

**Series: Return to the Lord**  
**“Despising God’s Name”**

**Malachi 1:1-14**

Have you ever been lost and unable to find your way home? I don’t know if there is anything more frightening and more alarming than feeling completely lost. I remember many years ago when I was in middle school, getting lost in a very bad way. My dad was out of town one weekend, and I was responsible for taking care of all the animals. We had sheep, chickens, and rabbits at the time. I remember, on a particular Saturday evening, checking on the sheep to make sure that they were all ok. I suddenly realized that several of our sheep were missing. I walked through the field looking for any sign of foul play and found none. So, I decided to walk the fence line. Once I made it to the far corner of the field, I noticed an area where there was a large gap in the fence, and I saw some wool gathered there at the fence. It was obvious that the sheep had gotten out of the fence and they were now on a farm that literally consisted of hundreds of acres of woods. I remember that it was getting dark, but I convinced myself that I had enough time to find them. I went through those woods calling out for the sheep. One by one I found them and brought them back to the fence and lifted them over. However, I was still missing one sheep. I remember going throughout those woods. I remember at one point becoming nervous. It was getting really dark, and I was losing sight of the trails that I had wandered down. I convinced myself that I would look for just five more minutes. Somehow 5 minutes turned to 15 minutes and before I knew it was so dark that I could hardly see my hand in front of my face. Once I stopped moving and looking for the sheep, I began to take note of my surroundings. Suddenly everything looked unfamiliar. I started to walk down various trails, but moment by moment it became obvious that I was lost. I didn’t mean to get into this predicament. I should have paid better attention. I didn’t anticipate being there. I began to panic. I literally didn’t know what direction to go or how far I had to go to find my way back home. I don’t know if you have ever been there. I began to pray desperately. I began making deals with God. I would have given just about anything in that moment to be in the comfort of my own house, enjoying fellowship with my family. I wanted nothing more than to just be safe at home. I slowly and cautiously began walking in a direction that seemed right to me. As I walked, I tried to listen closely. There was a road in front of our house, and I knew that if I could hear a car driving by it would tell me the direction to go. I walked and finally heard a car and kept pursuing that direction. I began walking faster in that direction. Before too long, I will never forget walking through those woods and seeing through the trees that there was a hazy light from a pole. As soon as I saw that light I rejoiced because I knew that light. It was a light that was located right beside my treehouse. I kept walking and eventually came to the fence. I was now probably 300 yards further down than the place where I had entered. I climbed the fence, walked through the field and made my way home. Words cannot express the joy and the relief that I felt when I finally had returned home.

I share this story today because I believe that this is where many people are spiritually today. Many have been distracted by all the temptations, pressures, and pursuits of this world. Most of us think that we are fine and that we have everything under control. Then suddenly one day we open our

eyes and realize that we are completely lost. We may feel hopeless or maybe even helpless. We may have fear or anxiety that grips us. I believe what God is wanting to show us today from the book of Malachi is that He wants us to return home. He wants us to return to Him. In fact, He has done everything possible to enable this to happen. He doesn't leave us alone to figure things out on our own. He has given us His Word and His Holy Spirit to guide us back to Him. So, today, we begin a study through the book of Malachi called "Return to the Lord."

Show Text

I don't know if you have ever read the book of Malachi or ever heard a sermon from it. It isn't the most popular passage of Scripture, but there is much that we can learn from it today. Malachi was a prophet of God. His name literally means "My Messenger." God raised him up to address some specific things with God's people. He wrote between 440 and 400 B.C. Frankly, the message that God gave him is every bit as true for us today as it was for the people of his day. Malachi lived and ministered at the same time as Nehemiah. Perhaps you remember in the Old Testament that the Israelites had spent many years in bondage in Babylon. God delivered them from this bondage and released them to go back to Jerusalem to rebuild the city that had been destroyed. God raised up Nehemiah to lead the rebuilding of the walls. By the time Malachi wrote, the people had also rebuilt the temple. From man's perspective, these should have been good days. They were days of great success and victory. From our evaluation, we would look and see a lot of good work being done for God, a lot of good religious activity, and we would likely assume that all was well. However, God raised up Malachi to speak into the things that He saw. The people didn't fully realize it yet, but they were lost and separated from God's power and God's blessings. God raised up Malachi to reveal the truth and to call the people to return to Him. Beginning today, we are going to identify four sins that the people were committing against God. We start today with the fact that the people despised and ridiculed God's name.

Let me ask you this morning, do you despise God? What do you think of when you think of the word "despise"? The word "despise" literally means "to hate, to scorn, to ridicule, to disrespect." Perhaps when you think of the word "despise" you think of things like hypocrisy or politics or drama amongst people. Some might say they despise work or hot, humid weather. There are many things that we might say we despise. But do you despise God? Do you hate God? Now, I realize that there is probably not anyone here today that is so brazen that they would admit to that, but in our text this morning God says there are some that despise Him. Who despises God? How do you know whether or not you despise God? What is the evidence of one who despises God? The answer will likely surprise you, but let's look together at the verses as they unfold.

### **I. What they lost sight of (vs. 1-5)**

I have never known anyone who set out on their life with the goal of despising God. However, I have known some who have become so bitter, angry, and hateful that it is clear that they despise God. How does someone get to this point? I believe that despising God's name begins in a simple, subtle, but serious way. Despising God's name begins the very moment we lose sight of God's love for us.

We have all known what it is like to forget something. Perhaps we have forgotten a meeting that was scheduled, where we last saw something or where we placed the keys. As we age, we might call them “senior moments.” I have more of these than I want to admit. We all know what it’s like to forget some things, but there is Someone that we must never forget. We must never get so busy and so distracted and so out of tune with reality that we forget God and His great love for us. That is exactly where the people of Malachi’s day had gone wrong. They had forgotten God’s love.

God gave Malachi a specific word for His people that starts like a simple love letter. He says, “I have loved you says the Lord.” Now, all throughout Scripture we see that love doesn’t define God, but God defines love. His very nature is love. Everything about Him expresses His love. All throughout the Word His love is revealed because that is Who He is. He is LOVE. To the Jews of Malachi’s day, He clearly states, “I have loved you.” \*ILL: These well-known words, have been quoted by many. We long to hear the words “I love you” and we long to express them sincerely to another. I still remember to this day the first time that Heather looked into my eyes and said, “I love you.” Well, here is a special moment for the Israelites. God is reminding them clearly that He loves them. In **Jeremiah 31:3** He had told them, “I have loved you with an everlasting love; Therefore, I have drawn you with lovingkindness.” What a joy it is to be loved by Almighty God! Not only had God told them this, but He had also demonstrated it in countless ways throughout their lives and history. As soon as God expressed His love for His people, we would think that they would be quick to acknowledge their privileged position. Of all the nations of the earth they had been chosen by God. He had sovereignly placed His love upon them. Surely, they would be grateful to God for the compassion that He has shown them. Sadly, however, that isn’t at all what they do. After all that God had done for them, they responded by saying, “In what way have You loved us?” They were questioning God’s love for them. How about you this morning? Are you questioning God’s love for you? It is the first step to despising God’s name.

Why did they doubt God’s love? Because they were a distracted and self-focused people. They were distracted by their own trials and temptations and lost sight of all that God had done. They certainly had their share of trials and circumstances. Even as they outwardly served the Lord, they faced some hardship. It seems that by our human nature we tend to dwell on the negative and forget the positive. “Why did this happen to me? How could God do this to me? If God is love, then how could HE allow this to happen? If God is so good and loving, then why am I struggling?” These are questions that we might ask. These are questions that we hear asked in counseling on a regular basis. The problem with this is that when this is our focus, we aren’t focused on the promises of God or the many blessings of God. Instead, we are focused on ourselves – our trial, our injustice, our suffering, etc. We get so discouraged and so defeated in the circumstances that we can begin to have a “What have you done for me lately mentality?” God says, “I love you,” and they ask, “How have you loved us?” because they were so distracted by their difficulties that they were blinded from seeing the truth.

I look at them and I wonder, “Guys, what is going on? How could you forget God’s love for you? Many times we try to interpret love based upon the emotions, the feelings, the goosebumps. God’s love may cause you to be emotional, but His love has been demonstrated through absolute clear emphatic actions. As I think of the Israelites, I wonder, “Had they already forgotten how God had

led them out of Egypt to go to the promise land? Had they already forgotten how God had given them victory over all of the enemies in that land? Had they already forgotten how they wanted a king, so God anointed a man to be king? Had they already forgotten, how after they were taken into captivity in Babylon that God provided a way out for them? Had they already forgotten that God allowed them to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the temple? Had they already forgotten that God had provided them all the resources that they needed?” God had done so many things in their life, but they had forgotten all the wonderful things He had done in them and for them. I encourage you, don’t forget the ways that God has shown His love for you. Don’t forget the way that He has provided for you and the special times that He has led you. They are evidences of His love for you. Because they forgot His love for them, they became spiritually apathetic. Instead of focusing on God, His will for their lives, and His many blessings they instead seem to be focused on all the temporary things. They began to doubt God, and their lives began to be characterized by disobedience. In fact, the rest of Malachi goes on to explain the many ways that they had strayed, but make no mistake about it, the basis for it all was they forgot and neglected the love of God.

## II. Who they Loved (vs. 6-14)

Over the next few weeks we will see how forgetting God’s love manifested itself in their lives, but we see the first result in verses 6-14. When we lose sight of God’s love for us, it usually first manifests in the way that we worship the Lord. Because the people had lost their passion for God, they became spiritually apathetic and lethargic. They had an outward appearance of Godliness, but they had no real heart behind their action. They didn’t realize that their actions said far more than they could have ever imagined. See, outwardly they said, “I’m religious. I love God. I do good.” However, as always, God saw their hearts. He knew exactly what was going on. He called for them to love Him. **Deuteronomy 6:4-5** says, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” However, their worship showed that they didn’t love God supremely. Instead, who they really loved was themselves. We see this in the way that they tried to worship God in their own way with their own rules. They claimed that they were worshiping God, but we see from these verses that they were really serving and worshiping themselves. They valued their comforts and desires over the obedience that God was calling them to. In this short book it becomes obvious that their worship was worthless, their love for others was missing, their faithfulness to their spouses was nonexistent, their giving the Lord was neglected, just to name a few. This was the same people that had obeyed the Lord and rebuilt the temple under Haggai’s leadership. This was the same people that had recently rebuilt the city walls of Jerusalem under the leadership of Nehemiah. I remind us this morning that we might think we can hide sin from others, and we may even hide it from ourselves, but we can’t hide it from God. God knew all about it and sent Malachi to address the real issue.

We see who they really loved in three specific ways:

### A. By What they Said (vs. 7, 12-13a)

The priests and the people of Malachi’s day had begun to see the Lord’s work – worship, service, sacrifices, giving – as a bother and an inconvenience. We learn this through their

words and expressions. Instead of counting it a privilege to worship God, to bring their offerings, to serve God, or even to minister to one another, they exclaimed, “What a bother!” **Verse 7** shows that they literally said that the work was to be “despised.” **Verse 12** says that they looked at the fruit of the offerings and were disgusted by it. Then **verse 13** summarizes their perspective. They looked at the call to love God and worship Him and said, “How tiresome it is!” It was more trouble than it was worth in their minds. They even “disdainfully sniffed at it,” which means that they “huffed” and “puffed” in exaggerated exasperation. Now, they were outwardly going to the temple, praying and even offering sacrifices, but the Bible says that man speaks out of the abundance of the heart. Their words revealed the condition of their heart. They were insincere in their worship, and, as a result, it became a great burden to them. God actually put this into a question in **Micah 6:3-4**, “My people, what have I done to you, and how have I wearied you? Answer me. Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery...” In other words, we must remember what God has done for us and rejoice at the privilege that is to worship Him. Those who see serving God and worshiping Him as a burden demonstrate that they clearly do not understand all that He has done for them. Sadly, they saw the Lord’s work as a tedious chore, but friend, I want to remind you that all empty religion is a tedious chore. When God’s work is born out of our relationship with Him then it is fulfilling, life-giving and joy-filled no matter what challenges are faced. When we realize the extent of the sacrifice that Jesus gave for us in giving His life for us, there is nothing that should seem tiresome to us. If He would willingly give His life for us, then why should we be willing to give anything less for Him.

Now, please hear me this morning, I am not saying that if you get tired in the work of the Lord then your worship is worthless. Anyone who has served the Lord wholeheartedly, for any period of time, understands that you can become tired and you can need some rest and refreshment. That is especially true when you are serving with little support. If you have one person serving and serving and serving without the support and help of the body, then that one person is going to be exhausted. The “tiresome” here is referring to the overwhelming bother that one might feel to the work of the Lord and thus to the Lord Himself. Friend, may we never forget the great undeserved privilege we have to know and serve the Lord! Let me ask you, “What is your attitude towards attending worship gatherings on Sunday mornings? What is your attitude towards giving to the Lord generously? What is your attitude towards serving the Lord and contributing to His work? Your words and attitudes towards these things reveal far more about your spiritual condition than you might realize. In their case, it showed that they valued their own comforts over the worship of God.

#### **B. By What they Gave (vs. 8, 13b-14)**

We recall this morning the sacrifices of the Old Testament. In order for sins to be atoned, there had to be a sacrifice of an animal. The sacrifice was a very vivid image of the cost of one’s sin and was a statement of faith that they were awaiting the Lamb of God Who would come to take away the sins of the world. Because these sacrifices were made in faith

concerning the coming Savior, God had very specific laws for the sacrifices. **Leviticus 22** tells us all that they needed to know. **Verse 2**, “Tell Aaron and his sons to be careful with the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to Me, so as not to profane My holy name; I am the Lord... **vs 19-22**, “for you to be accepted (when you make a sacrifice) it must be a male without defect from the cattle, the sheep or the goats. Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it will not be accepted for you. When a man offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord to fulfill a special vow or a for a freewill offering, of the herd or of the flock, it must be perfect to be accepted; there shall be no defect in it. Those that are blind or fractured or maimed or having a running sore or eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the Lord, nor make of them an offering by fire on the altar of the Lord.” Why was God so specific? **First because He deserves only our best**, therefore we must not give Him the leftovers. **Second, because this was all a picture of the sacrifice that He would send in the future, His perfect Son**, without spot or blemish who would give His own life as a sacrifice for our sins. God’s command and will was clear. But, by the time we get to the people of Malachi’s day what do we read in **verse 7-8**? The priests were accepting the very sacrifices that God said He would reject. They were offering the ones that weren’t worth anything. They were only offering God what they themselves didn’t want anyway. **\*\*ILL:** Imagine the parade of diseased animals limping and stumbling blindly toward the Temple. Some of them probably collapsed even before they got there! God asks them twice, “Is this not evil?” God made it very clear that He was not interested in half-hearted sacrifices. He wasn’t interested then, and He isn’t interested in them today either. The people didn’t seem to have a problem with it. In fact, when God confronts them and says, “You have despised My name,” they don’t receive it and repent. Instead they ask, “How God? How have we done you wrong? Prove yourself.” The people showed that they were more concerned with keeping what they had 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 still wanted to “worship” (probably for the good feeling it gave them or the good appearance it presented), but they were unwilling to give anything of value. They had accepted mediocrity in their lives, and their leaders did nothing about it. God gave a simple illustration. He said, “Go offer it to your governor. See if he will be pleased with it.” They knew better than to do that. You offer the best to those who are in positions of authority. The bottom line, though, is they thought God didn’t care what they did. They rationalized and justified their compromise. They said, “Well, we didn’t give our best to God, but at least we gave something. We didn’t really worship wholeheartedly or sacrificially or even joyfully, but at least we went through the motions. We came, said our prayer, gave a gift, and that is good enough.” That’s what they thought, but friend, God will not settle for worship that is all about us, our comforts, our conveniences, or our wants. This causes us to look at our lives and ask, “Are we giving our best to the Lord? What are we doing with the time we’ve been given? Are we giving it to the Lord? With our talents and abilities what are we giving to the Lord? With our treasures and resources are we giving our best to the Lord? The question is not do we serve, give, and offer our time to the Lord? The question is, “Are we giving God our best?” I can’t answer that question for you but God can. He already knows!

### C. What they Asked (vs. 9)

Here is one of the key ways that we see that their worship was really all about themselves. What we ask of God reveals a great deal of our spiritual condition. In their case, here is what we see. They have come to the temple but complained about the burden that it was. They have offered their diseased and defiled offerings that they didn't even want anyway, and then they ask something of God. They ask for God's favor that He may be gracious to them. In other words, they are doing all of this outward work for the sole purpose of hoping that God would bless them. They gave their half-hearted burden, but they wanted God's wholehearted blessing. They gave their meager scraps but expected God's magnificent supply. They didn't say it out loud, but their actions were basically saying, "God, we want to do as little as we can for you, but we expect you to do as much as you can for us." Their request shows that they didn't really go to the temple to worship God. They didn't offer their sacrifices because they recognized their sins and their need for His grace. They didn't go to the temple with a cheerful heart or a willing spirit, rejoicing over all that God had already done for them and believing God for what He was going to do. They showed that their motivation for it all is that they were there to get out of it what they wanted. They were there for their own goosebumps, not for the glory of God.

### III. What they Learned (vs. 9-14, 2:1-2)

It's easy to see, here, how both the priests and the people felt about the cost of obeying the Lord. "It costs too much time to sacrifice the animals and prepare the table. It costs too much money for the people to bring the best of their flocks and herds as a sacrifice. It costs too much of my ability to keep doing all of this." To be sure when you are doing the work of the Lord there is always a cost. In churches when the Lord puts an opportunity before us to do something – a special event, build a building, etc. – someone inevitably asks the question, "How much is this gonna cost? Here's the ultimate answer, "If God is truly leading us to do something, then the cost of obedience is far less than the cost of disobedience." Disobedience always costs far more than obedience. Go ask Jonah, go ask Lot's wife, go ask Abraham about Ishmael, etc. See, the priests and the people were looking at what it would cost them to bring God, and completely ignorant about how God saw it. I'll finalize this message with three things that God revealed to them that day:

#### A. The Worthlessness of their worship (vs. 9-10)

Clearly, the overarching tone of this passage is that this group was going through the motions and their worship had become worthless. Is your worship worthless? To worship means that we are to surrender all that we are to the Lord for His glory. In fact, the latin word that we get the word "worship" from means "worth ship". It means that we worship God by demonstrating His worth to us. This happens, when we by faith give our best to God. It is important to note this morning that anyone's worship can become worthless. It doesn't matter how long you have professed Christ, how long you've served as a leader, how long you've been preaching etc. Anyone can be guilty of the things that we read today. Notice how severe God's displeasure was. God says, basically, "I wish that one of you would get up and close the temple doors altogether. If you aren't going to truly worship

Me and give Me your best, then quit playing games and faking it. Just close your doors. I'd rather the doors be closed than for you to keep despising Me by going through these vain, lifeless, worthless rituals." They were like the church of Laodicea. Jesus said, "I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot. So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. Because you say, 'I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,' and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked." **Revelation 3:15-17** What is God saying? He is saying, "Quit playing games. Open the doors and truly worship Me or just close them and quit wasting my time and sinning against Me."

### **B. The Worth of God (vs. 11, 14)**

Notice what God reminds them of. Their worship wasn't to be about themselves and what they were wanted to bring and offer. Their worship should be about Who He is and What He is worthy of. Our question in worship shouldn't be, "What do I want to do? What do I feel like offering? What can I get out of this?" Our question should be, "What does He deserve? What can I bring to offer to the Lord? What would demonstrate my love and devotion to Him? God reminds them that he is not some simple leader or a governor. He is not mere man. In Verse 11 He says, "My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is PURE; for My name will be great among the nations." Then in verse 14 He says, "I am a great King,' says the Lord of hosts, 'and my name is feared among the nations.'" In other words, their actions or inactions would never change the fact that He is God, that He is worthy of all praise and adoration and that His glory would be revealed to the ends of the earth. All creation would give Him praise and declare His majesty. They could choose to praise Him while there was grace and compassion, or they could reject and one day declare His greatness in judgment, but God would be praised among all the nations.

### **C. The Will of God (3:7)**

We didn't get to this verse today, but this is the key text of the entire book of Malachi. Had the people dishonored God? Absolutely! Had the people made worship all about themselves? Of course. Were the people living a vain, lifeless outward religion? Yep. I bet God sure wanted to judge them. I bet God was fed up. Don't you? Well, actually, God is such a God of love, grace and patience, notice what His will is. In **Malachi 3:7a** God said this, "From the days of your father you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me and I will return to you."

There are some of us here today, who need to hear that. We have been straying. We have grown cold in our relationship with Him. We have forgotten His love for us and we have settled for a worship that is all about us. What does God say? He says, "Come home. Return to me." God's will is not a list of actions and works that you must achieve. He simply calls us to repent and return to Him. If this is your need, I invite you, I urge you, please return to the Lord today!