

Giving God what is Right, not left

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[0 : 00] I think it's a human tendency to take things or people for granted. And I think I've asked that on the weekly newsletter this week, whether you've done something like that.

Especially when we become familiar with things or people. And then we simply just go through the motions. So take work, for instance.

The first day is always so exciting, isn't it? This is the job I've always wanted. But then after a while, the passion subsides.

We get tempted to just go through the motions. To clock in and then to clock out. We turn up just so the bills get paid. And when we're at work, our heart really isn't in it at all.

And I suspect that as we look at tonight's passage, that's what's happening with the priests. And perhaps even with Israel as a whole. They seem to be just going through the motions with God.

[1 : 02] Last week, we heard that God had assured Israel of His love for them. That He had chosen them. Even when they doubted. Even when they didn't deserve it. But tonight, the spotlight turns on Israel instead.

Or at least her priests. For they haven't reciprocated God's love for them. They haven't kept faith with God. And so in this sort of series of answers and questions, God lays out His charge against them.

Much like being in a courtroom. And so in verse 6, if you look with me, He begins with His argument. 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? It's indisputable, isn't it?

Everyone knows that a son must honor his father. And a slave his master. And yet, if this is true, The question is, why haven't the priest shown God the same honor, if not more?

[2 : 08] After all, He's not merely a father or a master. He's the Lord Almighty. Much greater than any earthly father or master. But God lays the responsibility, not just at Israel, but squarely at the feet of the priests.

When in the next verse He says, or in the next sentence, It is you priests who show contempt for my name. Now I'll come back a bit later as to why the priests are being singled out.

But notice what the specific charge is. It's contempt for God's name. It's a lack of respect for God. And rather ironically, the priests actually answer back like a rebellious child.

How have we shown contempt for your name? It may be that they are thinking, We're not like our forefathers. We haven't openly worshipped idols. We haven't used God's name in vain.

Well, God supplies the evidence in verse 7 by saying, By offering defiled food on my altar. They're doing it right there at the temple.

[3 : 17] Right where they should be honoring His name instead. But again, the counter question comes back. You know, the answering back. How have we defiled you?

Well, God says, By saying that the Lord's table is contemptible. 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. And then, as if to reinforce his point, These same points are going to be repeated again in the next few verses.

And so the problem is quite clear, isn't it? It's not the misuse of God's name, But rather, their contempt is seen in how they administer the sacrifices. As priests, they knew that perfect animals were required.

And yet, they offered blind, crippled, and diseased animals instead. I think what's happening is people were coming with defective sacrifices. Instead of saying, no, that's not acceptable, We need

something without blemish, They probably just turned a blind eye to it.

[4 : 30] And to add insult to injury, This is probably not something they would even dare do to their earthly governor. Now, remember, this earthly governor, This is actually the guy that the Persian overlords appoint over them.

It's not their favorite ruler. And yet, even though they despise this ruler, They show more respect to him than to God. And so you see, the problem isn't so much the sacrifices, is it?

Yes, those are not good, But it's really what the sacrifice showed about what's in their hearts, What their attitude is towards God. It's rather like when, you know, you have to entertain VIPs for work.

Say they've just flown in from overseas in their private jets, perhaps, And you have to take them out to dinner. Now, the restaurant you chose showed how important you thought they were, right?

So, for example, taking them to David and Kemi's at Box Hill, It's just not on. Even if they serve the best dumplings in Melbourne, Which they don't, sorry.

[5 : 40] It's not right, is it? It's not acceptable. Instead, if you want to honor them, Then you have to pick the finest, The best fine dining restaurant in town, right?

Because at the end of the day, It's not about how great the food is, Even though it will be great, But it's what the quality of the restaurant says, About how important you thought they were.

And so for God, If that's what the priests were doing, Then God says, Look, it's much better than, That you just don't do anything at all. In verse 10 he says, God wishes that one of them would just shut the doors, Instead of offering useless fires on the altars.

One verse back, in verse 9, And God says, And don't even come and plead to me for mercy, Or to be gracious, But because there is no sincerity in your pleas. And the other thing is that, If God accepts those sacrifices, What does it actually say about him?

Would he not be showing the same contempt, For his own name, If he did that? He would, wouldn't he? Which is why, If you read further on, God actually defends his name, Three times in this passage.

[6 : 55] So, look at verse 11, Twice he says, For from the rising of the sun to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, And in every place, Incense will be offered to my name, And a pure offering, For my name will be great among the nations.

And then again in verse 14, Right at the end, For I am a great king, And my name will be feared among the nations. It was God's name, That was uppermost, In God's, What God was focused on. And God had chosen Israel, So that by their worship, They would point the nations to God. By honoring God's name, They would also inspire the other nations to do the same.

But now, Because Israel has failed to do it, God himself vows, That he will make it happen. He says, I will make it happen, That my name will be great among the nations.

He will ensure that a time will come, When the nations will indeed fear his name. And of course, We know that the time of fulfillment occurred with Jesus. So that if you look around the world today, We do have people from all nations, Don't we?

[8 : 09] Fearing and praising, The name of God, And offering worship to him through his son. And God now, In turn, Appoints us as the church, To do what Israel was supposed to do.

So in Peter, First Peter, In his first letter, In chapter 2 and verse 9, He says, Of the church, But you are a chosen race, A royal priesthood, A holy nation, A people for his own possession.

And what was the purpose of that? That you may proclaim the excellencies of him, Who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Two verses later, In verse 12, On the next slide, Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, So that when they speak against you as evil doers, They may see your good deeds, And glorify God, On the day of visitation.

That was what Israel was meant to do as well, In the Old Testament. But sadly, By the time of Malachi, That was no longer the case. In fact, In verse 14, As we come to the end of that chapter, We hear even worse evidence.

Because the priests weren't just going through the motions, If that wasn't bad enough, They were, You know, They were actually bringing blind and diseased animals, When, Back in their farm, Or back in their paddock, They actually had acceptable ones to offer.

[9 : 32] See what it says there? The male in the flock was an acceptable animal, And yet they kept it from the Lord. No, Actually, It was worse than that, They had even vowed or promised beforehand to give it, And then they broke their promise to God, And substituted a blemished one instead.

Can you see how bad it was getting? I mean, No wonder God had no choice but to act. This was really contempt for His name, Wasn't it? And so, Here's what we see in chapter 2, Where God lays out the consequence for their contempt, Verses 1 to 3.

And so He says, And now, O priest, This command is for you. If you will not listen, If you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, Says the Lord of hosts, Then I will send the curse upon you, And I will curse your blessings, Indeed, I have already cursed them, Because you do not lay it to heart.

Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, And spread dung on your faces, The dung of your sacrifices, And you shall be taken away with it. I think it's actually quite amazing, How God continues to be gracious.

Because even here, There is still a final chance for repentance, Isn't it? He says, Only if you do not listen, Will the curse come upon you. But alas, Even in the very next sentence, He knows that this offer of repentance, Will not be taken up.

[10:56] Why? Because He can see their heart. He knows that they have not laid it to their hearts. They have stopped listening. They have hardened their hearts. And so the only cause left, Was to be cursed.

And here, If you scrunched up your nose, When you heard those words, About dung on their faces, Then that's the right reaction to have. That is literally how bad it is.

Now God is being figurative, But what He's saying is that, Shame will come upon your names. People, The nations, Will turn away in embarrassment, When they see your face. Just as the waste of the animals, Are tossed from the temple, God will cast them from the temple, In the same way. They and their offspring. No longer will they be honored in Israel, Or given the respect that's due to them, As priests. And, You know, Bad as it sounds, It is the right thing to actually befall them, Because of their contempt for God's name.

It's just not right, For them to do that to God. Now, The thing though is that, God is right to do all this, But it does leave him, In a bit of a conundrum, Doesn't it?

[12:14] Because, God has a covenant with Levi. God had a promise, That He made to Levi. So verse 4, So shall you know, That I have sent this command to you, That my covenant with Levi, May stand, Says the Lord of hosts.

My covenant with him, Was one of life, And peace, And I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, And he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. God had made a promise to Levi, All the way back then.

He had raised Levi up for, This very purpose. And Levi had done as God commanded. He had feared God. He had stood in awe of his name. In verse 6, He explains, True instruction was in his mouth.

No wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me, In peace and righteousness. And he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest, Should guard knowledge, And people should seek instruction, From his mouth.

For he is the messenger, Of the Lord of hosts. And so in those early days, Levi and his tribe, Actually did these things. And if you want two examples, Well, Moses and Aaron were Levites.

[13:26] And they lived up to their role. They were God's mouthpiece, Instructing the people in the law. They were role models, Living God's way, As an example, To the people.

And I've searched, And even though the Bible Doesn't record a covenant as such, With Levi, This was the special role That God had given to the Levites, And explained in the Bible.

And part of how it worked, Was that, Unlike all the other tribes, They would not be given a portion, Or allotted a portion of land, Of their own. Instead, They were given cities, Cities among the other tribes.

And the purpose, I think, Part of it was so that They could live among them, And serve as teachers Of the law to them. So if you had a piece of land, People had to come to them To hear their teaching.

No, But they were put into The tribes, Other tribes' land, So that they could teach them Where they were. And in return, God actually promised, Like in this verse, In Joshua chapter 13, He promised that He himself Would be their inheritance.

[14:33] So they would not have Land as inheritance, But God himself Would be their inheritance. And so I suspect That when we read Malachi chapter 2, Verse 5, This reference to A covenant of life and peace, Is a description, I think, Of this special relationship That Levi had with God.

But the thing was That as time went on, Levi corrupted, Or the tribe of Levi, Corrupted this covenant. So much so, In verse 8, We read that You have, God says that You have turned aside From the way.

You have caused many To stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted The covenant of Levi, Says the Lord of hosts. And so I make you Despised and abased Before all the people.

Inasmuch as you do not Keep my ways, But show partiality In your instruction. And so here, As I suggested before, We have the reason Why the Lord Singles out the priests.

Because they had A greater capacity As leaders of Israel To cause many To stumble By their instruction. And it's the same With leaders Of all kinds really, Whether it's a company Or a church.

[15:46] What leaders say And do Sets the tone For the rest Of the people. If the leaders Don't live By what they teach, Then you can't expect Any of the others To do the same.

You know, Companies often have, You know, Mottos, don't they? Or value statements. But when the CEO Of the company Doesn't live by that motto, Doesn't live by those values, It doesn't work, does it?

Nobody else would follow. And so it's the same here. The Levites Or the priests Were meant To be living By what they taught. And they didn't do that.

They were meant To be God's mouthpiece. They didn't do that. And then they were meant To be God's models. And they didn't do that either. And in fact, Right at the end In verse 14, We're actually told That they've brought God's name Into disrepute Partially Or partly By being partial In their instruction.

I think that means That they actually Were favoring the rich And the powerful For their own Personal gain. Perhaps they were Being lenient To those who were Rich and powerful Telling them It's okay, You don't have to Obey the law.

[16:58] Hoping that then They'll get some Sort of reward In return for that. I'm only guessing. But whatever it is, God says that They were being partial In their instruction.

And so God is in This conundrum, Isn't he? On the one hand, The priests need To be punished. They deserve it. And yet, On the other hand, God's covenant With Levi Has to stand.

It was at stake. God's word Was at stake. And so how can we solve Or how could God Solve this conundrum? Well, If you've been Paying attention To the New Testament Reading, You know the answer To that.

Don't you? In our first reading In Hebrews, God said that He solved it By sending His Son To die for us. So Hebrews says That He was God's perfect High Priest, Holy and blameless And pure, Set apart from sinners.

And unlike The other priests, His sacrifices Were not for His own sins But for ours. And He did it Once for all By offering Himself On the cross.

[18:03] And if you then Look at Jesus' Life in the Gospels, You'll see Exactly how Jesus fulfills These very verses In Malachi. True instruction Was on His lips.

That's true of Jesus. Nothing was false. He walked with God In peace And uprightness. That was true of Jesus. He turned many From their sin.

That was true of Jesus. And Jesus didn't Just go through The motions. He didn't live For His own benefit. No, He gave God What was right.

Not just what was left. He gave actually His best. He gave Himself. And so Jesus Is the priest That fulfills Malachi Chapter 1 and 2.

And He did all this So that the Father's name Would be great Among the nations. It would be honoured And feared Among the people. So God has solved His conundrum By sending Jesus So that He can both On the one hand Uphold His covenant With Levi And on the other hand Be right To punish Those who fall Short of it In the priest.

[19:23] And as for us For all those of us Who are in Christ Jesus Well we are now Called to live The way Jesus Was as well. Did you recall At the very start In Peter We are God's Royal priesthood Aren't we?

So we are All priests And these verses Actually Apply to us. We are called Like Levi To be God's Mouthpiece And models.

And we have Jesus As our perfect Priest And pattern. So we don't need To offer Animal sacrifices Anymore. Now that's been Done by Jesus Substitute In Jesus Rather As we Heard in our Other New Testament Reading in Romans 12 We are to Offer ourselves Our bodies Instead As living

Sacrifices.

Romans 12 Says In view Of God's Mercy to us That is Because of What Jesus Has already Done We are called To offer Our own Bodies As living Sacrifices Holy And pleasing To God Which is Our true And proper Worship.

And so When Paul Says that We are to Offer our Whole bodies That means Our whole Bodies Isn't it? Wholehearted All of Life Worship To God Not just Parts of It Not just The parts That we Can spare But all Our entire Lives Are to Be given To serving And pleasing God Now it's Actually very Easy to See When someone Is wholehearted Because you Can see it In their Dedication To it You can See it In the Attention They give To every Detail So take For example All the Wedding Proposals In our Recent time Here at HTD Have you Noticed The lengths To which The gentlemen Have gone To impress The love Of their Lives At the Proposal I think It started With Victor And it's Since snowballed The months Of secret Planning Scouting out The best Location Or maybe [21 : 32] Returning to The scene Of the Original date Or something Then there's The co-opting Of the best Friends To help Create the Perfect scene For that Perfect moment Romantic Music Mood Lighting And of Course a Photographer To capture The moment On Facebook I've heard Even that There were Secret groups Created Like Gazebo Glory To ensure That everyone Is on the Same page Knows what's Happening And nothing's Left to Chance Now you See all That That's Dedication Isn't it I'm not Trying to Have a Go at Anyone I'm Thankful I've Got Married 20 Years Earlier Because I would Never Lift up To that Kind Of Expect But it Shows Dedication Doesn't It Whole Hearted Dedication Their Love For their Future Wife Is Whole Hearted And they Would Spare No Effort To make Sure That It's Just Perfect For her Now There Are Other Are Are Of course As Well For Some Of You The Amount

Of Work You Put In For Your Exams You Know Practice Exams Memorizing Your Notes Over And Over Again Getting That Extra Tuition Even Though You Have Already Got 99% That Shows Dedication Doesn't It Others Is Your Job Interviews You Know Rehearsing For Hours And Hours Those Interview Questions Polishing Your CVs To The Nth Degree Now You Do All These Things Because You Care About The Outcome You Care About What You Are Pursuing Isn't It You Are Whole Hearted You Are Fully Dedicated To The Cause And So I Guess The Question Then Becomes If We're Willing To Put In Such Efforts For Our Earthly Pursuits Then What About Our Pursuit Of God As We Look At Our Lives What Can We Show That Indicates Our Love Our Whole Hearted Dedication For God So

For Instance Are We Constantly Reflecting On Our Godliness How We're Living Lives That Are Holy And Pleasing To Him How Often Have We Asked Ourselves That Question Or Take Another Example What About Our Time That's The One That I Sort Of Often Fall Over Time For Us Is Our Precious Commodity Isn't It Do We Offer God The Very Best Of Our Time As Far As Our Lives Are Concern Or Do We Give Him What's Left Over So When Do We Pray And Read The Bible Is It At The Very Best Time Of The Day Or Is It When Our Brains Have Started To Shut Down As We Go About Our Day How Do We Prioritize Our Time So That We Maximize How We Serve Him Or Do We Spend For Example More Time Playing Computer Games Than Serving Him And When It Comes To

Serving In Ministry Do We Just go Through the Motions How much preparation and prayer do we put into our ministry Do we pray for the people we actually serve Do we pray for our own attitudes when we serve others Now friends I'm not raising these questions because I think you're doing a bad job in fact I know that for many of you you are wholehearted in how you serve God But the text today drives us this way doesn't it the people in Malachi's time were failing in this way and so it's just something that we need to ask ourselves tonight but also regularly even as Christ has already died for us in view of God's mercy how do we then respond in the way we worship God Do we just go through the motions do we let things slip particularly when you know we've just been doing it week in week out year in year out it's easy to take God for granted isn't it

Last week we saw that Israel was God's chosen people and you know what we are God's chosen people as well and yet they face God's rebuke didn't they showing contempt for his name And so I think it's worth us asking the same question of ourselves just in case we too fall into the same trap That we call ourselves Christians and yet we do not live up to the name of Christ I'm not saying all this because we have to do all this in order to be saved No, but if we truly love God and and appreciate the sacrifice of his son in Jesus Then we will respond by giving our wholehearted worship to God And so if having reflected on it you think that you have been wholehearted then

great Praise God for that keep doing it and guard yourself from pride

[26 : 39] But if there are things in your life perhaps that God's prompted Habits or behaviors that God has allowed that you've allowed to slip Then perhaps Now might be a time to just Come before God in humble repentance Heed the warnings that are in this passage And then Turn and offer again ourselves Our whole bodies to God as a living sacrifice Think about specific things that we think we need to change In order that our worship for God is true And acceptable to him So what i'm going to do now is just give us a short time of personal reflection And then afterwards I will pray Father forgive us when we only give you what's left and not what's right Especially when you have given us what is most right in your son Jesus And he himself gave what is most costly His holy and blameless life

As the perfect sacrifice for our sins Help us each day to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to you Holy and acceptable in your sight And help us to persevere until the coming of your son In his name we pray Amen