

WIPING MY SPIT FROM HIS FACE

(sin; repentance)

MALACHI 1:6-14

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My undergraduate college days were in the late 60s and early 70s. It was not uncommon to go to classes at the University of Minnesota and see hundreds and sometimes thousands of students demonstrating against U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War.

I was too busy trying to support a family and get through school to be very involved politically in those years but I well remember the times that an American flag would be burned.

I remember being greatly disturbed when before burning the flag they would drag it along the ground and then dozens would step forward to spit on it.

To them the flag, and the country it represented was worthless or worse.

If you have watched the film "Jesus" or another of the movies on the life of Christ then you have seen how the Roman soldiers took Jesus and stripped his clothes from him and beat him before making him carry his own cross to the hill where he would be crucified. This was God in human flesh, standing before those Roman soldiers. Undoubtedly the most difficult thing to watch however was when they spit on him.

Spitting in his face they would show their contempt for him.
They considered him worthless or worse.

You wonder how anyone could do that.

Please look with me at the passage of Scripture just read: Malachi 1:6-14.

God, through the prophet Malachi, says He has something against His people.

It is as if they are spitting in God's face.

Their actions are as obscenities hurled at God.

Their attitudes are as attacks on the God's character.

This morning before we hear God's very pointed criticism, of maybe even some of our conduct, it is imperative that we hear again the setting for these words.

When God spoke through Malachi to begin this book he started with this great affirmation: "I love you!"

In these opening words (vss2-5) at which we looked last week, God declares his unconditional love for his people.

We may have difficulty believing God loves us unconditionally
but God shows it through the world he has made,
he says it through the good things we enjoy daily,
and most of all he shouts it through his son Jesus.
Who could reasonably doubt the love of a God who died for us?

And because he loves us he has something hard to say to us.
His stern rebuke is because of His love - otherwise he wouldn't care.

It has probably happened to you many times.
A couple of months ago I was in Walmart and from near the checkout
counters came the ear-piercing scream of a young child.
You could tell by the sound that it was not a cry of pain or fear but
of anger.

And it went on not for 15 seconds but for over five minutes and
could be heard all over the store.

Like others, I was embarrassed for the parent and then angry at
both the child and the parent for not putting a stop to it.

Oh, I wished there was something I could do to help them but mostly I
was upset, I didn't really care. I knew that in a few minutes I would walk
away from the store, never see that child again, or so I hoped, and I would
never have to deal with him. I didn't care so I walked away.

God can walk away, but He loves us!

When I was studying these hard, indicting words I was seeking a way to soften them. I
was afraid you might only feel condemned and not loved.

The more I studied the more I realized God wasn't afraid of that.

That's a lot like my father. When I had discipline coming I got it.

He didn't worry and whimper out of fear I might dislike Him or think that He didn't
love me.

Some parents today seem afraid - afraid their kids will think they don't love them.

And some kids will use that on you: "You don't love me." "You hate me."

That didn't work with my dad. The best had tried to manipulate him.
His response was a very clear: "It is because I do love you that you are about to

get it.!"

God begins this book, continues this book, and ends this book with His affirmations of His love for us and His desire for our good.

1:2-6 I love you

3:6-7 I am God who doesn't change, that is why you aren't destroyed.

4:1-2 God indicates he has a great future planned for those he loves.

It is as if he says, "It is because I love you so deeply and so unconditionally, I am going to discipline you - I make these hard charges against you.

Look with me now at God's complaint against Israel and his complaint against some of us.

READ v.6

The word "honor" is from the root word meaning "heavy" or "weighty".

It meant impressive, worthy of respect.

Like 20 years ago if something was important it was "heavy"

This proverb-like statement means that it is just common sense that a son shows respect for his father and a servant shows respect for his master.

It is as if God says, "Wait a minute, there is something wrong here!"

I am your father - I love you. I am your master - your creator.

In fact "I am the Lord Almighty.

Seven times in 9 verses God is referred to as the "Lord Almighty".

This title is used of God to refer to his authority over everything.

He is king over all the world and will certainly some day visibly display that authority.

I am the Lord Almighty, your master and your loving father and yet what do you do? End of v 6: YOU SHOW CONTEMPT FOR MY NAME!

To show "contempt" for something is to treat it as if it has no value and even more to have an active disregard for it - to heap insult on it.

To spit on Jesus is to show contempt, to indicate you think he has no value.

When God says, "you show contempt for my NAME" He means you show contempt for Him. A name in the Bible stood for the person even more than it does in our culture. To show contempt for God's name was a way

of saying they were showing contempt for everything about God.

You probably noticed in v 6 that God mentions the priests specifically as the ones who are doing this. And it is true that God's indictment of his people is usually aimed first at the leaders but included are the rest of the people as the rest of the chapter indicates. It is appropriate to include not only the rest of the people of Israel in this indictment but us as well.

The people then respond: How have we shown contempt for your name?

God answers: "You place defiled food on my altar".

You probably remember that when God set up worship for the Israelites he was very specific about what kind of sacrifices were acceptable in the Tabernacle and later the Temple.

For obvious reasons, sick, crippled and blind animals were not appropriate offerings to sacrifice. The offerings were to reflect as nearly as possible the perfect character of the God being worshipped.

The offerings were to be the best the people had.

But these people under the leadership of the priests had begun using unacceptable offerings and giving them in worship to God.

The people again responded: "How have we defiled YOU, God?"

It is almost as if they are saying, "Maybe we haven't lived up to the letter of the law with our offerings, maybe we have let a few shoddy sacrifices slip through. Why are you so picky about our offerings. IT doesn't mean we love you any less. "How have we defiled YOU?"

Actions express attitudes which in turn express ones heart.

Whether they wanted to admit it or not, their conduct in worship revealed their hearts and what they truly thought of their Father God the Lord Almighty.

God then again responds: How have you shown contempt for me? - let me show you: And he begins to do just that at the end of verse 7.

Before going further with this description however, I want you to see something in the text that helps me understand this passage:

If you will look at v 7 you will find that it is similar in content to verses 12 and the first part of v 13.

If you look at the first part of v 8 you will see it is similar to the middle of v 13.

Verse 9 is the same idea as the very end of v 13.

You will then see that verse 10's idea is repeated in the first part of 14.

And last, you will see that verse 11 and the last part of 14 are the same.

Clearly there is a repetition here and it is intentional to emphasize the point God is trying to make.

Now let's go back to the issue: How have the people shown contempt for God?

First of all in verse 7 as in verse 12, God says, You've shown contempt for me by your attitudes.

Specifically he says, you've shown your contempt "by saying that the Lord's table is contemptible."

A little study will reveal that the "Lord's Table" as used here is a reference to the altar where the sacrifices were placed in the Temple.

The Lord's Table here then is simply one illustration of all of the religious practices of the people in worship.

God says your attitude toward the worship I have called you to is one of contempt. You treat worship as if it is repetitious, pointless, and frankly not worth much.

They were going through the motions but inside they were treating worship as if it had no real value.

Spoken or not their lackadaisical and careless attitudes were indicating: "Why pray?", "Why worship?", "Why give?", "Why spend my time serving?", "Why study God's word?".

It doesn't produce anything of value - what's the point.

The leaders and workers were thinking they were martyrs, overworked, and underpaid - could hardly wait to get out from under the burden of service.

God says what it demonstrates is an attitude of contempt for God - you place little or no real value on God.

Secondly in verse 8 and again in the middle of verse 13 God says not just your attitude but your very actions show your contempt for me. READ 8a

God was very clear in Exodus 12 and Deuteronomy 15 that animals brought for sacrifice in worship were to be without blemish - they couldn't be the sick ones, the crippled ones, or the blind ones.

To make an offering of these animals to God was blasphemous!

But what God got was what was left over after the people got what they wanted.

They gave to God what had no real value.

It wasn't that it had absolutely no value but compared to what the people used it was of very little value. God got the leftovers.

When it came to worship - God got the time that couldn't be used for something more fun.

Today it is reflected in sporadic attendance in worship. I'll worship if I have nothing better to do. Sunday is my day and if a worship service fits in then maybe I'll go. God should be glad if I show up two out of four weeks.

Today it shows up in our reluctance to give more than passing attention to prayer and exclusive time with God. We fit God in when it's convenient if at all.

When it came to money - God got what was left over after they purchased all or nearly all they wanted.

God sees what excites us when we think of spending money.

He knows how often the expansion of His kingdom excites us.

When it came to service - God got the time left over after all the other more important things were done.

Are our attendance in worship together, our offerings, our time in prayer, our commitment to service of others, our dedication to the Word of God indications of the regard we have for God? God says they are!

Do we have little regard for God? Do we hold him in contempt?

If you will look at verse 13 you will see the third indication of the people's contempt for God: They said worship of God, religious activities, following God was a burden - it made them weary.

Getting tired in our service for God is human.

But being tired of service for God is something else.

They thought about their responsibilities toward God and they said, It's just a burden, they found it wearisome, - It didn't have enough value to make it worth it.

After illustrating this contempt for God, God asks a question: READ 8b-9, 13c

Do you really think such worship has any value with God?

Do you truly think God is pleased with such an attitude?

Do you actually think you are buying favor with God by going through the motions?

And then in verse 10 God has a sharp response: READ 10

Basically God says He'd rather we didn't pretend to be worshipping.

Shut the doors and stay home.

Don't come and go through the motions.

We come asking forgiveness but we have no heart for God.

We come expecting his favor but we couldn't care less about his laws.

God says our attitudes and our actions betray our hearts.

We hold God to be of little value in our lives.

Or worse yet we come expecting nothing at all - going through the motions but not even expecting to meet with God.

God says I'd rather you shut the doors.

This shutting the doors is a metaphor for putting God out of our lives.

Live as if we don't belong to God because that is what our conduct demonstrates.

Verse 14 says something similar: If you are going to say one thing but do another. If you are going to pretend that God is important in your life but then when you have to follow through and you don't - then a curse be on you.

A curse means to be shut out of God's presence - just like shutting the doors to God's presence in verse 10.

As Jesus told the Pharisees, hypocrisy is the most despicable form of contempt for God.

But that is not where God leaves it. READ v 11

Here in verse 11 as at the end of verse 14 God gives the people a picture of the future.

I see this as God's gracious call to repentance.

God says, You may treat my name with contempt now but there is coming a day when My greatness, My value, will be evident everywhere. All over the world, from East to West, true worship will be given to God.

The Lord Almighty, the king of kings, the one who will reign supreme when all other kingdoms fall - that God will not be treated with contempt (as of little value) but He will be treated as the Great God - the God of greatest value.

Return to me, the Lord Almighty says in 3:7 and I will return to you!

This is God's call throughout this book:

Turn away from your sin and I will forgive you and restore your relationship to me.

When I began studying this text of Malachi, I was struck with that word "Contempt".

I had to ask myself in what ways do I hold God to be of little value.

In what ways do I figuratively "spit in his face" as the Roman soldiers did as they led him to the Cross?

Are my indifference, my carelessness, my apathy, my negative attitudes as spitting in God's face?

And though the image is crude, I wondered if I had the chance would I reach out with a clean cloth and gently wipe that spit from his face as an indication of my sorrow at having treated him so.

Would I ask his forgiveness?

Would he look me in the eye and with tears of compassion filling his own eyes would he say, "you are forgiven, go and sin no more?"

Please remember, God's indictment of our worship is not out of retribution but out of love - His is a loving call to a renewed relationship -

If God's Spirit has used His Word to convict you this morning then I invite you to join me in a time of prayer. A prayer of confession.

On the left side of the front panel of your program is a prayer that may help you as you come before the Lord today.

I ask the rest of you to sit quietly as some of us deal with our attitudes toward God.

Silent prayer

Chorus: Change My Heart O God

Benediction: You have been reminded that Jesus Christ is your Lord and that you are God's servants. You are loved; you are forgiven; you are empowered; and now you are sent to live as God's faithful ones. Amen