After listening restlessly to a long and tedious sermon, a 6-year-old boy asked his dad what the preacher did the rest of the week. “Oh, he’s a very busy man,” the father replied. “He takes care of church business, visits the sick, works on his sermon, counsels people...and then he has to rest up because speaking in public isn’t an easy job.” The boy thought for a moment and then said, “Well, listening ain’t easy, either!”

Why are some of you nodding your heads? It ain’t easy to listen, is it? Especially when it’s something that we don’t really want to hear. Let me tell you up front that you can relax a little this morning because our passage in Malachi 1:6-14 is directed more to paid pastors than it is to you. Look at verse 6 – “To you priests who despise my name.” You can apply what spills over because these verses will mess with each one of us.

Because this passage is directed to the paid professional clergy of that day, I decided to lead our staff team in a discussion of these verses on Tuesday. I asked each of them to come up with five observations and one application. I was humbled by the seriousness in which they took this assignment and by their deep devotion and desire to honor God. Here are ten things I wrote down from our discussion...

1. God desires and deserves more than leftovers
2. The people were not really giving sacrifices; they gave what they didn’t want
3. I have to give my very best to God because He is the giver of that resource
4. When we do the right thing over and over it’s easy to become sloppy
5. If the church is just a social club let’s just shut the doors
6. Just because it isn’t easy isn’t an excuse
7. When we offer to God our best it will cost us more
8. The work we do for God should not be viewed as an obligation but an honor
9. When we focus on one specific thing we don’t have we can’t see all the good things we do have
10. No matter what happens, God is still great

Let me remind you of the situation that Malachi is addressing. The Jews have returned to their land after living in modern-day Iraq for 70 years. The Temple has been rebuilt and the worship of God has been reestablished. While outwardly everything seems OK, on the inside a cancer of complacency is eating away at their commitment. As God’s final spokesman at the end of the Old Testament, Malachi comes on the scene to challenge them, and us, to give God our best.

As we’re listening in to this dialogue between God and His people, we learned last week that of all the things God wants us to know, the most important is that He loves us with a tender, affectionate, and unconditional love. He loves us in the past, He loves us in the present and He will love us in the future. We can count on God’s love even when we question it.
Because they didn’t respond to God’s love, things started to head south for them. Their worship became wimpy, their leaders became lightweights, their relationships ruptured, their offerings were anemic and they stopped serving.

To get a flavor for this passage, let’s stand and read Malachi 1:6-14.

6   “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?’

7   “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.’
8   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?
Offer it then to your governor!
Would he be pleased with you?
Would he accept you favorably?”
Says the LORD of hosts.

9   “But now entreat God’s favor,
    That He may be gracious to us.
While this is being done by your hands,
Will He accept you favorably?”
Says the LORD of hosts.

10  “Who is there even among you who would shut the doors,
    So that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain?
I have no pleasure in you,”
Says the LORD of hosts,
“Nor will I accept an offering from your hands.

11  For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down,
    My name shall be great among the Gentiles;
In every place incense shall be offered to My name,
And a pure offering;
For My name shall be great among the nations,“
Says the LORD of hosts.
12 “But you profane it,
   In that you say,
   ‘The table of the LORD is defiled;
   And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.’
13 You also say,
   ‘Oh, what a weariness!’
   And you sneer at it,“
   Says the LORD of hosts.
   “And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick;
   Thus you bring an offering!
   Should I accept this from your hand?”
   Says the LORD.
14 “But cursed be the deceiver
   Who has in his flock a male,
   And takes a vow,
   But sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished—
   For I am a great King,”
   Says the LORD of hosts,
   “And My name is to be feared among the nations.

Here’s the main point of the passage: God would rather have no worship at all than for us to come with paltry praise.

As part of His program for our spiritual progress, God longs for us to give Him our best. Let’s focus on three ways we can do that.

1. **Embrace an authentic faith** (6-7). What we see right away in verse 6 is that there are two sides to the Father’s love. One side is tender and the other a bit tougher. He is relational in His giving, and He is resplendent in His glory, and as such, we must honor Him: “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.”

God refers to Himself as the Father of Israel in Exodus 4:22: “This is what the LORD says: Israel is My son, My firstborn.” And, in Exodus 20:12, He tells us to, “Honor your father and your mother…” To “honor” someone is to consider them weighty, or heavy. When you treat a person as a heavyweight you’re saying that they are of extreme importance.

Shortly after we moved in to our house someone noticed a plaque that we have in our living room that reads, “You are Weighty to Me.” I think they wondered if that was a fat joke but we then explained that one of our daughters made it to communicate her desire to honor her parents as weighty and worthy. Come to think of it, maybe it was a fat joke.

Seven times in these nine verses, and 23 times in the book of Malachi, God calls Himself, “The Lord of Hosts.” “Lord” is the name “Yahweh” and was too holy to be spoken by human lips.
In fact, it was so revered that it was only pronounced once a year on the Day of Atonement, and then only by the high priest in the most holy place of the Temple. If this name needed to be written, the scribes would take a bath before writing it and then destroy the pen afterward. This name refers to the fact that God is who He is; He’s the one who causes everything else. He is unchanging, the one who inhabits eternity. The word “hosts” depicts a great number of armies. The Lord Almighty has all the angelic hosts of heaven ready to do His work because He has infinite authority in the universe.

Let’s look at how this name is used in our passage for today.

Verse 6: “If I am a master, where is my reverence? says the LORD of hosts.”
Verse 8: “Would he accept you favorably? says the LORD of hosts.”
Verse 9: “Will he accept you favorably? says the LORD of hosts.”
Verse 10: “I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts.”
Verse 11: “For my name shall be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.”
Verse 13: “And you sneer at it, says the LORD of hosts.”
Verse 14: “For I am a great king, says the LORD of hosts.”

In essence, the priests and the people had an awful and awesome problem. In short, they had lost their awe of God and because they no longer saw the Almighty as awesome, they ended up in an awful place.

Now, during the first half of verse 6, the priests are probably saying, “Amen, that’s right God. Bring it on. Let the people have it.” But notice the second half of the verse: “To you priests who despise my name.” Ouch. Now it’s time for them to listen. By the way, this had to be a difficult message for Malachi to deliver because he was not a priest. They probably resented him and looked down upon him. They certainly didn’t like what he had to say.

The priests were despising God, which means they no longer thought of Him as weighty. To “despise” means to look down on with aversion and to regard as worthless. They were despising their duties and scorning the sacred because worship had become wearisome, and they were taking God for granted. And, they had the nerve to lash out at the Lord of Hosts.

Look at the last part of verse 6: “In what way have we despised your name?” In verse 7, He answers them: “You offer defiled food on my altar.” The Hebrew word order is significant. God is saying, “How dare you do this on MY sacred altar!” Unbelievably, the priests persist in their questioning: “In what way have we defiled you?” God replies, “By saying, ‘The table of the Lord is contemptible.’” This means “worthless and despicable.”

They were just going through the motions like we sometimes do when we allow the extraordinary to become ordinary. In fact, familiarity with the holy can lead to a humdrum spirituality if we’re not careful.
Ravi Zacharias said it this way: “When man is bored with God even heaven does not have a better alternative.” If God bores you, then nothing else is going to satisfy you either. A cheap religion, costing little, is rejected by God, and so is worth nothing.

I wonder if these professional priests had grown so accustomed to God that they no longer took Him seriously. The danger of familiarity is that we too can get bored with God when we somehow think we’ve arrived spiritually. Friends, listen. Spiritual growth is intentional, not automatic.

→ CLASS Seminars

If we want to give God our best we must first embrace authenticity. Incidentally, that’s what the millennial generation is seeking. Millennials are made up of people born between 1982 and 2000. I just finished reading a book that I highly recommend called, “The Post-Church Christian” by Paul and Carson Nyquist. Listen to what Carson, a millennial has to say: “Few things are as frustrating as inauthenticity, especially in relation to faith...we see this and it has caused many of us to walk away from Christian community and even the church...a shallow version of Christianity is not compelling, relevant, or attractive to us. In fact, it’s the thing that often drives us away from the church” (pages 24-25).

We must stop going through the motions, refuse to play church, and do whatever it takes to keep the fire burning. God would rather have no worship at all than for us to come with paltry praise. Let’s embrace an authentic faith.

2. Give God priority over possessions (8-9). We could sum up Israel’s problem by saying that they were suffering from SARS – Severe Acute Religious Syndrome – and it was highly contagious. Look at verse 8: “‘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? Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?’ says the LORD of hosts.”

The priests were accepting not just the second best from the people; but worse than that, they were bringing God sick sheep and gross goats. They were offering the ones that weren’t worth anything. Maybe they thought that its all going up in smoke anyway so why not just get rid of what they don’t need anymore. It’s better to offer the blemished than nothing at all, right? Wrong.

Imagine the parade of diseased animals limping and stumbling blindly toward the Temple. Their oozing sores were covered with flies. Some of them probably collapsed even before they got there! The reason God says, “is it not evil?” twice in this verse is because the people, and certainly the priests, should have known better.
In **Leviticus 22:22**, God made it very clear that He was not interested in substandard sacrifices: “*Those that are blind or broken or maimed, or have an ulcer or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the LORD, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to the LORD.*”

Here’s the principle: God deserves priority over your possessions. These people were more concerned with keeping the best than they were in giving God their best. Their hearts were not in it any longer. They were still coming to church but it was just a meaningless ritual to them. They had accepted mediocrity in their lives and their leaders did nothing about it. God tells them to try and offer their junk to the governor see if he would accept them. The bottom line is they thought God didn’t care what they did.

I’m challenged by this passage because the priests could have said, “*Hey, it’s not our fault that the people are bringing their garbage to God. We’re just sacrificing what they give to us.*” God doesn’t buy this. He holds the priests accountable for what the people are bringing. Likewise, your pastors are responsible to make sure that this congregation does not slip into a ritualistic religion that no longer gives God the best.

There are at least three standards for sacrifices in Scripture.

- **Give the best.** Israel had been taught to look through the flocks and find the one animal without defect or blemish to sacrifice. This wasn’t easy because this animal was the cream of the crop, the most expensive, and the one used for breeding. But it was what God demanded. Giving what you don’t need is really not giving anyway. When Mary of Bethany broke her alabaster jar filled with expensive perfume in **John 12:1-8**, she was demonstrating that the giving of our gifts reveals our estimate of the one to whom we offer them.

- **Give to God first.** God is never to get the leftovers. He should receive what is right, not what is left. When the Israelites tithed, it helped them to recognize that everything they had was a gift from Him. That’s the whole idea behind “first” fruits.

- **Giving should cost something.** In **2 Samuel 24**, David wanted to offer a sacrifice to God. He went to a place owned by a man named Araunah and told him that he wanted to buy his threshing floor so that he could build an altar to the Lord. Araunah generously offered to donate the oxen for the offering and the wood for the fire – like a “turn-key” sacrifice. David refused this discount and said in **verse 24:** “*No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God with that which costs me nothing.*” Likewise, we must give sacrificially, not sacrilegiously.

In effect, the people were lowering God’s standards by saying, “*God isn’t perfectly holy. We don’t need to offer a perfect substitute for our sins.*” On top of that, they lifted up sinners by saying, “*We’re not all that bad. A slightly blemished sacrifice is good enough for us to come before God.*”

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Are you giving God your best? Are you striving to give Him the first? And does your giving cost you something? Beth and I have always given at least 10% to the Lord’s work through the local church and then we respond sacrificially to God’s promptings when opportunities come up like the Walk for Life, or when missionaries or mission projects come along. Friend, one of the best ways to monitor how you’re doing spiritually is to take a look at your giving. Are you leaving God your leftovers, or are you giving Him priority over your possessions? *God would rather have no worship at all than for us to come with paltry praise.*

3. **Grasp the greatness of God** (10-14). Verse 10 should cause us to bolt upright in our pew. God would much rather have us shut down the church than to come to Him with pathetic leftovers: “*Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you,’ says the LORD of hosts.*” How would you feel today if when you came, the doors were locked and everything was sealed up tight?

God takes no pleasure in perfunctory worship. We tend to think that half-hearted devotion is better than nothing but God says that lame worship makes Him want to lock up the church. Jesus said it like this in Revelation 3:16: “*So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.*” I hope none of us are making Jesus nauseous today.

Instead of counting it a privilege to minister on God’s behalf, the priests exclaimed in verse 13, “*Oh, what a weariness!*” It’s the idea of being bored. Someone has paraphrased it this way: “*How tired we are of all this!*” Worship made them weary and was more trouble than it was worth in their minds. They even “**sneered at it,**” which means that they “puffed” or “blew” in exaggerated exasperation as they turned their noses up at Him. Would you notice that now they are not only giving the sick and the lame but also the stolen?

I imagine God looking at us and wondering why we get so bored with Him. God actually put this into a question in Micah 6:3: “*O My people, what have I done to you? And how have I wearied you? Testify to me.*” Instead of magnifying the fame of God’s name they were bringing shame on His name.

God not only wants the temple shut down but the offerer of awful stuff will be bitterly cursed in verse 14. To be cursed is to be sentenced to death. This is not an empty threat according to Deuteronomy 30:19.

What God wants from us according to Romans 12:1 is to be living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to Him. Many of us have promised to be a living sacrifice, but we’ve crawled off the altar.
God is saying that His name will be great, whether we acknowledge it or not. God told Israel that His greatness and His grace will be given to the Gentiles and that’s what’s happening right now. And, there’s a time coming when every knee will acknowledge His supremacy. Look at verse 14: “For I am a great King,’ says the Lord of Hosts, and my name is to be feared among the nations.” The quality of one’s worship is in direct proportion to one’s concept of God.

To fear God’s name means that we are filled with a reverential fear before the presence of the Almighty. The word conveys a sense of holy terror. It’s what should happen when we come into the very presence of the Thrice-Holy God. Too many of us have a sentimental grandfatherly view of God. We think he winks at our sins and settles for whatever time, talents or treasures we can give Him.

The way we use words is interesting to me. Each generation seems to have it’s own lingo. When I was in high school we used words like, hip, cool, far-out, out-of-sight, rad, and groovy – I’ve tried to bring groovy back but whenever I use it, people just stare at me and wonder where my Leisure Suit and 8-tracks are!

Words express a common understanding, and phrases serve as code words, or shortcuts. The word, Awesome has sure been used and overused – whether you’re a child of the 60’s like I am, or if you happen to be a bit younger. Awesome can refer to the weather, the Packers, a meal, a car, a song, or garlic and dill cheese curds (by me).

Friends, God alone is awesome and I should only use awesome to describe Him or His work. Sure, there are other things that I think are great, but God is the only one I should stand in awe of.

Friend, this ain’t easy to hear, but it’s time to step it up! Are you embracing an authentic faith? Have you given God priority over your possessions? Have you grasped the greatness of God? The best way to avoid mediocrity is to treasure the majesty of God. God would rather have not worship at all than for us to come with paltry praise.

LifeWay Research recently conducted a study among Millennials and published their results in a book titled, “The Millennials: Connecting to America’s Largest Generation.” Here’s what they discovered:

“Millennials are strongly connected to their parents...there is not a close second in importance...85 Percent of the Millennials look to their parents as their primary source of advice and guidance...[they]tend to follow the examples of their parents in matters of faith, but they also tend to take the level of commitment one step further.” The application is obvious to those of us who are parents or grandparents. Let’s give God our best because He deserves it and because the next generation is watching.

Check out this testimony from one of the Millennials in our church who has settled the question of spiritual authenticity and full-fledged devotion…no matter what it may cost him.
Justin Rumley Video Testimony

When I watch that, I think of what John Piper is famous for saying: “God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

It all comes down to this. If you ever get a glimpse of the greatness of God, and what Jesus has done for you, you’ll never play church again and you’ll give God your best for the rest of your life.

Have you ever noticed that there is no one more miserable than a half-hearted Christian? It’s time to surrender fully to Him right now.

Saturday Night Invitation: “Heart of Worship”
Sunday Morning Invitation: “Give us Clean Hands”