

Pako Morning Service 10/7/2016

Scripture Reading: Mal 1:6-2:9; Sermon: "Only the best will do."

Congregation, last week we saw that Malachi begins this book by emphasising God's great love towards his people and showing that he chose Jacob and didn't choose Esau. Now in this second oracle, Malachi zooms in on the priests and their obvious lack of appreciation of God's great love. From Chapter 1:6-14 he criticises the priests for (1) offering defiled sacrifices on God's altar, and (2) thereby harming God's people. (3) By their disparaging behaviour, they are bringing the office of priest into disrepute. And then (4) thinking that serving God in the temple as a contemptible and intolerable burden, and thereby defying God.

In the second part (2:1-9) he calls for repentance and warns of a curse on the priests if they do not repent. And what I find particularly difficult is that the lack of proper respect and action for God from the priests have caused many to stumble (v8). There seems to be a direct correlation between what the leaders of God's people do and how the God's people respond. If the priests would do their job well and offer their best, then God's people will also do that. If the leaders don't and offer God second best, then we cannot expect much different from God's people.

Let's look a little closer at what the priests were doing in Malachi's day. First, they were not showing proper honour to their Father. Q1 "If I am a Father, where is the honour due to me?" Now this analogy or comparison of God being Israel's Father is not new. It had been used before. For instance, in Isa 63:16, the prophet twice mentions that Yahweh is their Father. He called them. He gave birth to them. He made a covenant with them. (cf Isa 64:8; Exo. 4:22, Hosea 11:1).

Now if God was seen as a Father to Israel, then the priests also knew that the fifth commandment applied. Just as children are to show honour and obedience to their fathers and mothers so also were the priests to show honour. The priest also knew that those who disobeyed were to be stoned (Deut. 21:18-21). So God's question, has a loaded answer. If I am your Father that glory and honour are due to God is beyond dispute (Psa 24:7-10). I am sure if these priests were to answer honestly they would have had this sinking feeling for they deserved to die for not showing honour to their Father!

The Lord's second question was more ominous, "If I am a Master, where is the respect or fear due to Me?" Scripture presents Israel as the Lord's servant (Isa. 44:1-2) and He as being their Master. Therefore, as the Lord's servant, how could they be disrespectful to Him? If you were a disrespectful servant, then prison would be the end result. So the priests, who themselves liked to be called fathers and masters by the people, and obeyed as such (Judges 18:19, Mt. 22:7, 10); forgot to revere and obey their heavenly Father and Master.

The third charge is that the priests were showing contempt and it seems to surprise the priests. They ask "How have we shown contempt for your name?" (v6) God answers them by saying, "You place defiled food on my altar!" The priests immediately answer by asking, "How have we defiled you?" Oh the priests might not like to admit it, but that is what they were doing. They were offering blind, crippled, diseased, animals on God's altar! These contemptible sacrifices were second best – in fact they were the left overs. God's law in Leviticus 22:17-30, gave instruction on what was considered defective.

They were warned against offering such sacrifices and yet they did, thus despising His name. And yet the priests dared to ask God, "How?" That's the trouble with sin isn't it? We rationalise it. The first time it hurts, the second time it pains us less, and before long, there is no pain at all. We become desensitised.

But by the priests giving second best, they were giving God the left overs. They had defiled God by saying that the Lord's table, referring to the altar was is contemptible. The proof was in the pudding. Their actions (Mal. 1:8) made them guilty and deserving of death (Lev 22:9). Instead of trying to justify the indefensible, their answer should have been a resounding "YES we have sinned!" (Lev 22:20).

For when it comes to serving the Lord and offering sacrifices, only the best will do, and it was to their shame that these things had to be pointed out to them. But look what Malachi says to his priests. "Try offering these gifts to your governor whose table was a lavishly prepared banquet" (cf. Neh. 5:17).

They wouldn't have dared! They would have been thrown out. Totally unacceptable! Neither would God almighty accept such sacrifices. To emphasize the point, Malachi states that the whole temple service might as well be shut down. It was even useless to light the fires on the altar of burnt offering. (vv. 8-9). God was not pleased. He would not accept offerings from them.

We can see by the priest's attitude in verse 13, that the work for the Lord had become burdensome. They were wearied by it, sniffing at it contemptuously. That happens doesn't it, when your heart isn't in something, when you lost your first love. They thought God imposed too hard a task upon them. It was all too much. They could no longer be bothered. They were forced to attend too often, and too long. They thought the duty of their office toilsome and troublesome, and snuffed at it as unreasonable.

We can even see the extent of the people's sin. They make vows to do the right thing, but when it came to the crunch, they would cheat God. They would offer a blemished animal, second best, third rate, and they would keep the best for themselves. However, says Malachi, God's name would still be great despite their actions. God doesn't need us to make his name great. If He can't use us because we are unwilling, He will use someone else. His glory, his honour, his name will be great.

And if the priests and God's people didn't offer the best, then God would raise someone else who would give him honour and glory. Not just in the temple, but in every place. From as far as they could see. From where the sun rises to where the sun sets. The people along with the priests forgot that only the best will do when it comes to offering sacrifices to God.

So Malachi states the warning Ch 2:1-4; If they fail to listen and fail to honour God they will experience a curse. The Covenant made with the Israelites under Moses included curses for those who disobeyed the Law (Deut. 28). The priests and their children would be removed from office. The priests needed to remember that they were given a special position.

Chosen by God to be the mediators between God and his people (Exo 28&29). That is why they were urged to set their hearts on honouring God. Don't just be passive in honouring God – going through the motions without your heart in it! Make a conscious effort. Set your hearts on honouring me! And if they didn't honour God, he would remove them from office.

Secondly, status and function are interrelated, therefore any curse would also effect the blessings they pronounced on the people (Num. 6:22-27). This was already happening, with pests affecting the people's crops and vines not bearing fruit (3:11) and by the decrease in tithes and offerings.

Thirdly, the priests would be humiliated. The offal, the waste matter from the sacrifices was to be rubbed into their faces. In other words, the priest would be carried off with the waste. God's purpose in admonishing them was to purify the priesthood so that His covenant with Levi could continue.

Malachi gives an example of what a true priest for God should be doing. The descendants of Levi made up the priestly class. One of the best known was Aaron. But God made a similar covenant with Phinehas, a grand son of Aaron (Num. 25:10-13). Phinehas was zealous for God's honour. So God made a covenant of peace with him. That's the way God wanted the priesthood to be. "He revered and stood in awe of my name, true instruction was in his mouth, nothing false on his lips, walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin".

The priests in Malachi's day had caused many people to stumble because they themselves had turned from the way God had taught them. So the priests would be despised and humiliated before all the people. This actually was a light sentence, for their penalty should have been death (Num. 18:32).

So how do apply these things today. If I were to speak to you about some of the charlatans that parade as preachers of God's truth today, we would be hear a month of Sundays. Well, rather than dodge the question entirely, let me mention a few concerns I have about how 'priests' are defiling the Lord's table today.

Some clergy today, don't like to speak about the need to repent from one's sins. They suggest that doing so isn't being winsome today. I disagree entirely. God's word speaks a lot about sin and the failure to repent. The consequences of not doing so is eternal punishment.

Some clergy preach that many rivers runs to the sea – or if you like there are more ways to heaven than just believing in Jesus as the only way. I disagree. God's word clearly says that Jesus is the only way to the Father (John 14:6). Some clergy today no longer believe that the bible is the word of God but only contains it. Hence we have clergy and Christians who no longer think it is important to believe in the first chapters of Genesis, the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, his

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physical resurrection from the dead. I just read this week that NASA has spent one billion dollars on a spacecraft called Juno to place itself in Jupiter's orbit so that they can perhaps begin to understand how the universe was formed and how earth was made. I would gladly explain it to them for a fraction of the price – well they can read it for free!

I hear messages from so called preachers in their purple robes that promise people the world and heaven too, but have nothing to say about the need to repent of their sins and embrace Jesus as their Saviour! And all these things and more have caused great harm to the Lord's church and to the spiritual welfare of God's people and it grieves me no end. I wish they would get down off their pulpits and never again show contempt for the office. These preachers have dishonoured God and have held him in contempt and defiled the Lord's table.

Well, since we hold to the priesthood of all believers, how are you going with answering the questions? If we claim to be true Christians, followers of Christ, offering second best will never do. Oh I am not speaking about earning your way into God's good books, for we know that our good deeds are as filthy rags in God's sight as far as salvation is concerned. And we also know, God looks at our hearts and he knows whether everything we do is driven by a deep love for him. He knows what we think about Jesus and what He has done for us.

He knows what has driven us to be at worship today. Hopefully it wasn't to dodge a visit from the elders or a phone call from a concerned friend. That would be a lousy reason to come to worship. Hopefully, the love of Christ filling your heart stops you from passing on the crude joke, or dressing inappropriately or being sexually immoral. Perhaps the thought of grieving the Holy Spirit within you puts the brakes on sinful activity.

Paul says to those who believe, who claim to be Christians in Romans 12:1, "that in view of God's mercy, we are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God--this is your spiritual act of worship." It amazes me that the people in the Old Testament could offer their left overs when God had just brought them back from exile. Surely, we wouldn't dream of doing that knowing what God has done for us in Christ!

Surely we desire to honour God's great name by giving God our best, all of the time. Surely, our priesthood hasn't become too burdensome has it? Has our worship of God become too hard or too long or take up too many Sundays, too much free time? I sometimes wonder whether being a light to God's wonderful love to us in Christ become too onerous for many in the church, not just here but also the wider church. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why God is feared and honoured so little in the church today.

Congregation, when we offer our left overs, others see it, and our children see it, and those we wish to win for Christ also see it. It is my prayer that none of us would want to dishonour the Lord by giving him the left overs. We don't want to defile his table. We don't want to experience his curse, but rather his blessing. In fact, the Father has already given us his very best, by giving his Son as the perfect sacrifice! And with the giving of his very best for our forgiveness and the gift of eternal life, the thought of giving Him left overs in return should horrify us.

Congregation, may we never be guilty of treating our wonderful God and Saviour with contempt. And if we have been, let us repent asap, and again commit ourselves to honouring our Saviour God wholeheartedly. For when it comes to our loving Saviour God, only the best will do. Amen.