

How have we despised God?

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would take your Bible and open to the book of Malachi, our first reading so well read this morning on page 801.

This is the last book of the Old Testament, Malachi, and it's pronounced Malachi, not Malachi, Malachi, and it's not a very nice book.

It's a wonderful book, but it's not a very nice one. Malachi chapter 1, our passage today, 6 to 14, and the people of God are in a complete mess again.

It's about 60 years after they've returned from exile and they've built the temple, but the temple's a bit shoddy. The glory days of David and Solomon are behind them.

They're still under the control of Persia. They live in a backwater of empire with enemies all around. And the nature of their disobedience has changed.

[1 : 02] They've not openly rejected God and built idols and gone to worship golden calves. On the surface, they still look very orthodox.

They're still going to church and they're still offering sacrifices, which was the Old Testament way. They're going through the motions, but their hearts are not in it.

They blamed God for their difficulties. And they had become completely disenchanted with serving God. So they were going through the motions, but half-heartedly. Faith had become a bit of a bore. And they weren't brave enough to throw it in. It just really didn't make any difference in their lives.

That's why I say it's not a nice book, this last book of the Old Testament. Because God brings his word, his loving word, to bear on this spiritual disease, which is afflicting his people.

And he does that by addressing a variety of symptoms. We'll see as we go through it. They were refusing to give God 10% of their income. That was one symptom.

[2 : 08] They were divorcing their Jewish wives and marrying women who were not believers. They were taking advantage of the poor and weak. They had lost their grip on the love of God.

And there was a culture of critical conversations amongst them that destroyed their serving of God. And here is the problem with the God of the Bible.

The problem with the God of the Bible is that his glory is far greater and far higher than we could possibly grasp. And our need is far bigger and deeper than we can imagine.

And we don't like that spread. We don't like that distance. It's just not manageable. And one of the easiest ways to try and make it manageable is to bring God's glory down a bit to our size and to bring our need up so it's not so dire and to lessen the immensity and enormity of the spiritual distance.

This is the spiritual disease. Australian writer Peter Adam describes it this way. He says, And then he speaks about the cure.

[3 : 51] So I've got two points. The disease and its symptom. And the second point is obviously the cure. The first place, this spiritual disease that we're talking about, the first place it manifests itself is in our attitude in worship.

Look down at verse 6. Let me read a couple of lines. God says,

And God says, Try that on the governor, says God.

See how far that gets you. They were talking about? They were still coming to church. They were still offering sacrifices. They were still putting some money in the offertory plate. but it meant nothing to them because it cost them nothing and they were treating God with less honour than they did their parents and employers and in doing it that overturned the whole point of the sacrificial system they'd lost sight of the seriousness of their sin and their need for atonement they didn't really believe in sin anymore and so they had a trivial view of God and his love now those of us who are older there's been a cultural shift which in the last 50 years which I generalize 50 years ago it

was believed that when people did bad and criminal things it was because they had too high a view of themselves and what was needed was more laws and incarceration and that's been reversed and now we believe people do bad and criminal things because they have too low a view of themselves so we teach our children to believe in themselves that they can do anything they put themselves to as long as they believe and the greatest love of all is learning to love yourself yeah and I think as Christians it's impossible for us to resist this we've become quite timid and tentative about the whole issue of sin and the holiness of God and we think about witness more as a marketing exercise so that we minimize sin and we maximize the positives and so that Jesus death is no longer a sacrifice for our sins but just a kind of an object lesson in the kindness of God I used to think that the doctrine of sin the Bible's doctrine of sin was the only empirical empirical was the only doctrine in Christianity that was empirically provable but I've come to see the opposite that the Bible's view of sin is not something any human could ever invent it has to be revealed by God in fact it's completely hidden from us unless God reveals it left to ourselves we would never think that we are as lost as God says we are which I think is why it's so easy to lose the wonder of God's love for us because the two things go together if you take away the depth of our need you also take away the height of God's grace and love and it's not just the people of God here it's the priests in the temple you despise my name says the Lord of hosts because once we lose sight of the love and glory of God we gradually become blind to our own need and we easily despise God and I think this is one of the most worrying symptoms of the disease which is rife here in the people of God in Malachi's day they can't see it they can't see it so throughout this book whenever God challenges his people what the people do is they don't repent they say how so you saw in our passage in verse 6 how have we despised your name or verse 7 how have we polluted you or down in 2 17 you've wearied the Lord with your words but you say how have we wearied him and there are there are several more and the most important is the first one in verse 2 which Dan covered last week let's look back at chapter 1 verse 2 I have loved you says the Lord but you say how have you loved us how have you how have you loved me try that in your marriage see what happens God things are difficult we've got lots of problems and you just don't say you just don't seem to be solving them you say you love us and we're willing to believe it you just need to prove it give us some evidence and you can hear the grief in God's words where is my honor where is my glory you're treating me as insignificant now I think this is a very Anglican temptation I think we are very prone to this to go through the motions but to despise God in our hearts to have music good liturgy but to treat God with contempt in our hearts and in God's mind that's worse than open rebellion because we deceive ourselves in the process we dishonor God and we're dishonest with ourselves they thought if they just kept the ritual going things would be okay it doesn't really matter what we offer to God we're going to keep the best for ourselves so long as we give something and my guess is they were not brave enough to say these things openly just as we aren't but their actions demonstrated the reality the wonder of the wonder and reality of God's love had been lost and it had turned into cynicism if you look down at verse 13 but you say oh what a weariness this is and you snort at it says the Lord of hosts you bring what's been taken by violence lame sick you bring this as an offering shall I accept that from your hands says the Lord you know if your heart is not in it it just it quickly becomes tiresome doesn't it and it's possible to play a game of pretend with ourselves where we give God the dregs because we think it might keep him happy and then it gives us room for compromise but throughout the Bible the thing is that you can't serve God and mammon for long you can't sin and try and live for the Holy Spirit for long you can't serve yourself and God for long God won't allow it and he says wonderfully in verse 10 he would rather that we shut things down and continue the charade see verse 10 oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain

[13 : 59] I have no pleasure in you says the Lord of hosts and I will not accept an offering from your hand it matters to God whether we bring him the cream of our hearts and our energies and if we won't God will say go away he takes no pleasure in the externals for their own sake he delights in obedience and I think it's a pretty devastating diagnosis I told you it's not a nice book it's a devastating diagnosis and before we move to the second point it's good to just pause and ask ourselves some questions I mean do I examine our hearts do we have some symptoms of this disease the middle-aged spiritual disease has your faith become a bit dreary a bit of a burden do you find yourself saying things that that are destructive to the serving of God are you giving God your best or what's left over do you judge the love of God by your circumstances or by his word do you have a sense of privilege in serving him and if we step back just a moment I think the very fact

that God is reasoning and revealing this to his people as we'll see in chapter 3 is to call them back to draw them to their senses before too late and if we feel some of these symptoms then what is the cure how does God draw us out of this and secondly then I will move to what God says here what he offers in change and restoration to us and what he offers is two promises and the first is a grand vision of the future he will make his name great among the nations and it's so important God says it three times just look down at the passage I want to show you these verses verse 5 the one before our passage

God says to these people your own eyes shall see this and you shall say great is the Lord beyond the borders of Israel you may be afflicted with this disease but I am going to cause my name to be great beyond the borders of Israel or verse 11 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 says the Lord of hosts and in the end of verse 14 the last sentence of the chapter for I am a great king says the Lord of hosts and my name will be feared among the nations it's very important God is not a needy God God does not need us to honor him he doesn't feel insecure when we don't give him glory he doesn't rely on our obedience for the greatness of his name his name is great and he undertakes to spread the greatness of his name beyond the borders of Israel so that one day from the rising of the sun to its setting there will be a pure offering and the name of God will be treated as great by all and the name of God is not a label you know just a random attachment the name of God is God as he is toward us as he's revealed himself to us and even if God's people refuse to give glory to that name and despise his name it doesn't change the glory of the name nor his commitment to spreading the wonder of his name throughout the world it's an incredible promise to have

I think in the last book of the Old Testament goes right back to creation when God determined to bless all the people of the world creation the call of Abraham through you Israel all the families of the earth will be blessed but here the end of the Old Testament it finishes with disappointment and hope disappointment in the people of God but the wonder of hope that God's promise is that he will ensure his name will go forward in all the world and Israel and God's people may bring him their leftovers but that's not the way God treats us in fact God sent to us his very best his only son the perfect, purest, unblemished, sinless son of God to be the Lamb of God who offered himself up for us a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice for sins once for all upon the cross which is able to cover the deepest, darkest and most evil of our sins and it does show us the wonder of his love and by his spirit

God has created a mission church and the purpose of the mission church is to spread his glory among the nations and the failure of God's people both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament doesn't diminish his glory and it doesn't change his desire to spread his name what it means is is that God's people miss out doubly they miss out on the fellowship with the Father and the Son and they miss out on taking their place in the great purpose of God to establish his name you see this purpose of God which runs from creation to new creation is like a great river and when we come to trust in Christ we are caught up into that river and we draw others into the currents of his love we pray we've already prayed today hallowed be your name we give him our best we do what we can to spread his name but if we stop and if we catch this disease that the people in Malachi have we drop like a stone and the river just floats by us so the cure for our disease is firstly this great promise for us that we're not here to keep the rituals going to do what we've always done we're here for the name of the great God of heaven and earth we are here so that his name will be great among those who don't know him and if God has made this promise and if God is working to bring all things under the feet of Jesus Christ there is no sacrifice that we can make for him that's wasted there's no prayer there's no word no gift no service that he doesn't take up into this great purpose and he deserves the best but there is a second promise that we touched on last week and this is the promise with which the book begins the whole book of Malachi begins with this mighty declaration in verse 2

I have loved you it's like a stake in the ground a great fact and truth the beginning of the book of Malachi in the Hebrew it's a perfect which the experts say can be translated I have always loved you and I love you now despite the fact that you despise me I have loved you in the past and I still do so that God is not calling us to love him with everything we have so that he will accept us he's not saying if you love me then I will love you no no no it's the other way around real faith and real returning to God begin with the realisation that his love for us is not based on our response or our

obedience but on his free and sovereign decision to place his love on us isn't that great and I think the only cure for spiritual apathy and compromise and blindness is to see again the greatness and the priorness of his love and his name we know much more about the love of God than Malachi's audience you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for your sake he became poor so that we by his poverty might become rich we've seen that inexpressible gift and Jesus endured the cross and despised the shame because of the joy that was set before him and he now sits at the right hand of God and he has provided the complete and final and eternal atonement for sins and so we don't offer God physical sacrifices animals anymore but the one book in the New Testament that speaks about

[22 : 27] Jesus' sacrifice more than any other says this through Christ that us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name I encourage you to go and have a look at Hebrews 13 what does that mean what does our sacrifice of praise mean it's all these practical things brotherly love let brotherly love continue be hospitable to strangers to those who are mistreated let the marriage bed be kept undefiled keep your life free from the love of money be content with what you have obey your leaders and submit to them don't neglect to do good and share what you have these sacrifices the writer says are pleasing to God for here we have no lasting city but we seek the city that is to come so we pray that God would equip us with everything good that we may do his will working in us that which is pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory forever and ever

Amen