

## Questioning God's Demands

A Study of Malachi 1:6-2:9

Characteristic of Completeness: Worship

Big Idea: God deserves our best, not our leftovers.

Related Scriptures: 2 Samuel 24:24; Psalm 69:30; 145:1-21;

Romans 6:13-19; 12:1-2; Hebrews 13:15-16; 1 Peter 2:4-5

Introduction:

- A. When I was a teenager in college, I used to work at my father's Chevron station in Tucson. I would go to class during the day, and some nights I worked at the station, pumping gas, cleaning up, and closing. At closing time, after I turned out the lights and checked all the locks, I would hop in my car, a red '66 GTO, and I would get on Interstate 10 and head for home.

Between the bucket seats in the front of my car lay an eight-track tape player I had installed myself. Often I would play one particular tape on the way home: the Eagles. I liked the Eagles, and they were particularly good at night, cruising on the freeway in my GTO, thinking about my girlfriend, Cathy, who was going to school in California.

One of the songs on the tape was called "Best of My Love." Some of you remember it. On the tape it would go, "But here in my heart I give you the best of my love," and then it would fade out and go *chi-chunk* to change tracks and fade back in with the rest of the chorus: "Oh sweet darlin' you get the best of my love, oh sweet darlin', you get the best of my love."

I was pining for Cathy back then, but I wonder now how the words of the chorus might apply to my relationship with God. What would it look like for me to give God the best of my love? After all, Jesus says the greatest commandment, and therefore our highest calling, is to simply love God.<sup>1</sup>

This morning, my goal is to learn a little more about what it might look like to give God the best of our love.

- B. Last Sunday, we began a study through the book of Malachi. Our text for today extends from Malachi 1:6 through Malachi 2:9. This morning, we're going to take a brief interpretive pass through this text. Then, we'll draw a principle or big idea from the text. Finally, we'll try to apply the big idea to our lives.
- I. First, we're going to spend about 12 minutes, or so, on the interpretation of the text.
- A. Verse ► 6 begins with these words of the Lord:

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 22:36-37.

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:6 “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. . . .”

1. Notice, that the Lord is addressing ► the “priests.” In fact, our entire text this morning is aimed at priests.<sup>2</sup> Priests were those duly authorized to lead the people of Israel in various forms of worship, including the offering of sacrifices at the altar; they acted as mediators between men and God.<sup>3</sup> They had a twofold responsibility: to lead worship, and to teach and apply God’s law to the people.<sup>4</sup>
  2. God’s complaint against the priests is that they failed ► to “honor” Him; they demonstrated ► no “fear” or reverence before Him; instead, ► they “despised” His name, which means they ascribed little worth to Him.<sup>5</sup>
  3. In ancient Israel, ► the “name” of a person represented his character, works, and reputation.<sup>6</sup>
- B. In response to this charge, the priests ► claim to be unaware:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:6 . . . “But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’”

- C. Then, the Lord explains specifically ► how the priests have disrespected Him:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:7 “By offering polluted food upon my altar. . . .”

God is saying that the priests, as part of their worship, were offering sacrifices that were unacceptable; the “food” offered was somehow “polluted.”

- D. The priests persist in asserting ► their own ignorance:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:7 “. . . But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ . . .”

- E. And so, the Lord ► spells it out:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:7 “. . . By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised.”

<sup>2</sup> Robert L. Alden, “Malachi,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, 1985), 711.

<sup>3</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, rev.ed., vol. 3, s.v. “Priests and Levites,” W.O. McCready, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1986).

<sup>4</sup> *Nelson Study Bible*, s.v. Malachi 2:6; Deuteronomy 33:10.

<sup>5</sup> R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke, *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, s.v. “בִּזְיוֹן,” (Chicago, IL: Moody Press, 1980), hereinafter referred to as TWOT.

<sup>6</sup> *Nelson Study Bible*, s.v. Malachi 1:6.

1. The ► “table” here is the altar on which animals were to be sacrificed to God.<sup>7</sup>
2. The idea seems to be that the priests were communicating in some way, perhaps even telling themselves, that to make sacrifices to God on behalf of the people is not an undeserved honor; it’s just a dumb job.

F. And the actions of the priests communicated this loud and clear. In ► Verse 8, the Lord says,

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:8 “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.”

1. According to the Mosaic Law, the animals sacrificed were to be unblemished—the very best available.<sup>8</sup> But the priests were violating the Law by offering animals that were blind, lame, or sick.
2. Instead of offering to God their best animals, the priests offered their worst. Such offerings would have been insulting even to an earthly governor, much less to God.

It would be a little like peeling some gum off the bottom of your shoe and then offering it to your spouse, saying, “Here, honey, this is how much I love you.”

G. Then in ► Verse 9, it seems that God mocks the priests’ hollow prayers for His favor, indicating that they can’t expect His favor while they’re ignoring His commands. God says,

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:9 “And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.”

H. Verse 10 ► continues:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:10 “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.”

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<sup>7</sup> Ryrie Study Bible, s.v. Malachi 1:7; Pieter A. Verhoef, *The Books of Haggai and Malachi, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, eds. R.K. Harrison and Robert L. Hubbard, Jr. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 217.

<sup>8</sup> Leviticus 22:20-25; Deuteronomy 15:21.

1. I think what God is saying here is that it is better to shut the doors of the temple and offer no sacrifices at all than to offer worthless worship. He wants their best, or nothing at all.
  2. I think God is after what the best animals represent. He wants bigger hearts, not juicier steaks. The best animals are simply a reflection of greater devotion, and that's what He wants.
- I. Indeed, greater devotion and respect is what God deserves. And one day, He will get it. In stark contrast to the careless and cold-hearted worship of the Jewish priests, people in Gentile nations all over the world will one day worship God. That's what He's saying in ► Verse 11:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:11 “For 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.”

- J. The Lord then juxtaposes the praise of the nations with the ► profanity of the priests.

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 1:12 “But you profane it [My name] when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. ► 13 But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. ► 14 Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.”

- K. In accordance with the Mosaic Covenant, then the Lord warns the priests that He will curse or discipline them if they continue to disrespect and disobey Him. You may recall that, in the Mosaic Covenant, God made a deal with the Israelites. He said, in effect: Obey Me and I'll bless you; disobey Me and I'll curse or discipline you. So, God says, beginning in ► Malachi 2:1:

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 2:1 “And now, O priests, this command is for you. ► 2 If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the LORD of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart. ► 3 Behold, I will rebuke your offspring, and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with it.”

Verse 3 sounds particularly bad. It sounds like God is threatening to humiliate the priests, but this may simply mean that they are at risk of being cut off from the priesthood. The term ► “dung” was used to describe the unclean or unfit parts of

animals that were to be removed and taken away before the sacrifice.<sup>9</sup> As such, saying that dung will be spread on the faces of the priests may simply be a metaphorical way of saying, “Straighten up or you’re fired; you will be unfit and unable to perform your duties in the future.”<sup>10</sup>

- L. In the concluding portion of our text, God explains one reason that He is calling for priestly repentance: that they may continue to serve as priests in unbroken succession dating back to their ancestor, Levi, through whom God established the priesthood.<sup>11</sup> Levi was the model for them; he served in reverent awe of God and taught the people of Israel well. Beginning in ► Verse 4, the Lord says,

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 2:4 “So shall you know that I have sent this command to you, that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the LORD of hosts. ► 5 My covenant with him was one of life and peace, and I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear, and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name. ► 6 True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. ► 7 For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.”

- M. Finally, the Lord charges the priests with corrupting the legacy of Levi, ► saying,

<sup>ESV</sup> Malachi 2:8 But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the LORD of hosts, 9 and so I make you despised and abased before all the people, inasmuch as you do not keep my ways but show partiality in your instruction.”

So, ► in our text, we see priests who have disrespectfully questioned God’s demand for their best offerings—their best animals and their best teaching—and they chose instead to offer something much less.

- II. We’ve covered the interpretation, now let’s try to identify a principle from the text. Here’s a pretty good working definition of a principle: It’s a timeless truth about God or people.
- A. There are certain things in our text that are not timeless.
1. For example, God no longer expects animal sacrifices from His people. The sacrifices of the Old Testament provided a picture of the people’s need for forgiveness of sin. They foreshadowed the coming forgiveness of Jesus Christ

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<sup>9</sup> Leviticus 4:11-12.

<sup>10</sup> Verhoef, 242.

<sup>11</sup> Numbers 1:50; Deuteronomy 33:8-11.

offered as a sacrifice for our sin. Jesus was and is the Lamb without blemish offered up on the cross to pay for our sins once and for all.<sup>12</sup>

2. Furthermore, we no longer need human priests to act as mediators between us and God. Jesus Christ Himself is now our High Priest who intercedes for us.<sup>13</sup> And we, as believers, are all priests who offer ourselves to God, having direct access to Him.<sup>14</sup>
3. Moreover, the Mosaic Law—all of it—has been superseded by Christ.<sup>15</sup> The blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant simply do not apply to us today.

B. So what's the point? What are we supposed to learn from our text?

1. I think the text does teach us something about worship. In fact, ► worship is our Characteristic of Completeness for the week.

In the most basic sense, worship is simply our response to God's initiative. God initiates; we respond. Our response is worship. One author of a classic book on worship says, "True worship then is really all there is to being a Christian . . ." <sup>16</sup>

God took the initiative to reveal Himself to the people of Israel to show them how much He loved them and to tell them how they were to respond to Him through things like priestly sacrifices. So the priests were worship leaders and their offerings were worship.

God has taken the initiative to reveal Himself to us today through what He has created, through what He has done, and through what He has said in the Bible. When we respond by singing on Sunday mornings, that's worship. When we respond by praying, that's worship. When we respond by listening to a sermon on Sunday morning, that's worship. When we decide to apply the Bible to our lives, that's worship.

2. In this context of worship, here is a principle or ► big idea that comes from our text: God deserves our best, not our leftovers. He wants our response to Him to be whole-hearted, not half-hearted. He wants our response to reflect the highest honor and respect He is due; He does not want to be dismissed.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 10:5-18; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Hebrew 6:19-20.

<sup>14</sup> 1 Peter 2:4-5.

<sup>15</sup> Romans 10:4; Galatians 3:24-25.

<sup>16</sup> Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate!*, (Carol Stream, IL: Hope Publishing, 1981), 78.

3. It is always wise to test a principle or big idea against other parts of Scripture. In dealing with the Old Testament in particular, as we are today, it is good to look for New Testament passages that corroborate the principle.

A corroborating New Testament Scripture for our Old Testament principle is

► Romans 12:1. It says,

<sup>ESV</sup> Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Here, the Apostle Paul even uses Old Testament word pictures relating to sacrifice to help bridge the Old and the New. Instead of presenting animals as sacrifices to God in worship, we are to present ourselves, and not just parts of ourselves, but our whole bodies. That would certainly be our best because we have no more to give than all of ourselves.

So, we'll get a fire going on an altar up here, and who will be the first to throw yourself on the fire and be burned alive for God? Who wants to be go on the grill for God; cook for Christ; worship on the Weber; bow on the barbie?

No. Paul is speaking metaphorically about the offering of ourselves to God. We need to learn a little more about what Paul means when he calls us to present ourselves as sacrifices.

- a. The Greek word for ► “present” means “to place someone or something at someone’s disposal.”<sup>17</sup> Notice there is an object presented and a person to whom the object is presented.
- b. We can get a better idea what this means by looking at how the word is used elsewhere in the Bible. In Matthew 26:53, angels are presented to Christ. In Mark 4:29, the harvest is presented to farmers. In Mark 14:47, a sword is presented to Peter. In Luke 1:19, an angel is presented to God. In Luke 2:22, Christ is presented to the Father.

In all these cases, the thing presented is simply made available; it is ready. The thing presented does not act according to its own selfish agenda. The thing submits itself entirely to the control and direction of the person to whom it is presented.

So to present ourselves means to surrender ourselves—every part of us—to whatever God wants to do in us or through us. That would be

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<sup>17</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “παρίστημι and παριστάνω,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

our best. God deserves our best, not our leftovers. That's true ► worship.

- c. I want you to see that giving our best or presenting ourselves as sacrifices is not a condition of being saved; it is a *result* of being saved. God isn't saying to believers, "Give your best, then maybe I'll save you." He's saying, "Give your best because I've already saved you."

We are adopted in God's forever family through faith alone in Christ alone. The adoption has no other strings, no other conditions, no fine print, no balloon payment. The adoption is irrevocable.

But once we become the adoptive children of God, our heavenly Father expects the best from every one of His children. Why? Because He deserves it.

Notice in Romans 12:1, the sacrifice is described in terms indicative of one who has already believed in Jesus for eternal life, and thus, someone who is already saved, already a Christian, already headed for heaven.

- 1) It is ► a "living" sacrifice—alive in Christ, no longer dead in your sins, already adopted.<sup>18</sup>
  - 2) It ► is "holy," which means set apart for God, already adopted.<sup>19</sup>
  - 3) It ► is "acceptable to God;" that is, reconciled to God through the death and resurrection of Christ, already adopted.<sup>20</sup>
  - 4) And so Paul appeals to ► his "brothers" in Christ—all who have believed in Jesus—to present ourselves to God in response to ► the mercies God has already shown us. That's worship.
4. So, as believers, we are to present ourselves, to surrender ourselves—every part of ourselves—to whatever God wants to do in us or through us.

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<sup>18</sup> Romans 6:8-9.

<sup>19</sup> Ephesians 1:4.

<sup>20</sup> Romans 5:9-11.

As is often the case, we can look to Jesus and see that He models this idea for us. In ► John 6:38, we see that Jesus is entirely surrendered to the Father's agenda, not His own. He says,

<sup>ESV</sup> John 6:38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me.

Moreover, in ► John 14:21, Jesus explains how He glorified or loved His Father on earth, and it was not just with some sappy show of superficial emotionalism. Jesus prays to the Father, saying,

<sup>ESV</sup> John 17:4 I glorified you on earth, having accomplished the work that you gave me to do.

- III. Well, we ► have our principle or big idea: God deserves our best, not our leftovers. And our best involves presenting all of ourselves for His purposes, to accomplish whatever work He has for us to do.

Now, what do we do with this principle? How can we apply it to our lives?

- A. I have found that I have a tendency to compartmentalize. It's as if I have a mental shelf. On the shelf, I have mental boxes representing the various areas of my life: husband, father, son, brother, employee, friend, neighbor, student, lover, citizen, homeowner, etc. I take down one box at a time and put it on my mental work bench until I'm ready to go to the next one.

When I'm in this mode, sometimes I try to put God in a box. On Sunday mornings, the God box involves church services. During the week, the God box might involve praying or reading the Bible or personal devotions or even going to Life Group. When I try to put God in a box, there are several possibilities in any given day.

Some days, I never get around to the God box. Most of us who are believers would probably agree that this is not good.

Some days, I do get around to the God box, but by the time I do, I don't have much energy or concentration to give. I'm too tired from working through the other boxes. Most of us who are believers would probably agree that this would be giving God our leftovers, not our best.

And so, maybe I decide to really be committed. I resolve to rearrange the order of my boxes so that God gets the very best part of my day every single day. And I think to myself, wow, such commitment; what a sacrifice I'm making; I'm really giving it up for God.

And then God says to me, "You are despising my name."

And I say, “How have I despised your name.”

And He says, “By putting me in a box. I don’t want to be in a box. It’s insulting. I don’t deserve it. Does a wife like her husband to put her in a box? Does she feel respected when her husband ignores her all day, except when he pulls her down off his shelf to grace her with a few minutes of his time before putting her back on the shelf? Neither do I like it. I don’t want *a* box; I want *all* your boxes, every one of them, presented to me on the altar of your mental work bench. I want to be with you in your work, in your home, in your marriage, in your friendships, in your conflicts, in your thoughts, in your dreams, in every step you take. I deserve your best, not your leftovers.”

B. And so, here’s what I’m going to do this week, and I invite you to join me.

1. I’m going to sit down in a quiet, undistracted place, and I’m going to ask God this question: “Lord, are there any boxes in my life that I’m not presenting to You, any boxes where it’s all my agenda and not yours, any areas of my life where You’d like to enter and transform, but I haven’t let You?”

And I’m going to keep asking and waiting and listening for a reply because I know my propensity to hide boxes from Him. I’m not going to plug my ears and hurriedly say: “Any boxes? Guess not. We’re good. Amen.” I’m going to keep asking, “Lord, are there any boxes in my life that I’m not presenting to You, any boxes where it’s all my agenda and not yours, any areas of my life where You’d like to enter and transform, but I haven’t let You?”

2. And then, for any boxes that come to mind, I’m going to ask another question: “Lord, how can I give you my best; what do I need to do to surrender; where do you want to work right now in my life? You deserve my best, and I want to give it. Show me how.”