

# Sermon Outline

“ABBA! FATHER!”:  
KNOWING GOD AS OUR BELOVED FATHER

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## WHERE IS MY HONOR?

*MALACHI 1:6-14*

### I. Introduction

### II. On Malachi the Prophet

- A. The prophet Malachi was sent by God to preach to Israel about a hundred years after the first exiles had returned from Babylon.
- B. Based on the message the Lord had Malachi say, it seems that postexilic Israel—though humbled by the Lord’s judgment—is still essentially the same rebellious nation.
- C. Malachi was sent by the Lord to remind the nation to be loyal to the Lord—and not presume on his mercy.
- D. But it is specifically 1:6-14 we want to consider today.
  - 1. Here, we see the Lord’s indictment against the people of Israel.
  - 2. We hear the Lord voicing his frustrations concerning his own people.
  - 3. From the Lord’s charge, we get a sense as to what the Lord requires from his children.
    - a. The Lord requires our honor, our sincere worship.
    - b. The Lord requires us not to defraud him of his rights as our King and Father.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Who was the prophet Malachi? When did he preach? (2) What was Israel’s spiritual condition when Malachi ministered? (3) What will we see in Malachi 1:6-14?

### III. The Love of God for Israel (Malachi 1:2-4)

- A. Although Malachi’s prophecy rebukes Israel, it is worth noting that Malachi’s message actually begins on a note of *love*.
  - 1. Malachi 1:2: “I have loved you,” says the LORD.”
  - 2. Before the Lord rebukes his people, the Lord reminds Israel of his steadfast, patient, and enduring love for them.
  - 3. When the Lord says, “I have loved you,” he doesn’t mean, of course, that he once loved Israel and no longer does now.

4. Rather, it underscores the fact that he has always loved Israel even before these rebukes that he is about to deliver.
- B. While the Lord has loved Israel, they have not responded in love to him.
  - C. Instead, Israel questions God's love: "But you say, 'How have you loved us?'"
  - D. The Lord responds by directing his people to consider his choosing of them: "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated. I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert" (vv 2, 3).
    1. The Lord reminds Israel that his love for them is evidenced by how he has preserved Israel all through the years.
    2. Specifically, the Lord has singled Israel out for blessing, while he has ordained destruction for Israel's brother, Esau.
  - E. The Lord states that even if other enemy nations, such as Edom, should seek to reassert themselves, he will tear them down again: "If Edom says, 'We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,' the LORD of hosts says, 'They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever'" (v 4).  
—The implication here is that the Lord will not be angry with Israel forever (Jer 3:12).
  - F. The Lord says all this to demonstrate to Israel that they are indeed a *special, beloved* people to him.
    1. Even after the massive destruction of the nation leading into the exile, Israel continues to live.
    2. Israel survives precisely because the Lord has set his *fatherly* love on them.
  - G. But if Israel wants to be in relationship with the heavenly Father, they must recognize that they have responsibilities to God as well, which is where verses 6-14 come into the picture.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) Why is it important to see that the Lord's charge against his people begins on the note of love? (2) How did the Lord show Israel his love?

#### IV. Where Is My Honor? (Malachi 1:6)

- A. The Lord presents his complaint against his people: "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" (v 6).

1. These are words tinged with great pain.
  2. They are the words of a Father and a Lord who, in spite of all that he has done for his people, has been mistreated and scorned by them.
- B. It is striking that these words are addressed to the priests: “O priests, who despise my name.”
1. The Lord addresses his rebuke not first to the ordinary Israelite on the street.
  2. He first addresses his priests—the shepherds and the pastors of the nation of Israel.
  3. The Lord addresses the leaders of the Church first probably because their sins led to the moral decline of the entire nation.
  4. If there is to be renewal in the spiritual life of Israel, the first people who need to get right with the Lord are his appointed shepherds.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the Lord’s complaint? (2) To whom does the Lord present his complaint? (3) How does he describe his priests?

#### V. How the Priests Despise the Lord, I (Malachi 1:6, 7)

- A. Having pointed to the priests as the root of the problem, the Lord anticipates their protest. “But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’” Lord, how have we treated you poorly? How have we insulted your name?
- B. The very fact that they ask these questions is itself an insult. The priests know full well how they have been despising the name of the Lord.
- C. The Lord then presents his grievance: “By offering polluted food upon my altar.”
1. In ancient Israel, the priests offered the sacrificial offerings to the Lord.
  2. These food offerings were the means by which the relationship between the Lord and Israel was maintained.
  3. We can understand this through daily experience: We maintain our friendships with others through shared meals and other acts of hospitality.
  4. The food offerings to the Lord was how Israel, in a sense, shared a meal with God.
  5. Through this meal, Israel maintained their relationship with the Lord.
  6. But the food Israel offered to the Lord is polluted food—the priests were cheating the Lord!
- D. But the offering also represents the offerer.
1. Thus, the issue is not merely one of food.
  2. The issue has to do with the *person* or *persons* the food represents.

3. By offering polluted food, the priests were really offering polluted lives to the Lord. They were not offering themselves and the rest of the nation fully to the Lord. They were cheating the Lord.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How have the priests grieved and offended the Lord? (2) How does the offering relate to the offerer? What do the corrupted offerings teach us about the offerers themselves? What parallels do you see in your own life—in the way you work, parent, play, or study?

## **VI. How the Priests Despise the Lord, II (Malachi 1:7-9)**

- A. The Lord anticipates a further excuse that the priests make: “But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’” As if they didn’t know!
- B. The Lord responds: “By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised.”
  1. It is doubtful that the priests would actually dare to say this out loud.
  2. More likely, the Lord was revealing what was in their hearts.
  3. The reason the priests could so carelessly offer polluted food was because they were saying, in their hearts, that they could serve the Lord’s Table carelessly.
- C. The Lord presents a list of offences that show how his priests have dishonored his table. He says to them:
  1. “When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil?”
  2. “And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?”
- D. According to the Law, offerings presented to the Lord must be in a healthy physical condition. The animals that Israel gives to the Lord must not be ill or deformed in any way (cf. Ex 12:5; 29:1; Lev 1:3, 10, etc.).
  1. The Lord God is the supreme King of all creation—therefore, he deserves the best of what we have to offer.
  2. Thus, when an offering is made, the Israelite who makes the offering must present a healthy, unblemished animal to the Lord.
  3. During Malachi’s time, the priests themselves were in flagrant disregard of God’s Law.  
—They offered sick, and blind, and crippled animals to the Lord!
  4. The assumption here is that the priests know how to judge whether an animal is fit to be offered as a sacrifice. But clearly, they were not even doing that.
- E. To help them understand the gravity of what it is that they were doing, the Lord poses the question this way in verse 8: “Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.”

- F. The Lord echoes what the people ask of the priests to do: “And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us.”  
—But then he adds: “With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts” (v 9).

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How specifically have the priests grieved and offended the Lord according to vv 7-9? (2) What example does the Lord use to help Israel understand the gravity of their sin (v 8)? (3) Will the Lord accept Israel’s gifts as they are presently offered?

## VII. The Verdict of the Lord (Malachi 1:10)

- A. Moving to verse 10, the Lord pleads with his people: “Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain!”
- B. Then comes the great verdict on Israel’s sin. And this has to be the most shattering statement of all: “I have *no* pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will *not* accept an offering from your hand.”
1. With a single statement, the Lord has placed the nation of Israel, including the priesthood, under condemnation!
  2. The *No* of the Great King thunders from these words and shatters every ounce of self-confidence in our hearts.
  3. This is the most damaging of all verdicts that God can give to anyone: “I have *no* pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will *not* accept an offering from your hand.”
  4. Suddenly, the praises of men seem so weak, so pointless.
- C. How does worldliness/secularism find its way into the Church?
1. We are tempted to blame primarily external factors (atheistic philosophies, immoral entertainment, etc).
  2. But the greatest force that drives us to worldliness is the failure to live with the question: *Is God pleased with me? Does God take delight from my life?*
  3. The idolatry of the Self is the single-greatest force for secularism in the world today.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is the Lord’s verdict on Israel’s sin? (2) How does Israel’s example demonstrate how worldliness creep into the Church? (3) “Is God pleased with me and with what I do?” Do you keep this question before you?

## VIII. My Name Will Be Great among the Nations (Malachi 1:11)

- A. But the Lord has news for us: There is only one God. There is only one heavenly Father—and we must love him above everything else in creation.

- B. As the God and Father of his people, the Lord has absolute right to set the terms of his worship.
1. The Lord has an absolute right to our total and comprehensive devotion.
  2. After all, that is what it means to be possessed by God.
- C. The Lord expresses his desire to his children now. This is the heart of God's work in the world. This is where God is taking the world: "For from the rising of the sun to its setting *my name will be great* among the nations..."
1. God is not interested simply in the honor of Israel.
  2. God desires every nation and civilization in the world to serve him.
- D. The Lord adds, "and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering." The Lord desires proper worship to be given to him.
1. The worship that the Lord desires is "in every place."
  2. We take this to mean in every part of the world.
  3. From every nation, every city and town, every household, the Lord desires for his name to be worshiped.
- E. Then we come to the reason the Lord desires this: "For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts."
1. Our Father is unveiling his heart to us here.
    - He desires to be honored and "great among the nations," to be exalted above all the powers of the world.
  2. As we journey in the Christian life, we must be asking ourselves: *Are we on the same page as our heavenly Father?*
    - Are we truly behaving as his sons?
    - Do we share his vision for our lives?
    - Or are we obstructing it by our own preoccupation with our desires in life?

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is God's desire for the world? How does God want to be treated in the world? (2) Where does the Lord want to see his worship? (3) Are you on the same page with the Lord?

## IX. Closet Atheists (Malachi 1:12, 13)

- A. In verse 12, we can see how one ends up becoming careless, insensitive, and rebellious toward the Lord: "But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised."
- B. The priests may have been entertaining such hateful thoughts in their own hearts for quite some time.
- C. The priests are really harboring a form of practical atheism in their hearts.

D. Practical atheism may be the most frightful form of atheism precisely because it's hardest to detect.

1. Practical (closet!) atheism is...
  - an attitude that says we don't need to care so much about what the Lord thinks.
  - a mindset that pushes the Lord away from our thoughts and values.
  - a disposition of the heart that makes God an assistant to our own plans for our own lives; thinking that God is only to be worshiped to the extent that he supports our personal agendas.
2. In the case of Israel's priests, this practical atheism showed in the careless, dismissive attitude taken toward the food offerings.

E. What about ourselves?

1. Our own versions of practical atheism may show in other ways. It may show when...
  - we approach the worship of the Lord without joy and awe.
  - we approach the Lord's Table as a mere ritual instead of a symbol of our Lord Jesus Christ, summoning our renewed faith and repentance from sin.
  - we treat the Sabbath as another chore to get over with.
  - we do not pray as we ought.
  - we take refuge in sinful habits or sinful forms of entertainment.
  - we allow ourselves to be filled with fear, anxiety, or anger.
  - we are unwilling to allow God's Word to search our hearts and correct our values.

F. How do we know if we are harboring the false idol of atheism in our hearts?

1. One evidence is that the Lord's commands and requests become wearisome to us.
2. Instead of treating them with respect, seeing them as health to our bones, we treat them as chores or mere obligations.
3. This is what we see taking place in the inner lives of the priests: "But you say, '*What a weariness this is,*' and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts" (v 13).
4. The priests themselves had lost sight of the grandeur of the Lord.
5. They bring lame and sick offerings to him: "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."

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What is practical atheism? Why is it possible the worst form of atheism? (2) How do we become practical atheists? How do we know we are harboring practical atheism in our hearts? (3) Are you a practical atheist? How do you kill your atheism?

## X. Cursed Be the One Who Cheats the Lord (Malachi 1:14)

- A. The Lord makes clear what he thinks of the corrupted offerings yet again.
1. Back in verse 10, the Lord says he takes no pleasure in such offerings.
  2. In verse 14, he utters a curse on those priests and ordinary Israelites who do offer such things: “*Cursed be the cheat* who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.”
- B. But what about ourselves? Are we keeping the promises we have made to the Lord?
- Are we living up to the vow we made at baptism—the vow to struggle against sin, choose the will of the Lord in all situations, and rest in the Lord Jesus Christ?
  - Are we living up to the vows we made before God to our spouses, to cherish them for the glory of God?
  - Are we living up to the vows we made to God concerning our children, to nurture them toward faith in the Lord Jesus Christ?
  - Are we living up to the vows we made to God regarding our Church, to love our Church, pray for and encourage our brothers and sisters in Christ?
- C. When we...
- take a careless, neglectful approach to the Christian life
  - treat the Christian life as a co-curricular activity rather than the Activity itself;
  - take a careless attitude toward the Law of God;
  - allow our personal desires to obscure each of those vows we’ve made;—we are essentially breaking our promises to the Lord!
- D. The Lord makes clear what he thinks of such a thing.
1. He thinks that such people are to be cursed.
  2. And in fact, he does place a curse on them, whether Jew or Gentile—the curse of the Law.
- E. Lastly, the Lord reveals why he feels this way and why he takes the action he takes. It ultimately has to do with who he is: “For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.”
1. For some, the Lord’s words may sound harsh and vindictive.
  2. But we will read the Lord that way if we forget everything else that the Scripture teaches us about who he is.
  3. Scripture teaches us that the Heart of creation is not ultimately an impersonal, nameless force.
  4. Instead, the heart of creation is deeply personal. He is a Person. In fact, he is a Community of Persons, the divine Trinity.
  5. When the Lord asserts his right to be worshiped and obeyed, he isn’t making an arbitrary, haphazard law disconnected from the rest of life.



6. The very good of all living beings is at stake when it comes to God himself.
7. When we see God jealously, even violently preserving his glory, he is ultimately protecting what is most essential.
8. God is protecting the very Template on which all life is based.
9. That template is the Community of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
10. Thus, to attack God, to insult God and defraud him, is really to strike at Life, Truth, Love, and Community himself.
11. When we see things in this way, it finally makes sense why God is jealous for his glory.  
—Because as the Creator and Source and Pattern of all good things, God is the Great King of all creation, the One who holds all creation together.

- F. Moreover, Israel has the honor of being the Lord's priest to the world.
1. If even Israel—the *son* of God, the *priest* of God—does not honor the Lord, then the future is bleak indeed.
  2. The rest of mankind would not think highly of the Lord.
  3. When the word of the Lord is not taken seriously, repentance is impossible.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) What does the Lord pronounce on the one who cheats him of his dues? (2) What reason does the Lord give for his harsh measures against those who defraud him? (3) Why does Israel's neglect of the Lord imperil the rest of the world?

## **XI. Do Not Defraud the Heavenly Father**

**To know God as our Father is to devote ourselves in every aspect of life without reservation to him. To know God as our Father is not to cheat God of the honor that is due him; but to honor him with our whole lives; to exalt him as the Great King in the way we live our lives. It is to love God to the full extent of our beings, such that we give ourselves in complete consecration to him; obeying his holy Law. That is what it means to experience God as Father.**

- A. While it is a great honor to be a son of God, we have a responsibility to obey God as well.
- B. This Word functions in two ways for us.
1. *As a rebuke for us who live in unrepented sin.*
    - a. We are reminded of what grieves the Lord. Where are we defrauding the Lord today?
      - Where are we failing to keep the vows we've made to the Lord?
      - Are we allowing our pleasures in life—which may include our dreams of success—to hinder us from fulfilling the other vows we've made?

- Are we building up our families, and our spouses, and children?
  - Are we building up our fellow Church members? Are we striving against sin?
  - Is there any area in our life where we are no longer striving against sin, not even praying for strength to go against it?
- The Lord is our Great Father and King. Let us not test him.

2. *As an encouragement to us to persevere in holy love to the Lord.*

1. It puts steel in our bones to resist the world.
  2. God has shown us what he thinks of the rebellion that we see in the world.
  3. Those who turn their backs on him and despise him are cursed.
  4. Knowing that our heavenly Father is greatly angered and offended by sin ought to make us think twice about knowingly disobeying him.
  5. Brothers and sisters, it is not worth it going back to the world!
  6. The great and awesome Day of Judgment is coming.
- Those who have spent their whole lives pursuing success instead of pursuing the Great King will have neither their success nor their King.

**\*Questions for reflection:** (1) How does Malachi 1:6-14 rebuke you? How do God's words rebuke you today? What sins does it address? (2) How does Malachi 1:6-14 encourage you? How will God's words strengthen you this week as you face your temptations?

## **XII. The Right Son, the Right Sacrifice**

But let not your hearts be troubled. In time, God himself will provide a righteous Son, a holy Priest, and a spotless Lamb for himself...