pound of the eternal in a paper sack. I want three dollars’ worth of God, please.” Paul inferred it’s living on baby’s milk rather than chewing the meat of the word. In essence we never grow until we’ve embraced an authentic faith putting God first, *and* bring Him our best, giving Him priority over every area of our life, walking daily focused on what Jesus His Son our Lord and Saviour has done for us, following His example and teachings and relying on God’s Spirit to direct us. The question is: **DO WE?** *Do we suffer from the same ailment as in Malachi’s day - SARS (Severe Acute Religious Syndrome)?*

Do we recognize Christ has become the propitiation for our sins, paid the price, died in our place, so we no longer drag our animals to the altar for sacrifice. The sin for the people of Malachi’s day was they were more concerned with keeping what they had than in giving God their best. Their hearts weren’t in it. Church was a meaningless ritual to them. They’d accepted mediocrity in their lives and their leaders did nothing about it. The bottom line is they thought God didn’t care what they did.

Do we suffer from a view of God distorted by a worldly lens? Pursuing the antidote as middle class people who’ve worked hard, paid our taxes, paid our bills, having little left over? It all comes back to our view of God, doesn’t it? God clearly indicates what He wants; we must respond accordingly.

This reminds me of Mary of Bethany. She looked for the one gift she could give to truly express her devotion. Having been greatly forgiven Mary wanted to give greatly. As she looked for something to represent her relationship with the Redeemer she settled on an alabaster jar of expensive perfume, worth almost a year's salary. With the jar spilling its fragrant fluid on His feet, the whole house permeating with the aroma lifted up to God in recognition of His great worth, and to the chagrin of others, she demonstrated her love for Jesus. Are we giving sacrificially to God the best we have? Are we bringing our best to Christ? Do we fall down and honour and respect Him? Will we like the widow in Mark 12:41-44, give all we have, even while those who've much more give tokens of their wealth? Listen: God always measures the value of the gift by its worth to the one who brings it!

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Well if you've patiently listened for the last few minutes, you may've decided I want you to increase the coffers or I'm eager to increase attendance. Actually my heart's in another place. It's asking "*How have you and I tired God?*" When we fail to live up to His calling on our lives we weary our Lord God. Have we trailed along with the Israelites in half-hearted devotion? Have we given God the glory and honour due Him *every day, every moment of our lives?* Have we taken seriously our decision to accept Jesus as Lord and Saviour, recognized the enormous sacrifice He made to take away our sins? Then let us worship Him in all we do, with all our hearts readily receiving instruction from God and taking what we learn to the world around us.

Taking it out into the world is the lesson Malachi teaches. Not only can no one live except through Jesus as our Saviour as a purifying fire, like an eternal laundry soap that cleanses us from sin, but we're judged by our God on how we treat others. Herein is the great mystery within the judgment-mercy tension found throughout the Scriptures. James exhorts us, "*Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.*" [James 2:18] God sends his message through Malachi, "*I will be quick to testify against those who take part in evil magic, adultery, and lying under oath, those who cheat workers of their pay and who cheat widows and orphans, those who are unfair to foreigners, and those who do not respect me*". It's not just our attitude of giving, it's what we do for Jesus in our opportunities for service to others; it's in the way we live around others!

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Some people primarily sing praises or meditate in prayer. Both prayer and praise are good, but if we only pray and praise God, without ever *listening* to what He says, without putting His words into action, without developing a life reflective of His presence, we must ask whether we believe the words we're praying and singing. If He's really all wise and all loving (and He is), we need to live intentional lives being attentive to what He's telling us; following His instruction, because He's worth it. Talk without action doesn't show God the respect He deserves! Actions speak louder than words, and if our behaviour isn't changed by God, then our actions are saying God isn't important — He's a nice idea, but not relevant to our day-to-day lives.

When we believe God's worthy of every praise, hears every prayer, knows all things, we'll be willing to listen, willing to adhere to His instruction, willing to change the way we live, willing to reach out to others, in response to such a worthy God. As the prophet, Malachi saw down the long, uncertain corridor of history, we too can cling to the hope that, "*The day is coming, burning like an oven*" [Malachi 4:1], when God's judgment will be meted out to purify and restore our broken and disobedient world. God comes ultimately not to destroy, but to bring a new day when "the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings" [Malachi 4:2]. God's last word is not judgment, but healing; not destruction, but

restoration. We can therefore respond *trusting* Him, *seeking* Him, *respecting* Him and wanting to *please* Him as much as we can – with all our heart. We'll bring God our best!

My hope is that you will bring God your best with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. Surrender to Jesus. Say yes to His wonderful grace. Not sure what to do? Start by simply telling Him you desperately need His amazing grace and mercy. He'll lead you from there! Give us a call or drop a quick email to let us know you've said yes to Jesus. We'd love to hear from you.

Blessings,

Pastor Dave