

Giving God Our Best

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Malachi is the last book of the Old Testament, but it was also the last of God's revealed word for almost 400 years until John the Baptist burst upon the scene. In Malachi's day, the people of Israel had returned from Babylonian captivity, had rebuilt Jerusalem and its walls, had restored the Temple and its worship, and were no longer worshipping idols. A tremendous restoration had taken place. But it wasn't complete. Their hearts had not been fully restored. God sent one last prophet to the people to encourage them, remind them, and warn them of what they needed to correct.

In the first chapter, God brings a complaint to the people. *"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honor? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? says the LORD of hosts to you priests who despise My name. Yet you say, 'In what way have we despised Your name?' You offer defiled food on My altar, but say, 'In what way have we defiled You?' By saying, 'The table of the LORD is contemptible.' And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil?'"* (Mal. 1:6-8) And later on, God accuses them of robbing him by not bringing the tithes and offerings they were supposed to (Mal. 3:8).

Even though they were worshipping God, he wasn't pleased. That's because they weren't giving their best. Rather, they were giving the worst. But they didn't recognize it. They didn't see anything wrong with what they were doing. Several times in Malachi, God accuses them of something and they deny it. I believe we can learn two lessons from this.

First, too often we don't see ourselves as God sees us. We think we're doing just fine. We think we're following God's commands. We think there's nothing wrong with our heart. All the while, God says we've got a long way to go. We see this illustrated in Revelation with the church in Laodicea. Jesus said to them, *"Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing' – and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked..."* They thought they were doing great, but Jesus thought otherwise. And they weren't even close in their assessment of themselves!

How does that happen? It could be due to a wrong attitude towards sin. Maybe we've lived among sin so much, seen so much of it in the world, that it doesn't bother us anymore. When we sin, we're not ashamed. After all, nobody's perfect. Everybody makes mistakes. That type of thinking shows that we don't think of sin in the same way God thinks of it. Sin is awful. Sin is repulsive to God. Sin is an affront to the supremely holy Supreme Being. If sin isn't repulsive to us, we're not going to be working diligently to rid it from our lives like we should. That in turn will lead to us viewing ourselves in a much more favorable light than God sees us. We need to be humbled. We need to be poor in spirit and mourn because of our sin. We need to hunger and thirst for righteousness.

Secondly, God deserves our best. God has never given us his leftovers, so why should we give him our leftovers? He sent the best of heaven. He has given us the best of everything. It's amazing to think about how seemingly insignificant we are in the grand scale of the universe. Each of us is only one individual on an earth filled with 7 billion people. Earth is not the biggest planet in the solar system. Our Sun is not the biggest star in the Milky Way Galaxy. The Milky Way is not the biggest galaxy in a universe filled with 200+ billion galaxies. And yet God is very much mindful of each one of us. If God thinks so highly of us and has given the best for us, shouldn't we think highly of him? After all, there is no one bigger or greater than the God who made this vast universe. Shouldn't we give our best to our great God?

When we think we don't need to be or have to be at Bible class or worship, we're not giving God the best. When we attend church services because we have to instead of because we want to, we're not giving our best. When we sing songs out of habit without paying attention to or meaning the words that we're singing, we're not giving our best. When we pray the same old prayer without much thought, we're not giving God the best. When we think about everything else except the sacrifice of Jesus while we partake of the Lord's Supper, we're not giving God our best. When we give just a small amount (if anything) when the plate is passed because we've spent our money on our own pleasures and pursuits in life, we're not giving God our best. When we listen to the boring preacher drone on and wish he would hurry and get done rather than intently look with him into God's word to find an application for our lives, we're not giving God our best.

The problem with the Israelites was they didn't have hearts that were totally restored to God. We can find ourselves in the same situation. The world is tugging at our heart. Our own desires and interests distract us from giving God the best. We must realize that there is nothing as important as being passionate in our service to God. Let's look at this world and all the vain things therein through the same lens that God uses. Let's see sin for what it really is. Let's not let the Satan use the world to draw us away from our God. Let's give him our best. Not just on Sundays and Wednesdays, but every day!