

Place: Lurgan Baptist 22:1:2012

MALACHI'S MIGHTY MINISTRY

Reading: Malachi 1:6-14

2. GIVING GOD YOUR BEST

When Jimmy Carter was President of the U.S.A. on several occasions he spent the night in the homes of common Americans picked at random. Suppose the President and his wife decided to come to your home. The big evening arrives. Crowds line the streets as the presidential limousine pulls up to the front door of your house, escorted by motorcycles, squad cars, and secret service agents. The President and his wife emerge from the limousine wave to the crowds and photographers walk up to your front door. You open the door wearing dirty jeans and a torn T shirt and say, “*Hi, I have been out working in the garden.*” As the President steps into the cluttered living room you say “*Sorry about the mess, but my wife got engrossed in the soap operas on television this afternoon and did not get around to cleaning the house. But dinner is almost ready. She is heating up the leftovers in the microwave right now. I hope you don't mind paper plates.*” Now that's absurd isn't it? You see, even if you were poor, if you knew that the President was coming, you would look your best. You would clean your home, maybe even do a little paint job. You would bring out your best dishes and cook your special meal. I mean the President of the U.S.A. deserves more than leftovers. So does the Lord. You see He is a “*great King,*” (1:14)

He says “*my name is dreadful (feared) among the heathen (nations).*” Surely nobody would serve the Lord leftovers. “*Yes,*” says Malachi they would. I mean the priests of his day were doing just that. You see, when the people would bring less than a perfect animal to the temple, the priest would say, “*Don't worry about it. It was sick, so you couldn't risk eating it. It's just going to go up in smoke anyway. Sacrificing it helps you get rid of an animal you didn't need and it helps us keep the fires burning on the altar. Everyone wins.*” Everyone, except God that is. So through Malachi the Lord confronts the priests the spiritual leadership of the nation. They were despising God's name. But the priests still did not get it. So the Lord explains in (1:7) “*Bread,*” speaks of the animal sacrifices offered to God. The “*table,*” speaks of the brazen altar on which these sacrifices were offered. Do you see that Malachi uses the word “*polluted,*” twice ?

The word means “*repudiating, to soil, desecrate and defile.*” Malachi was simply saying “*You are not giving God your all, your very best.*” You see, at the very centre of Jewish worship was the offering of sacrifices. The reason for sacrifices was that they were sinners approaching a holy God, and He had ordained sacrifices as the way of approaching Him. (Lev Ch's 1-7) These animals had to be perfect, for after all these sacrifices pointed to the Lamb of God and if they were imperfect, how could they typify the Perfect Sacrifice, the Son of God ? In short the priests were permitting the people to bring to the Lord less than their best. Sure, they have returned to the land after living in modern day Iraq for

seventy years. The temple has been rebuilt the worship of God has been reestablished but while outwardly everything seems ok, on the inside a cancer of complacency is eating away at their commitment. Malachi God's final spokesman of the Old Testament era comes on the scene to challenge them and us to give God our best. My are you giving God your best ? Is your passion in life to exalt Him ? Or could it be like the priest's in Malachi's day you are simply playing church ? Why should we would be devoted to the Lord ? How should we be devoted to the Lord ? What are the results of being devoted to the Lord ?

(1) THE REASON FOR SUCH DEVOTION

After listening restlessly to a long sermon, a 6 year boy asked his father what the preacher did the rest of the week. " Oh, he's a very busy man," the father replied. " *He takes care of church business, visits the sick, works on his sermons, counsels people and then he has to take time to rest up because speaking in public isn't an easy job.*" The boy thought for a moment and then said, " *Well, listening isn't easy either.*" Why are some of you nodding your heads ? It isn't easy to listen, is it ? Especially when it's something we don't really want to hear. You see, this passage is specifically directed to the priests the spiritual leaders of the nation, but generally it's applicable to us all. Now why should we give our best to the Lord ? Why should we honour the name of the Lord ? Because,

(a) WE ARE THE SONS OF GOD:

Malachi is basing his appeal on the ground of affection. Look if you will at (1:6) The greatest name for God in the Bible is Father. It occurs only rarely in the Old Testament, but it was characteristic of our Lord to call God Father. In John's gospel alone the name occurs more than one hundred times. Now the Lord here identifies Himself as Israel's father. Do you recall that the Lord says to Moses " *And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn.*" (Ex 4:22) We see the same thought in the book of Deuteronomy when Moses says, " *Do ye thus requite the Lord, O foolish people and unwise ? Is not he thy father that hath bought thee ? hath he not made thee and established thee.*" (32:6) Why in this very passage the Lord has already declared His love for Israel (1:2) and He has given evidences or proofs of that love. (1:2-4) But what is the proper response to such love ? The Lord answers, " *A son honoureth his father.*" Indeed, is this not one of the ten commandments ? " *Honour thy father and thy mother that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.*" (Ex 20:12) Paul says, " *Children obey your parents in the Lord for this is right.*" (Eph 6:1) Young folk, how do you treat your parents ? Do you treat them respectfully or disgracefully ?

As far as Israel were concerned they could never have a better father, but they treated God disgracefully. So God says, " *If I be a father, where is mine honour ?*" (1:6) The word " *honour,*" means " *glory.*" But they had deprived God of this. As sons they had not revered God. What does it mean to honour God ? It means to trust Him. You see, the Lord loves to be trusted. Do you

honour God ? Do you go about worrying ? Are you always down in the dumps ? Do you groan about everything ? Do you really trust Him ? To honour God is to obey Him. No matter what end of the Bible you start at when you come down to practical Christianity it will always come to these two factors, trust and obey. My to honour God is to love Him. What about your love for the Lord this ? Has He say to you what he said to the church at Ephesus, “ *Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee because thou hast left thy first love.* ” (Rev 2:4) Is the Lord to saying to us, “ *Where is my honour ? Where is my reverence ?* ” (a)

(b) WE ARE THE SERVANTS OF GOD:

For Malachi says “ *A servant his master.* ” Malachi is basing his appeal on the ground of obligation. Do you recall God said to Moses, “ *Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee that I have sent thee. When thou hast brought the people out of Egypt ye shall serve God upon this mountain.* ” (Ex 3:12) The word “ *servant*, ” carries the idea of a “ *bondslave*. ” It speaks of one who has been purchased and owes his life to his master. You see, we are not only the sons of God we are the servants of God. We have a special relationship, sons. We have a special responsibility, servants. Yet are we not like the people in Malachi’s day ? As sons we have not revered God, as servants we have not respected God. As sons we have not worshipped Him respectfully, as servants we have not worked for Him effectively. I wonder is the Lord asking us the same question that He asked His disciples long ago, “ *And why call ye me Lord,*

Lord and do not the things which I say. ” (Lk 6:46) Now do you see the reason why we should give our best for God ? We are His sons and we are His servants. (1)

(2) THE REALITY IN SUCH DEVOTION

In a graveyard beside a church in England stands a monument with this epitaph, “ *Here lies Robert Shirley who died in 1657. He did the best of things in the worst of times.* ” Now what does it really mean when we talk about giving all to the Lord, our best to the Lord. We sing, “ *Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee,* ” but what does that involve ? Well look at the context and notice that giving to God implies giving,

(a) THE BEST NOT THE WORST:

Look if you will at (1:7) As I have intimated “ *bread*, ” speaks of animal sacrifices and the “ *table*, ” refers to the altar for sacrifices. This is all made clear in (1:8) You see, what was happening was this. The priests were offering ceremonially unclean or blemished sacrifices which were strictly forbidden by the Lord. Do you recall God’s Word in all of this ? God said speaking of animal sacrifice, “ *But whatsoever hath a blemish that shall ye not offer, for it shall not be acceptable for you. Ye shall not offer unto the Lord that which is bruised or crushed or broken or cut,* ” (Lev 22:20-25) Still again God said, “ *And if there be any blemish therein, as if it be lame, or blind, or have any ill blemish, thou shalt not sacrifice it unto the Lord thy God.* ” (Deut 15:21) My can you imagine the parade of diseased animals limping and

stumbling blindly toward the temple ? Their oozing sores were covered with flies. Some of them probably collapsed before they got there. You see, it wasn't just that the priests were accepting second best they were offering animals that weren't worth anything. My Israel had been taught to look through the flocks and find the one animal without defect or blemish to sacrifice. This was not easy to do because this animal was the cream of the crop, the most expensive, the one used for breeding, but it was what God demanded. *The best not the worst.* Now tell me, what are you offering the Lord ? What are you giving to the Lord ? In what way are you worshiping the Lord ? You see, your gift reveals your estimate of the One to whom you offer it.

Do you recall Mary of Bethany ? Taking that expensive jar of perfume which was worth almost a year's salary for a working man. She went to the Lord Jesus with that jar broke it and poured out its contents on the person of Christ. (Jn 12:3) The disciples criticized her but the Lord commended her. He said, "*She hath done what she could.*" (Mk 14:8) You see genuine worship never counts the cost. This is exactly what Mary did. She gave her all and she gave her very best to the Lord Jesus. G. Campbell Morgan says, "*Sacrilege is centered in offering God something which costs nothing because you think God is worth nothing.*" My are we giving our best to God in worship ? Do you arrive with a heart that is prepared and eager to worship ? Do you concentrate on what you are doing in public worship ? Do you allow your thoughts to wander ? Do you give the ministry of God's Word a careful hearing ? Or have we allowed our

familiarity with the things of God to dull our appreciation of them ? Have we just lost the wonder of it all ? (a)

(b) THE FIRST NOT THE LAST:

I like the sense of joy that accompanies giving in the book of Chronicles it says concerning the Israelites, "*And as soon as the commandment came abroad the children of Israel brought in abundance the firstfruits of corn, wine, and oil and honey and all of the increase of the field and the tithe of all things brought they in abundantly.*" (2 Chron 31:5) When the Israelites give God 10% right away it helped them recognize that everything they had was a gift from Him. But do you see what was happening in Malachi's day ? God was just getting the leftovers. That's why He says in (1:8) If they had offered these defective beasts to their governor he would have rejected them but anything will do for the Lord.

The classic story is that of a missionary who received from some dear old saint a shipment of used clothing and other hand me downs. Included in the box was a jar full of used tea bags that the old lady had faithfully dried out and sent for the missionary's use. **Used tea bags.** Why not a send a case of new ones ? If you hear about a missionary or preacher who needs a new suit of clothes, don't give him your old clothes, buy them a new suit. God is never to get the leftovers. He should receive what is right, not what is left. *Is the Lord coming in for the leftovers in your life ?* If you have money left at the end of the week you'll tip the Lord. If you have energy left you might to decide to serve Him. If you have time left you might come out to

worship Him. My we should give the Lord the best in terms of quality. The Lord only wants unblemished lambs on His altar. If it's a reject it is not good enough for the Lord. (a) (b)

(c) *THE COSTLY NOT THE CHEAP:*

Yet this is exactly what they were doing here. The people would bring an unblemished lamb to offer as a sacrifice at the temple and the priests would reason, “ *Its does not make sense to slaughter this perfectly good lamb. After all it's just going to be burned on the altar. Let's sell it for a decent price and substitute a slightly blemished lamb that's cheaper. Good stewardship demands it.* ” But do you see what God thought of it all ? (1:10) As far as God was concerned it would be better that the doors of the temple were shut and the fires of the altar put out than this charade continuing. Listen to this phrase “ *I have no pleasure in you.* ” Do you see Lot sitting in the gate of Sodom ? He's cemented in the gate of Sodom having a good time with the Sodomites.

Do you know what God says ? “ *I have no pleasure in you.* ” Do you see Samson sitting on the lap of Delilah ? Do you know what God says, “ *I have no pleasure in you.* ” Do you see Peter warming his hands at the world's fire, standing with the enemies of the Lord denying Him. Do you know what God says, “ *I have no pleasure in you.* ” Is the Lord talking to you this ? Are you fiddling around with the Sodomites ? With Delilah ? Like Peter are you denying the Lord ? Do you remember what

David said ? “ *Neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the Lord my God of that which doth cost me nothing.* ” (2 Sam 24:24) My are you giving to the Lord your best ? Are you striving to give Him the first ? And does your giving cost you something ?

(d) *THE TRUE NOT THE FALSE:*

Here we are talking about motive, why you do what you do. Look if you will at (1:14) Here's a man who wants to look good in public so he makes a grandstand vow to best to the Lord. But when it comes to give, he slips in an inferior animal and keeps the best for himself. You see, he was not really offering the sacrifice to the Lord, who sees the motives of the heart. He was doing it to be seen of men. Do you recall that Ananias and Sapphira fell into this trap ? They wanted the church to think they were giving the total amount from the sale of their land, but they kept part of it for themselves. As Peter pointed before God struck them dead, they were not lying to men but to God.

My if we serve the Lord or give to the Lord's work out of the motive of gaining recognition from men we'll fail to honour God. Andrew Fuller an 18th century pastor and friend of William Carey was once soliciting funds for foreign missions. A good friend said to him, “ *Very well. Andrew, seeing it is you I'll give \$500.* ” Fuller responded, “ *No I cannot take the money since you give it seeing me.* ” His friend saw the point and said, “ *You are right Andrew. Here is a \$1000 seeing it is for the Lord.* ”

My is this not what we mean when we sing, “ *All to Jesus I surrender,* ” it means (a) (b) (c) (d) (1) (2)

(3) THE RESULT OF SUCH DEVOTION

Do you see what (1:10) says ? It should cause us to sit up and take notice. God would rather the temple be shut down than for his people to bring pathetic leftovers. I mean how would you feel today if when you came the doors were locked and everything was sealed up tight ? Its just like what the Lord was saying to the church at Laodicea ? “ *I know thy works that thou art neither cold nor hot I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm and neither cold nor hot I will spue thee out of my mouth.* ” (Rev 3:15-16) It’s as though God is saying here. “ *If you can’t give me every inch of your life, then you can’t play church because I am closing the doors.* ” On the other hand, if we give to God our all, two things will result.

(a) GOD’S GREATNESS WILL BE APPRECIATED:

For look at (1:11) No doubt there is a hint there of millennial glory. (Is 2:24 19:19-21) But the point I want to make is this. Every time God mentions sacrifice He follows it with the phrase “ *for my name shall be great.* ” Do you see it ? Sacrifice is directly linked to the greatness of God. That’s why when we give Him our best we are grasping the greatness of God. ***Conversely, when we offer God little or nothing we are really saying the Lord does not matter too much to us and we become bored with God and excited about the world.*** Is this not what

happened to these priests ? Look at (1:13) Instead of counting it a privilege to minister on God’s behalf they exclaimed, “ *what a burden.* ” They were bored with worship because they had lost sight of the greatness of their God. Is that where you are ? Bored with worship, and bored with Christian service, because you have lost sight of the greatness of God. Listen, if we give to God our best (a)

(b) GOD’S GLORY WILL BE RADIATED:

The Psalmist said, “ *Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name.* ” (29:2) That’s exactly what the Jews were not doing. Rather than honoring His name, they were despising it, regarding it with contempt. Now of course in our day a name is mostly a way of identifying or addressing someone. But in those days a name was much more. A name represented the essence of one’s being. I heard about one fellow who appeared before a judge to have his name changed. The judge said, “ *I see here that your name is Bill Stinks. I believe I understand why you would want to change your name.* ” Now what would you like to have it changed to ?” The man said, “ **Joe Stinks.** ” My God’s name was actually a revelation of Himself. Did you notice that 24 times in Malachi and nearly 300 times in the Old Testament one name is used. Here it is. “ *The Lord of Hosts.* ” (1:4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14) This is the military name for God for “ *hosts,* ” comes from a Hebrew word which means “ *to wage war.* ” The Lord is the Commander of the hosts of heaven. The stars (Is 40:26) the angels, (Ps 103:20-21) the armies of Israel (Ex 12:41) and all who trust in Him. (Ps 46:7-11)

And “ *from the rising of the sun unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles*,” You see, God is not tied to this remnant and don’t you believe for one moment that God is tied to the Baptists or the Brethren or whoever. He says, “ *If I can’t revive you, if I cannot quicken your paces, if I can’t fan the flame of your heart. Then I can get the Gentiles to glorify my name.*” And “ *my name shall be great.*” Do you recall when the angel came to Mary and said, “ *And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb and bring forth a son and shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great.*” (Lk 1:31) Do you remember the woman at the well said, “ *Art thou greater than our father Jacob ?*” (Jn 4:12) Yes, Christ is greater than **the Patriarch.** Do you recall He said, “ *A greater than Jonah is here.*” (Lk 11:32) Yes, Christ is greater than **the Prophets.** Do you recall He said “ *A greater than Solomon is here.*” (Matt 12:42) Yes, Christ is greater than **the Kings.** Do you recall that the letter to the Hebrews begins by saying that Christ is greater than **the angels ?** (Heb 1:4)

My when He arose from the dead He arose as “ *that great shepherd of the sheep.*” (Heb 13:20) and whenever He went through the clouds He became “ *a great high priest.*” (Heb 4:14) And when He comes again He will come as “ *the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*” (Heb 2:13) He is great, grand and glorious and when we give Him our best His glory and honour will radiate abroad. Ed Spencer was attending Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois. Ed was a rather well known athlete of his day, for he was one of the first to win a gold medal for the United States in the Olympics. The

campus of Northwestern is bordered on one side by Lake Michigan. One evening, as Ed was doing his studies in the library, outside a storm was raging. All of a sudden some fellows came running in shouting, “ *The Lady Elgin has just been thrown in the rocks and is sinking.*” Ed ran from the library out to the lake and saw the situation was indeed serious. Without a moment’s hesitation, he rid himself of any extra clothing that might hinder him and be dived in the rolling, chopping waves. He was able to reach the wreck and, fighting his way back, he brought the first person to safety. He had repeated this heroic effort several more times when those on shore said, “ *Ed, you’ve done all you can. You’ll surely kill yourself if you try it anymore.*” Ed’s reply was, “ *I’ve got to give my best.*” He plunged again and brought another one to safety, and another and another until he had rescued 17 people. He could go no further and fell unconscious on shore. All through the night, as he lay in the infirmary, he kept repeating, “ *Have I done my best, fellows ? Fellows, have I done my best ?*” He had done his best but the experience cost him his health.

Years later, inspired by the story, Ensign Edwin Young wrote the song, **Have I Done My Best For Jesus ?**

*I wonder, have I done my best for Jesus,
Who died upon the cruel tree ?
To think of His great sacrifice at Calvary
I know my Lord expects the best from me.*

