

Roy's Sermon For September 18, 2022

Malachi 1:4-9 'We May Say; But It's What God Says That Matters!'

So last time when we looked at this book we saw one simple yet profound truth: That God is the Sovereign ruler of all of the universe! And that He alone is the chooser of everyone of His people. Yes He chooses some and does not choose, or indeed He rejects others! We may think God unfair, we may not be prepared to accept this truth, we may even vehemently oppose and reject it, and yet Romans 9:19-20 "One of you will say to me, Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will? But who are you O man to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, Why did you make me like this?"

Yes as hard as it is to accept, (and particularly so in this modern western world in which we live, where we are taught from an early age to assert our rights) the eternal reality is, that the only birth given right as those who have rebelled against and rejected God have) is the right to be justly cast into hell! So when God says, "I have loved you," as we saw last time this is an all-encompassing love. Meaning, that even before the world came into being He laid His eternal hand upon us through His Sovereign choice! And He explained this to Israel through his prophet Malachi by saying, Esau was Jacob's brother and yet He chose Jacob. Not because he was better than Esau, not because He knew what kind of man Jacob would become, no. It was simply because it pleased God to do so! So those of us who claim Christ as our Lord and Saviour, do so, not out of any good thing that is in us, or anything which we have done or may do, it is by one way and one way alone. That cross upon which Jesus suffered and died and rose again. "I have loved you says the Lord."

And as God continues He responds on behalf of His rebellious ungrateful people. "But you ask how have you loved us?" So there is the ingratitude, there is the contempt which Israel had shown toward God since He took them by the hand as His chosen adopted children. "You have loved us they say," well prove it! And again as we saw, God's proof is that He chose Israel, out of the whole world of humanity as His own treasured possession!

This is where we pick up the text today, Malachi 1:4-9. To which I've given the heading 'We May Say; But It's What God Says That Matters!' In v4 we read, "Edom may say 'Though we have been crushed we will rebuild the ruins.'" Friends can you see the fist being shaken at God Here? Isn't this man's classic response to Him and His truth? We feel that no matter what He says or does, we as men and women can overturn those things, because of course, we are the masters of our destiny! Now where did this all begin? Well of course in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. But perhaps the clearest example of this fist shaking is at the tower of Babel! God had told mankind in Genesis 1:28 "Be fruitful and increase in number, fill the earth and subdue it." Or in other words, go into all the corners of the world and be its keeper and caretaker, I give you authority over all of those things.

But men said- Well let's look at what they said: Genesis 11:1-4 "Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved Eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, 'Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used brick instead of stone and tar for mortar. Then they said, 'Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.'" So in effect they have and know the Command which God gave them, but they say, '*No. We are not going to do that*'. So they turn their noses up at His Word, they in effect shake their fist in the face of God, and say, '*We know what we are supposed to do, we know what Your Command is, but you cannot make us!*'

Yet brothers and sisters, we may be able to get away with these kinds of words and actions with the schoolyard bully, but not with God. Because friends, though we try, we will never have the last word with God! Genesis 11:5-9 "But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other'. So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stop building the city. That is why that place was called Babel. Because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth."

You see the descendants of Esau, (the Edomites, which is much of the Middle Eastern Muslim world today) as a people, continues to be rejected by God. And those places continue to rage with war, turmoil, and destruction. And though they continue to build their towers of Babel, God's Hand of wrath and destruction is perpetually upon them. And so it shall be until judgement day!

Yes we may say throughout our lives that we will do such and such, but it's what God says that really matters. "They will be called the wicked land, a people always under the wrath of the Lord. You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel.'" Can you see? That through Malachi God is getting Israel to expand their puny view of His power and authority. That He does not merely act over Israel, He is in fact the God of the whole world, even indeed of the whole universe! "You will see it with your own eyes," He says.

Brothers and sisters, we do need our view of God expanded at times don't we? What do you think the floods, the droughts, The Hurricanes and the cyclones, the tsunami's the earthquakes, the forest fires the pandemics are all about? They are God saying you have forgotten Me. Do you not remember who I am? Romans 1:19-20 "Since what may be known about God is plain to them. Because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse."

Yes we need to be reminded that God is in control of all of the goings on in the world, though it seems like chaos at times. Because you see, if the Universe were viewed as a vast jigsaw puzzle, under the Watch and Rule of God, there would be no piece missing! Yes "You will see with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the Lord even beyond the borders of Israel.'"

Friends, have we not seen it with our own eyes? Have we not seen the mighty structures of men's imaginations around the world crumble before His breath? Those amazing images of the great storms of the world destroying all that stands before them. Are these not the Hand of God? Well of course they are. Mankind is asleep. 'Wake up,' God is saying. Zechariah 1:3 "Therefore tell the people this is what the Lord Almighty says. Return to me says the Lord Almighty and I will return to you. Says the Lord Almighty" Yes, this was Israel's problem. They had fallen into the deep sleep of complacency and apathy. Into that sickly state of being lukewarm. It's a false form of religion, which is not worship of God at all!

Look now at how God describes this runaway and resentful child which Israel was at that time, and in truth had always been. "A son honours his father and a servant his master." This of course is the natural God given order of things. He takes it as a given that of course, "A son honours his father and a servant his master." And we might put it this way today: "*A son honours his father" and an employee his employer*". Now when we put it this way, it's very confronting isn't it? We need to be people who are always going to work hard and honestly not merely when the boss is there, but also

as though he were always there. And our reason for doing this is very simple, because we are seeking to honour God with our labour. So it doesn't matter who is there or who is not there, because God is always there. And the Bible tells us that "no matter what we do, we do it all for the glory of God." Yes of course this is how it should be but very often this is not how it is. Because very often children do not honour their parents and workers, well, they should get as much as possible for doing as little as possible.

Well at least that is what the world will tell us today. And yet that is not what the Bible teaches. That is if we would honour God with the whole of our lives. And surely that is the point which he is making here. *You profess to be My people and yet in reality you don't know me at all. "If I am a father where is the honour due me? If I am a master where is the respect due me?" I am short changed; I am robbed by you on both counts. You pay me no honour. You give me no respect. If I were but an earthly father or employer, surely you would give Me these things. And yet I am eternally so much more. But contempt is all that you pay Me!*

Yes Beloved, we must ask ourselves: What do I bring to God? Yes what do I offer within my body and soul, as my signs of devotion? As my signs of devotion to this God that I claim to worship. Do I honour God with my lips but not with my substance? Yes, do I offer up my words but not my time and my finances? When life is crashing down around me and I'm last to whom do I run? Where do I turn? You see the answers to these questions are all indicative of whether or not, as the old hymn goes, *God is my strength and my refuge my ever present help in trouble; therefore I will not fear, that the earth should change.*

Again, can you see what God is doing here? He's confronting the Israelites, and you and me as well, with the question: *where is the evidence of your devotion? You receive all of your good things from my hand and yet with what, and indeed how do you repay me?* And now he strikes, as Jesus would do on many occasions, at the religious elite of the day. Or perhaps we might say the religiously privileged today! Now this is very important for us in Australia today to understand. You see, though we might not be priest in the Old Testament sacrificial sense, we certainly are in this country those of tremendous privilege and freedom. we have such abundant access to the word of God. Yes we are the religiously privileged. And indeed Revelation 5:10 says, "You have made them to be a Kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." So we are indeed the religiously privileged. Because there are bibles everywhere on offer if we would but pick them up and read them! "It is you O priest who show contempt for my name." So those who should have been the leaders, who should have been the examples to lead others in the ways of God, they were indeed leaders, but they were the leaders of wickedness and lip service. And yet again God answers for them, as they deny their actions. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' And God answers for them, "You place defiled food on my altar."

Now we need to remind ourselves what the sacrificial system was all about. When the Old Testament people of God transgressed His law, as He set out in the book of Leviticus, there were set requirements spelled out for each and every sin, whatever that scene may be. So bread, wine, grain, birds or animals were to be offered up as sacrifices to make atonement for those transgressions, (those breakages) of God's law. And when it came to the animals in regard to sin, (and this is extremely important) every animal had to be in perfect health. Not sick, not diseased, not blind, not three legged, not of mixed colours. Or in other words, these animals had to be pure!

Now note that an animal can be impure, it can't sin it's an animal. But to look at it with regard to health and colour it must be perfect. And for very good reason. Because these things all pointed to Jesus, that spotless Lamb of God! In 1 Peter 1:17-19 we read: "Since you call on a father who judges

each man`s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.” Because never, and may I repeat never, could any animal sacrifice ever pay for any sin, no matter how insignificant we may think that sin is. And remember, one sin without Christ’s Blood, will cast ask into hell! Romans 3:12 “For all have turned away they have together become corrupt there is no one who does good, not even one.” And Romans 3:23 “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

So for these priests then, with full knowledge of the significance of those sacrifices, “though they did not know as we do that these things pointed to Jesus) to treat the table of the Lord in such a manner and with such contempt, was to in effect spit, into the very face of God. Remember, this was the means by which they received cleansing of sin, as God had prescribed it!

So two things become clear here. If they had such contempt for those sacrifices which had been painstakingly prescribed by Him, they obviously had contempt for God. And if those sacrifices meant nothing to them, then neither did their sin! “You place defiled food on my altar, but you ask how have we defiled you? By saying that the Lord`s table is contemptible.” And this had been a problem for the Israelites for 1000 years! Listen to Numbers 11:4-6 “The rabble with them began to crave other food, and again the Israelites started wailing and said, ‘If only we had meat to eat. We remember the fish we ate in Egypt at no cost, also the cucumbers, melons, leaks, onions and garlic. But now we have lost our appetite, we never see anything but this manna.” So it is no wonder that they had such contempt for God's sacrifices, when the very bread which He miraculously sent down from heaven to sustain them in the wilderness, for 40 years, they had so despised. And of course, that is also what they would do with Jesus who was the true bread, the real thing, to which that manner, and all of the sacrifices had pointed!

In John 6:44-51, we read: “No one can come to me unless the father who sent me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who listens to the father and learns from him comes to me. No one has seen the father except the one who is from God, only he has seen the father. I tell you the truth, he who believes has ever everlasting life, I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manner in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I give for the life of the world.” So again I say, that those religiously privileged ones, the so called teachers, those grand pooh-bas of their day, had contempt not only for God's table and sacrifices, ultimately it was that they had contempt for God Himself!

Look at what he says in verse 8, “When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor, would he be pleased with you? Says the Lord almighty.” Now I've already mentioned more than once why such things were so wrong in the sight of God, because such a fail stain they had placed upon the cross of Jesus. But secondly here, and may I suggest which is also of tremendous importance, (and I say this respectfully Lord) is that they were a clear indication and reflection upon the heart of the giver and in this case, those priests who were the administrators of God's justice at his alter and table! “Is that not wrong?” “Is that not wrong?” So when confronted with the truth of their actions, do they actually think that such things have been hidden from God? How clear it is, that as a whole, they have nothing of Him in their hearts. These priests have become nothing but glorified butchers. And the significance of all that they were doing, (supposedly in the Name of God) was nothing but a distant memory to them! Were it to their governor, God`s own appointed servant,

they would not dare to be so lacking in their duties. And yet to God Himself, well who cares? *He doesn't really know what's going on down here anyway.* But how wrong they were. Even a small bird doesn't fall to the ground anywhere in the world without Him knowing and authorising it!

Brothers and sisters we can be like that can't we? We can call ourselves Christians and yet live our lives as though God were way out in the universe, and not impacting or relevant to our lives at all. We can talk about heaven and yet live in a manner as though it isn't real, even as though it was some kind of fairy story. But the question for us today is this. If Romans 12:1-2 says "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, his good, pleasing and perfect will" then what am I actually offering up to God within my soul, my life, my body, upon that spiritual altar on which Jesus suffered and died? Am I offering up my all to Him, my Saviour and my God? Seeking to honour Him with my lips as well as with my substance. Praying, 'Here I am Lord do with me as you see fit. Use all of me for your glory. Everything I am and have is yours!' Or is my life full of blind and diseased animals? Does my life consist of a lukewarm sickly nothingness spiritually, as with the people in Laodicea. Is there nothing, yes are there no marks, which distinguish me and my life from the rest of the world who doesn't know Jesus at all?

Beloved that is the question. Is my faith in God, His Son and Holy Spirit, real or not? For these priests, it was simply a way of making a living. It was a good career move. Because it was easier than hauling rock or begging for a living. Life was easy, life was comfortable and warm, and cosy, and that was their problem. And for us dear friends, that is the danger! Romans 12:1 "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship." Yes we may say that we will do this or we will do that as did those priests. But it is what God says that matters! Let's pray!