

**Intro:** Three days ago we celebrated the Thanksgiving holiday. Many of us were privileged to sit down before a bountiful table and eat like kings. God has certainly blessed us. I'd like to ask you something. Do you like leftovers? What do you do with your leftovers?

This morning, we're going to talk about "leftovers." Lots of people give their leftovers to God. I don't have in mind "leftover" food now. I'm talking about a perspective on life by which we give God what is convenient to us, and think we are doing God a favor. Let's call it "Leftover Christianity." The American Church is plagued by this "Leftover Christianity" mentality.

Have you ever wondered what God thinks of leftovers? Did you realize He tells us what He thinks of leftovers. Where? We'll find out this morning.

Today we are embarking on a new journey. We are beginning a 6-week series in a book that is vital for us. It's an Old Testament book. In fact, it is the last book in our English Old Testament. It was written by a prophet (he has been humorously called the "Italian" prophet--"MalACHi"! ). Malachi.

How can we tell if we are giving God the "leftovers" in our lives? One way is by considering what Malachi told the Jews in his day. They were guilty of giving God the leftovers. How so?

**Proposition: In Malachi 1, we are exposed to two evidences that indicate when we are giving God the leftovers in our lives.**

Two evidences of giving God the leftovers in our lives...

- I. The first evidence is when we cheapen the love of God (1-5).
- II. The second evidence is when we cheapen the worship of God (6-14).

How do we do this?

- A. It happens when we dishonor God's Name (6).
- B. It happens when we defile God's altar (7-14).
  1. By our actions
  2. By our attitudes

Conclusion: What is God's response to our leftovers?

1. He is not pleased (10).
2. His ultimatum is clear: Be authentic or be cursed (14).

**I. The first evidence is when we cheapen the love of God (1-5).**

Malachi's book begins, "The burden of the word of the LORD to Israel by Malachi." We know very little of Malachi. We know his name (it means "my messenger"). We know he ministered in a difficult time (5th century B.C.). He called his message "the burden" (translated "oracle" in NIV). His was a "heavy" message, an

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unpopular message of rebuke, a call to repentance. We also know he ministered to a people who had a very deficient view of God. How do we know that?

Notice the dialogue in v 2. God said in v 2, "I have loved you." In a real sense, this is the theme of the whole book. God loved Israel. He loved the Jewish people so much He could not tolerate their ongoing wickedness. "I have loved you," He told them. Some have said, "In the Old Testament, we see God's holiness and judgment, but in the New Testament, we see His love." But notice, even in the Old Testament, God is love. The Hebrew verb "to love" is used of God's love 32 times in the first 39 books of the Bible. God's love for Israel was unconditional and generous. Time and time again, though they rejected Him, He loved them.

Hold on to your seat when you see how the people responded to God's love. In v 2, Malachi revealed the attitude of the people, "Yet ye say, In what way hast thou loved us?" As the NIV puts it, "How have you loved us?"

Why would the Jews of Malachi's day challenge the validity of God's love? To understand, we need to sketch the backdrop of Malachi's day.

### The Setting of the Book of Malachi

The setting really goes way back to Abraham. 2000 years before Christ, God chose Abraham, and promised to make His descendants into a great nation. In 1440 B.C., God redeemed the nation of Israel, more than 2 million strong, from Egypt, and gave them the Promised Land. He told them, "Obey Me, and you'll prosper in the land. Disobey Me, and you will be forced to leave the land." For several hundred years, Israel's history was like a roller-coaster ride morally. In 722 B.C., God fulfilled His warning, and sent the northern 10 Jewish tribes into Assyrian captivity. In 586 B.C., the same thing happened to the southern kingdom of Judah, and the Jews spent 70 years in exile in Babylon. After the exile, God brought back a remnant to the Promised Land. The temple was rebuilt by Ezra (458 B.C.), and the wall around Jerusalem was rebuilt under the leadership of Nehemiah (445 B.C.). There was jubilation, but it just wasn't the same as before.

Then Malachi came on the scene (latter part of the 5th century B.C.). He served during a time of great disillusionment. Earlier prophets made great promises. Ezekiel said that after the exile, there would be miraculous fruitfulness (Ezek 34:26-30). Isaiah had said the Jews would once again become a mighty throng (Isa 54:1-3). Jeremiah had said God would raise up another great king like David (Jer 23:5-6). And Isaiah had even said that in that day, all nations would come and serve Israel (Isa 49:22-23).

But by Malachi's day, it hadn't happened that way, at least not yet. In fact, just the opposite. The land was in shambles. Only a small number of Jews had returned to the Promised Land. Though they enjoyed some freedom, the Jews still existed under the rule of Persia.

Now plug in the Jews' response in v 2. When God said, "I have loved you," the people responded, "In what way has Thou loved us?" In other words, "God, if you love us, you sure have chosen a strange way to show it." As Walter Kaiser observed (11), "When times are hard, it is difficult to believe that God loves us. All appearances seem to count against such a belief."

The Jews of Malachi's day had become "practical atheists" (Kaiser's term, 11). Oh, they gave lip-service to God. They went to the temple. They even sacrificed their lambs. They "believed" in God, but it was a formal belief, a "going-through-the-motions" belief. The God in which they believed was not REAL in their lives (as is the case of many "Zionist" Jews in Israel today. They may go to the synagogue, but all the while they are thinking, "If God exists, how could He have let the holocaust occur?")

What happens when God is not real in our lives? We stop serving Him with gladness, and start giving Him our leftovers. The evidence of that is that we develop a cheap view of His love.

We are not much different, are we? What do we do when the circumstances of life don't meet our approval? We become sarcastic towards life, even towards God. "Where are You, God? I thought You said You loved me."

How did Malachi respond to this "cheap" view of God's love? He told his people to stop feeling sorry for themselves long enough to do two things. He told them, "One, remember you're in this shape because of your sin. If God didn't love you, He wouldn't chasten you. And two, look around and you'll see the evidence of God's love." Namely, He told them to consider what was happening to their blood brothers, the Edomites.

V 2 "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" Isaac had twin sons. Which one became the son of promise? Not Esau, the older, but Jacob, the younger. Vv 2-3, "Yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau." Esau became the father of the Edomites, a people that lived east of the Promised Land. Jacob became the father of the Israelites.

Don't get hung up on the word "hate" in v 3. In what sense did God "hate" Esau? Don't read into the word the psychological overtones of our English word (not a "feeling of spite"). We get an idea of its meaning by considering Genesis 29:30-33. V 30 says that Jacob "loved" Rachel more than Leah, while vv 31, 33 describe Leah as "hated." She was hated in the sense that she came out second best in her rivalry with Rachel (Wolf, 64).

Jesus used the word "hate" in a similar way in Lk 14:26 when He said, "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children...he cannot be my disciple." What did He mean? That we should love Him MORE THAN any other person.

So the word "hate" in the Bible has to do with "ranking." As Kaiser surmises (27), "'To love' is, in effect, to prefer or be faithful to one, while 'to hate' is to slight or think less of another." It wasn't that God disdained and disliked Esau. It was that He had a higher purpose for Jacob. God loved Jacob. God chose Jacob, and privileged Him to be the Messianic line. By the way, God's choice of Jacob had nothing to do with Jacob's choice of God (for God chose Jacob before he was even born). God's love is a sovereign love, uninfluenced by anything outside of Himself.

What happened to Esau and his people the Edomites? They were a proud people, but God humbled them (read vv 3-5). God allowed Edom to be destroyed at the hand of the Nabataean Arabs between 550 and 400 B.C., never to rise again.

What's the point? Just this. If Israel doubted God's love, what she needed to do was to take a look at nations like Edom. Then she'd realize that the only reason

Israel still existed was the love of God. Other nations come and go, but Israel remains, a testimony to the faithful, love of God.

We start handing God the leftovers of our lives when we start adopting a cheap view of His love. When we start thinking, "I deserve better than I'm getting in life," we need to be reminded that God did not have to love us. Nor did He have to save us. He saved us by His grace, not our merit. God chose us, as He chose Jacob, not because we are worthy, not even because He knew we'd choose Him. The basis of His choice was His sovereign love.

You know something? It's easy to take the love of God for granted. When that happens, we start giving God the leftovers. Have you cheapened the love of God in your life? If you have, confess that sin. Cherish His love.

## **II. The second evidence is when we cheapen the worship of God (6-14).**

Actually, the message from 1:6 to 2:9 is for the priests of Israel (Malachi will confront the people in 2:10-16). But what was true of the priests was true of the people. As went the priests, so went the people. Both groups were guilty of exhibiting a cheap approach to worship.

How do we cheapen the worship of God? The priests revealed two ways.

### A. It happens when we dishonor God's Name (6).

V 6 "A son honoreth his father, and a servant his master; if, then, I be a father, where is mine honor? And if I be a master, where is my fear? saith the LORD of hosts unto you, O priests, that despise my name."

The priests and people in Malachi's name were guilty of a great crime. They dishonored the name of God. And the audacity was heightened by the fact that they were oblivious to their sin. Notice their defensiveness in v 6, "In what way have we despised Thy name?" What a self-righteous response! "Who us, guilty? In what way!"

How had they dishonored God's name? They had blasphemed the name of God. How? By their irreverent lives. They failed to give God what He deserved--honor and fear (i.e. respect). God made it clear in Moses' day what He expected of His people. He told them in Deut 10:12, "What does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways, to love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul."

God is looking for people who will give Him the reverent awe He deserves. He desires His people to take His name seriously. Giving Him our leftovers doesn't cut it.

Potential Response: "Well, that's why I don't come to church too much. I don't want to be a hypocrite like a lot of others are. I'm not going to be half-committed." Wait. Malachi is not saying that the solution is to abstain from hypocritical worship. The solution is to start worshiping God in the right way! Start honoring His Name!

How else do we cheapen the worship of God?

### B. It happens when we defile God's altar (7-14).

V 7 is incriminating evidence against the priests, "Ye offer polluted bread upon mine altar." The word "polluted" means "contaminated," and usually refers to hands or clothes stained with blood (Isa 59:3). Malachi has in mind a scene in the temple. It happened every day. He can see the priests doing their job, offering sacrifices. They knew better, but they were defiling the altar of God.

How? That's what they wanted to know. V 7 "In what way have we polluted thee?" Malachi answered, "In that ye say, The table of the LORD is contemptible." They were offering God pollution. That happens in two ways--one if the offerer is polluted, and two if the offering is polluted. Both were true. Notice v 8, "And if ye offer the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? ... the lame and sick, is it not evil?"

This is no light matter. The Jews made God's altar "contemptible" (8). It's the same word used in Dan 11:21 to describe what Antiochus Epiphanes did to the altar. Antiochus, a pagan king, did the unthinkable when he desecrated the temple by sacrificing a pig on the altar (165 B.C.). What the Jews were doing was just as bad.

You see, when it comes to worship, our God looks first at the offerer, and then at the offering. If my heart is not pure, the sermon I preach is polluted. If your heart is not pure, the solo you sing is polluted. If your heart is not pure, the offering you gave today was defiled.

How do we defile God's altar in our worship? In two ways...

### *1. By our actions*

The Jews brought, and the priests accepted unacceptable sacrifices. They offered God blind, crippled, diseased animals. That was a clear violation of God's Law (Dt 15:21). It even violated the law of common sense. Malachi charged them (NIV), "Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you?"

What was the problem? The Jews were giving God what cost them little. You see, God measures a gift by what it costs us, not by its intrinsic worth. That's why Jesus said the widow who gave the two mites gave more than the rich man (Mk 12:42). If a gift means little to us, it will mean little to God.

We wouldn't think of giving our Governor the gifts we offer God. Can you imagine sending a letter like the following to our Governor (from Kaiser, 40): "Dear Sir, Please accept this sick cow in lieu of the taxes I owe you. I trust that the old 'bag' recovers and will prove more useful to you than she has been to me. Frankly, I just can't spare anything more than this at the present time. Oh, yes, please look after those requests that I made. I trust you will be able to improve our local roads and upgrade the quality of our education. Sincerely,"

Would the government stand for such flippancy? Well, then, why should God? Especially since He is a great king (v 14)! You see, the problem wasn't that the Jews weren't giving anything to God. They were giving all right. They were giving Him the leftovers, what they didn't need and didn't want for themselves. And many of us are not much different.

A survey of U.S. workers (conducted by Robert Wuthnow of Princeton University, recorded in Leadership Journal, Winter/94, p. 89) reveals that many of us live with competing values when it comes to money. While 89% agree that "our society is much too materialistic," 84% also say, "I wish I had more money than I do."

71% believe "being greedy is a sin against God," yet 76% say, "having money gives me a good feeling about myself." Yet Jesus said, "You can't serve both God and money."

Putting a \$20 in the church offering plate may be a noble thing for a widow living on \$800 a month, but how noble is a \$20 offering for a person who just spent \$300 for a new wardrobe, \$500 for a new set of golf clubs, \$20,000 for a new car, and \$100,000 for a new house? It's not noble. It's cheating God (that's the word the NIV uses in v 14). That's not sacrificial giving, but sacrilegious giving. It's an insult to God to give Him the leftovers, what's convenient. We can defile God's altar also...

## 2. *By our attitudes*

The Jews developed an "attitude" towards the altar. We already saw from v 7 that they said the Lord's altar was "contemptible." Notice what else they said. In v 12, "The table of the Lord is polluted." And in v 13, "Behold, what a weariness it is!" Or as the NIV puts it, "What a burden!" Worship had become a burden to them!

Is it a burden for you to give God the best in your life? I'm convinced that for many of us, if we took the same attitude towards our work that we do towards the Lord's work, our boss would have fired us long ago. Is worshiping God a delight to you, or a burden? Do you come to church and serve God only if nothing else "comes up", only if it's "convenient? We cheapen worship when we have the wrong attitude.

It's easy to get hung up on the letter of the law, and miss the intent of the law. The story is told (Leadership Journal) of two Buddhist monks walking in a thunderstorm. They came to a swollen stream. A beautiful Japanese woman in a kimono stood there wanting to cross to the other side but afraid of the currents. One of the monks said, "Can I help you?" She replied, "I need to cross this stream." The monk picked her up, put her on his shoulder, carried her through the swirling waters, and put her down on the other side. He and his companion then went on to the monastery. That night his companion said to him, "I have a bone to pick with you. As Buddhist monks, we have taken vows not to look on a woman, much less touch her body. Back there at the river you did both." The other monk answered, "My brother, I put that woman down on the other side of the river. You're still carrying her in your mind." It's so easy to justify sinful thoughts and attitudes.

It's easy to excuse our "leftover" mentality.

## **Conclusion: What is God's response to our leftovers?**

### 1. He is not pleased (10).

In fact, He'd rather we shut the church doors than that we keep giving Him our leftovers (see v 10). "I have no pleasure in you!" (10)

### 2. His ultimatum is clear: Be authentic or be cursed (14).

V 14 "But cursed be the deceiver (NIV "the cheat)." Who is the cheat? The person who could give God an acceptable offering, but keeps it for himself, and gives God the leftover, instead. When I give God only the leftovers, I'm cheating Him. And when I cheat God, I'm cursing myself.

What's the solution? We need to learn to be authentic. The choice is clear. We must be authentic or be cursed. May God help us to cherish His love and worship.