

How have we despised God? (7:30 am Service)

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Preacher: Rev. Jeremy Graham

[0 : 00] Good morning, everyone. It's a joy to be with you this morning as we look at Malachi chapter 1 together. And as we begin, I want you to imagine that you're attending a wedding, a beautiful July day at a gorgeous old church.

And the beautiful young couple, the bride, is dressed in a stunning white dress, and the groom is looking handsome in a tux. And the minister gets to the climactic moment in the service when he says to the bride, do you take this man to be your lawfully wedded husband?

And the nervous bride, she shuffles her feet and she looks down at the floor, and then she reaches somewhere into the recesses of her dress, and she pulls out her iPhone, and she scrolls through it, checking her email.

And as she does so, she says, yeah, uh-huh, sure. What would you think about that marriage? What chance would you give it to last a lifetime?

Would you feel assured that this woman loves this man? Well, here we are in Malachi chapter 1, and in verse 2, the Lord God declares, I have loved you.

[1 : 21] I loved you yesterday. I love you today, and I will love you tomorrow and forever. And like a marriage vow, God is declaring his covenant love for Israel and for you and I today.

And how do the people respond? Well, look with me at the very first verse in our reading today.

Verse 6. The Lord God says, A son honors his father and a servant his master.

If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts, To you, O priests who despise my name. They show contempt for God's name.

In fact, it's even worse. It's the very people who should be leading Israel in worship who are leading them in showing this contempt. The priests. But hang on a second. What is so important about God's name?

Well, despising God's name, it's much more than just swearing or taking the Lord's name in vain.

The name of God in the Bible, it means at least two things. It means the revealed character of God, his personality and his identity on display revealed to us.

[2 : 34] And also, it always means the presence of God. Because he makes his name dwell in the temple, through which he's accessible to his people, and through which he's going to be glorified to the nations.

So when you see the name of the Lord, it's all through the Old Testament. It always has this idea of the revealed, the person and the presence of God. And we see both of these here in Malachi chapter 1.

Did you notice eight times in chapter 1, the repetition of this particular name for God, the Lord of hosts. The Lord of hosts. It literally means Lord of the heavenly armies. And it captures both of these, the person and the presence.

It reveals God's character as the one with authority and power over heaven and earth. And it also reveals God's presence as the sovereign Lord, the cosmic king who dwells with his people in his holy temple.

And God's name is a central theme in Malachi, but it's also a central theme for us as New Testament Christians. Because when we pray the Lord's Prayer, what is it that we say?

[3 : 38] Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Let's press on, because the priests aren't done asking questions. How exactly are these priests and these people, how are the Israelites despising God's name?

Look with me at the end of verse 6 now. I'm going on to verse 8. You, O priests who despise my name, but you say, how have we despised your name?

By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, how have we polluted you? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised. When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil?

And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor. Will he accept you or show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts. You know, when I was preparing to ask my wife, Kimberly, to marry me, I went to an antique jeweler, and I bought a ring.

And I was 20 years old. It was the first time in my life that I ever went into debt. Not the last time. The first time, though.

[4 : 50] But you know what? It was worth it. Because not only was I showing how much I loved Kimberly, but I was showing how much I valued her. And my commitment to living self-sacrificially for her.

The ring was my gift to me, my gift from me to her. And it was worth every penny. And friends, what we're talking about here in Malachi is worship. It's worship.

And true worship is always an expression of love. It's sacrificial and it's costly, just like that ring was. But the Israelites, they're offering God roadkill sacrifices.

Did you see in verse 8, they're bringing blind and lame and sick animals as sacrifices to the altar. And in doing so, they're despising God's name because they're belittling his sovereign and loving character and they're spurning his presence among them.

They're spurning his holy presence among them. They're saying, God, you're not really that important to me. I'll go through the motions, but I'm not going to do anything really costly.

[5 : 56] So let me ask you the question, what were these sacrifices for? What are Old Testament sacrifices for? Well, there's several types of Old Testament sacrifices, but there's two that are particularly important to understand as we read Malachi.

Number one is atonement sacrifices. These are sacrifices, burnt offerings, sin offerings, the sacrifice of an animal for the purpose of forgiveness and cleansing from sin.

And then secondly, grain offerings, or thanksgiving offerings, peace offerings. And these were an act of thanksgiving and praise to God and a way of consecrating yourself to the Lord.

An offering of yourself for service. Atonement offerings, sacrifices, and grain or peace offerings.

And it doesn't really matter what type of sacrifice they're making.

All types of sacrifice were meant to be costly. For example, the gift of a perfect lamb to the Lord as a sin offering. The high cost of this sacrifice reminded you at least of two things.

[6 : 57] It reminded you first of the weight of your sinfulness. The fact that it costs the death of another in your place to bring restoration before a holy God.

Those sacrifices reminded God's people of that. And secondly, it reminds you of your deep dependence on the Lord. Because if this unblemished lamb is the livelihood for your family or it's the means of eating for your family as this lamb grows up, now you're going to need to trust the Lord and depend on him to provide for you.

You see, the sacrificial system, it required God's people to lean into his promises. So now we see that what's at stake here in Malachi chapter 1, there's a lot more at stake here.

Like the scene that I described in the wedding at the beginning, it's not just a little tacky for the bride to pull out her phone during the ceremony. It's a warning sign of a much deeper problem. You can't just go through the motions with love.

Shoddy sacrifices reveal an attitude of the heart that's infectious and it spreads. It starts with the priests going through the motions without any love in their heart and it spreads to the people and from the people it spreads to their children and beyond.

[8 : 17] And I know it's hard to relate to, it's hard to relate to talk about blood sacrifices and burning vegetables on an altar. But it's just as easy for you and I to despise God's name as Christians today.

Let's consider for a moment the same two sacrifices we just mentioned. The atonement sacrifices and these sacrifices of thanksgiving and service. In the New Testament, Hebrews 10 tells us every priest, Old Testament priest, stands daily at his service offering repeatedly the same sacrifice which can never take away sins.

But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Father. For a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.

Brothers and sisters, we despise God's name and the sacrifice of Christ if we show up in church every Sunday and we say the prayer of confession from memory, we receive the sacrament by

habit, and then we go home and we repeat the same brazen sin as the week before. And we despise the sacrifice of Christ if we live as self-made men or women who insist on working hard and earning God's favor rather than gratefully receiving the righteousness of Christ as a gift of grace.

[9 : 43] And what about sacrifices of thanksgiving and service? Well, in Romans 12, Paul tells us, he says this, I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

We despise God's name and his call to Christian self-sacrifice if we show up week after week at church and we write the same check for our monthly tithe, we attend the same Bible study group, we drink the same coffee after every service, and yet we fail to regularly love and serve those around us sacrificially with our time and our money and our talent in a costly way that actually involves self-sacrifice.

You see, worship is never tame or sedentary. It's a powerful statement of love and commitment responding to a powerful and loving Lord of hosts, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who desires that his name be glorified among us and through us to the world.

And I know you look around this morning and it's pretty humble, isn't it? And when Old Testament Israel looked at this second temple that they'd rebuilt, it was pretty humble.

But somehow in the mystery of God, he chooses that through his people he would have his name glorified. There's nothing sleepy, tame, or sedentary about it, let me tell you.

[11 : 16] So let me close with a quote from Annie Dillard about going to church. Maybe you've heard this quote before. It's a great quote. Does anyone have the foggiest idea what sort of power we so blithely invoke?

Or as I suspect, does no one believe a word of it? The churches are children playing on the floor with their chemistry sets, mixing up a batch of TNT to kill a Sunday morning.

It is madness to wear ladies' straw hats and velvet hats to church. We should all be wearing crash helmets. Ushers should issue life preservers and signal flares.

They should lash us to our pews. For the sleeping God may awake someday and take offense. Or the waking God may draw us out to where we can never return.

Amen.