

EASTSIDE COMMUNITY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY, MAY 16, 2021

SERMON: Giving God our Best

TEXT: MALACHI 1:6-14

It is hard to believe that 25 years ago, my brother having just graduated from a school in Branson, MO and myself, packed all of our earthly possessions into our cars and on Mother's Day 1996, drove through the night and the next day the 1800 kms to Kissimmee, Florida. I was fulfilling my bucket list dream of working at Walt Disney World. There was a bit of red tape to cut through, but I finally was hired as a server at a restaurant in the Magic Kingdom. Before you could work on the property, every employee (known as a cast member) had to go through several days of Disney University. It was within Disney U that the "magic" was instilled within us as well as the many rules of conduct, appearance, and customer service that we needed to know.

It might surprise you to know what one of the first lessons drilled into the cast member is. It is how to "point." That's right! Disney is very specific about how their cast members interact with the public, even in the most minute details. If a guest came and asked me for directions, what was my response? If I couldn't physically escort them to where they wanted to go (which was the preference), I would point the way using not one, but two or more fingers or even an open hand. The philosophy behind this is the fact, that in many cultures, a single finger is considered confrontational and aggressive whereas two or more fingers is considered non-aggressive and polite.

Disney spends countless hours perfecting how they do business. The emphasis is all about going the extra mile to make someone have a magical experience. As cast members, we were given the authority to do anything necessary to fix a problem. If I heard that a child's balloon popped, I could go out and get one, at no personal expense, and replace it. If a guest's meal was not up to standards, I could replace, add, or change anything I wanted to. If I heard a guest complain about the wait time at a ride they really wanted, I could give them a pass to go to the front of the line. The general way of thinking was "Guests may not always be right, but they are always our guests!"

Going the extra mile. Always offering your best. Giving your all! These are all characteristics of someone serious about doing a good job and even someone who is striving to have a successful marriage or friendship. Someone who wants their relationship to succeed. The question we ask today is, "Are you giving your best to God?" If you aren't...why not? Are we exceeding God's expectations or are we simply satisfying them?

Let's continue on in the book of Malachi by reading Malachi 1:6-14:

⁶ The LORD of Heaven's Armies says to the priests: "A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. If I am your father and master, where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have shown contempt for my name!

"But you ask, 'How have we ever shown contempt for your name?'

⁷ "You have shown contempt by offering defiled sacrifices on my altar.

"Then you ask, 'How have we defiled the sacrifices?'

"You defile them by saying the altar of the LORD deserves no respect. ⁸ When you give blind animals as sacrifices, isn't that wrong? And isn't it wrong to offer animals that are crippled and diseased? Try giving gifts like that to your governor, and see how pleased he is!" says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

⁹ "Go ahead, beg God to be merciful to you! But when you bring that kind of offering, why should he show you any favor at all?" asks the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

¹⁰ "How I wish one of you would shut the Temple doors so that these worthless sacrifices could not be offered! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "and I will not accept your offerings. ¹¹ But my name is honored by people of other nations from morning till night. All around the world they offer sweet incense and

pure offerings in honor of my name. For my name is great among the nations,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

¹² “But you dishonor my name with your actions. By bringing contemptible food, you are saying it’s all right to defile the Lord’s table. ¹³ You say, ‘It’s too hard to serve the LORD,’ and you turn up your noses at my commands,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies. “Think of it! Animals that are stolen and crippled and sick are being presented as offerings! Should I accept from you such offerings as these?” asks the LORD.

¹⁴ “Cursed is the cheat who promises to give a fine ram from his flock but then sacrifices a defective one to the Lord. For I am a great king,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies, “and my name is feared among the nations!

Today we look at the second of a series of arguments between God and His people. This argument is with no regular inhabitant of Israel. God takes to task those who are supposed to be representing Him to the people and the people to Him! He confronts the priests!

Israel’s attitude towards Yahweh has become so complacent and lazy that their very acts of worship have become detestable and wicked in the sight of the LORD. The sacrifices that they were to offer to God were supposed to be wonderful acts of worship and thanksgiving for all of the wonderful ways that God is watching over them and providing for their needs. Why give your best to God? We have forgotten that giving our best is not out of duty, out of demand, but rather we give God our best out of devotion, love, loyalty, and at times out of sorrow seeking reconciliation. Why is it important that we give to God out of devotion and love? When giving to God gets all flipped around; when giving to God comes from a place of “I have to...” instead of “I want to...” we cease giving our best. We are striving to appease instead of please our Heavenly Father.

In Genesis 4, we have the unfortunate story of the first murder...Cain and Abel. The story tells us about the occupation chosen by the two brothers. Abel chose to become a shepherd and Cain chose to be a farmer. At harvest time the requirements were already in place to bring God the “firstfruits” of their labors.

The idea of firstfruits is based on the fact that God is the creator of all things. Everything belongs to God and because of this, He deserves the best of creation.

We are told in Genesis 4 that Abel brought God “several choice lambs from the best of his flock.” God accepted this gift. Cain brought a “gift of his farm produce.” God rejected this gift. Cain gets angry and God calls him out for bringing an offering the “wrong” way. What is the wrong way? Genesis isn’t specific enough for us to know beyond a shadow of a doubt, but the text does go out of its way to tell us that Abel brought the “best/choicest.”

Much of our relationship to God boils down to the heart issues. Are we trying to please God out of love rather than requirement? A wonderful example of heart motivation is found in Luke 21:1-4, the story known as the “Widow’s Mite.”

While Jesus was in the Temple, he watched the rich people dropping their gifts in the collection box. ² Then a poor widow came by and dropped in two small coins.

³ “I tell you the truth,” Jesus said, “this poor widow has given more than all the rest of them. ⁴ For they have given a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has.”

What are the ramifications for not giving God the best that we can offer...we lose our first love. Cain is warned by God that if he doesn’t change his attitude and respond correctly that he should “***...watch out! Sin is waiting to attack and destroy you, and you must subdue it!***” (Gen. 4:6-7). Perhaps when you hear the phrase “lost your first love” you think about the church of Ephesus in Revelation 2. Jesus tells the church that, even though they are going through the motions of ministry and do good works, the problem is “***You don’t love me or each other as you did at first***” (Rev. 2:4).

God, through Malachi, is warning Israel, and more specifically the priests of Israel, that they have lost their first love, their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. The priests were going through the motions of their work and doing the bare minimum to try to please God. The offerings they were bring weren’t even O.K! They were substandard and the worst of the lot.

RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

The message of Malachi is all about the strength of our relationship with God. Are we keeping up our end of the deal or our side of the covenant? Honoring those whom you have a relationship is a very big part of any covenant. When God entered into the covenant with Moses on Mt. Sinai, He gave Moses a tablet with instructions on how to fulfill the covenant relationship. We know them as the Ten Commandments. Sadly, many have come to believe that these commandments are just a list of “do’s and don’ts” of God but they are so much more than that! The Ten Commandments are instructions on how to live in a covenant relationship with God and with each other. The first four commandments are about our relationship with the LORD. The next six focus on our relationship with each other based on how we are relating to God. The fifth commandment (Ex. 5:16) was very important within the covenant:

“Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you. Then you will live a long, full life in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”

How we treat and honour each other is a major theme in the New Testament. There is a reason that the marriage relationship (covenant) is so important as it is often used as a representation of our relationship/covenant with God.

The LORD reminds the people of the logical nature of honoring Him as they would any important relationship:

“A son honors his father, and a servant respects his master. If I am your father and master, where are the honor and respect I deserve? You have shown contempt for my name!” (v.6).

God isn’t hoping for Israel to respect and honour Him...He is expecting it. Why? Because it is due Him as they acknowledge him as the Creator and very Sustainer of the Universe. Instead of the respect due him, the people are in open contempt of the LORD. They are despising Him and treating Him as if he did not matter and was not worthy of their notice. Ironically it the priests that are the chief offender.

They had a dual job. The priests represented the nation to God and also represented God to the nation. The priests are literally dragging God's reputation through the gutters. How do the priests respond to God's accusations? In verse 13 you could translate their response as a complacent, lazy, rude "What a drag!" They turn up their noses at God as if their Creator was beneath them.

If the people do not hold up their end of the covenant, the LORD states that he would rather see the temple doors shut. True worship would move from the temple, where it was meant to be, and would be given to those throughout the world who honour their relationship to Yahweh.

FOR TODAY

We continue to partake in a covenant relationship with God that was perfectly fulfilled by the work that Jesus accomplished on the cross of Calvary. I am floored as I study the Old Testament and once again realize how God's word speaks to us from thousands of years ago. Names and faces change but the struggle against sin remains the same.

Today we live in high demand, face paced world. There are so many expectations on our time and on our resources that at times it seems we can never get ahead. Work, family, church, hobbies...what is the balance suppose to be in our lives? The temptation is, in trying to juggle everything, where can we just get by? Sadly a trend that I have noticed is that the corner we cut, the one that we give up is to merely try satisfying God's requirements as oppose to exceeding them.

A number of years ago, the Sunday service at the church I was at was going about between an hour and fifteen minutes to an hour and a half. One day a dear saint approached me and proceeded to complain about the service. She stated that it traditionally was an hour and it should stay at that. I asked "Why?" Her response was, "Because that is the way it always has been!" Sports enthusiasts can watch games that last several hours, especially with overtime. I love movies and have sat through 2 ½ to 3 hours or more with out a problem. We long to sit and read for hours and work 40+ hours a week. Why must our time together with God be "in and out" in an hour? For many, this is the only spiritual impact time they will have all week.

I have had people ask me whether their tithe to the church would be before or after taxes? We miss the boat when these are the questions we are worried about

when giving our tithes and offers to God. Some are worried that the answer to the tithing question might mean a change to our standard of living. It is at this point that we need to re-examine our hearts and our motives.

There is more to being the people of God, the Church, than participating in rituals and going through the motions. There are some who pat themselves on the back for giving to a church thinking that they have satisfied the requirements. There are those who don't participate in the active Kingdom of God, but demand action from God in their time of need. We treat our religious rituals as a type of lucky rabbits' foot, rubbing it for luck and expecting God to show up.

We are called to be the salt and light of the world but in reality, we are often bland and walk in the same shadows as the rest of the world. The lines between sacred and secular are dangerously blurred. We are called to give our best to the LORD! We cannot give our best without putting in the time and effort to make sure our beliefs are biblically grounded and others can see that we serve the one true God who is the way, the truth, and the life.

If we are willing to offer our family, friends, and bosses our best...why would we not offer the best we can to One who loved us enough to die so that we might find forgiveness and eternal life.

Are you offering God your very best!

Let's pray...