

"I Am A Great King, Says The Lord Of Hosts"

Call to Worship: Isaiah 40:12-26

1st Scripture: Genesis 4:1-16

2nd Scripture: Malachi 1

Hymn Insert- *Here I am to Worship*

Hymn Insert- *Shout to the Lord!*

Hymn #13- *O Worship the King!*

Introduction:

We can learn a lot from children, can't we? In both positive and negative ways, we can draw important principles and applications from the way in which a child relates to his/her parents. In one very significant sense, our Lord Jesus speaks positively of the way in which a child expresses total trust in, and dependence upon, his parents. And this type of trust and dependence illustrates well, the type of trust and dependence, which a Christian ought to have toward his/her God. We are to trust not in our own naturally fallen and wicked hearts; we are to lean not on our own finite, distorted understanding, but rather, in a child-like way, we are to lay our confidence completely at the feet of our Heavenly Father.

But, there are also negative things, which we can learn from children, as well, aren't there, which sadly, we find traces of, in our own hearts...at least if we are honest. We don't naturally like to admit this, but truth be told, there are times, in which, we act like children. And this is most predominantly the case, when dealing with matters of discipline. Discipline hurts; it is good for all of us, but it stings pretty bad at times, and we don't always respond to it favorably, do we? We all have heard of, and most of us have probably either stated or heard (or both) the following response to a parent's discipline: "You hate me! That is all! You don't care about me or love me! You spanked/punished me because you hate me! You wish I was dead!" Yes, we have seen it in the movies, we have seen it in other homes, we have said things like this to our parents, and if you have children, more than likely, you have heard something like this come from their lips, when responding to your loving discipline. Well, though all "grew up" now, is this not the way, that we are at least tempted to respond (if we have not directly responded in this way) to God, during the times in which He lovingly chastises us? Now, notice that I did not say, "painlessly," but "lovingly." Generally, discipline is painful, and at times, very painful and agonizing, but Hebrews 12 teaches us, and usually after the fact we realize, that God exercises all discipline toward His children, in love!

Well, the Book of Malachi, opens up with this kind of a scenario. While our primary focus will be on verses six and following, the first five verses are essential to the overall context of the rest of the chapter. And so, I will try to summarize the idea of what is being expressed here. First, it is worth noting that Malachi prophesied sometime during the time of Ezra/Nehemiah, following the return of the exiled Israelites, from out of Babylon. In fact, a significant period of time has probably passed, and if you recall, at the end of the Book of Nehemiah, the Israelites were already beginning to turn back to their former sins; sins, which had led to their former exile, in the first place. They had begun to intermarry again, with the surrounding pagan peoples, the Levites were being neglected (as to the portions that were to be given to them, so that they were forced to labor outside of the Temple), buying and selling was taking place on the Sabbath, and a foreign enemy was given a place to dwell *inside* one of the Temple storehouses!

Nehemiah's Book, ends with reforms taking place, under his disciplinary care, as he had returned. Remember, he was King Artaxerxes's cupbearer, and he was to return to the king, after helping the Jews rebuild the wall of Jerusalem. Well, following his return, corruption had already begun to settle in, and by the time you get to the end of Nehemiah (the last historical, Scriptural recording of God's dealings with the nation of Israel--in Israel), you get the sure sense that things are going to get real bad, yet again. There is this urgent and desperate sense that things will only improve (in any permanent sense), when Messiah comes! The Old Testament leaves us with that sense, does it not? All along, we are left longing for the Christ to come, to fix mankind's disastrous mess! And then, several years later, we come to the New Testament, and we find our suspicions to be correct. Israel is far astray; the spiritual/political scene is desperately marred, the priesthood is corrupt, Rome is running the show...but, "unto us a Child is born!" "Hope comes!"

Well, in our text in Malachi, clearly, the strain of corruption has already begun to deeply permeate the Israelite nation, once again. And God has, in some way, chastised His people. They lacked the blessings they once had, and rather than look within their own hearts, to see how they have drifted away from a true and sincere worship of God, like little children, they complained against God. "God doesn't love us! Look at how He has treated us! This just isn't fair!" Malachi addresses this attitude of complaint, coming from the people, first, by showing very clearly how God has indeed loved Israel in a very unique and particular way. And then, secondly, he turns the arrow upon their own hearts, exposing the fact that they were the ones,

who in fact, failed to love God, which is the cause of the very discipline that they were presently enduring.

I. God's Love Defended [Read verses 1-5]

And so, here we find the Lord proclaiming His love to Israel, only to receive the shocking response of, "In what way have you loved us?" Talk about being "short sighted!" "Lord, how have you loved us?" Again, here we find that childish response coming from Israel, as they fail to acknowledge the obvious. And so, God responds by proving His love to them, by the way in which He has uniquely dealt with them, among the nations. And he uses the example of Jacob and Esau, the father's of Israel and Edom (respectively), to make His case.

And, in essence, He says, "Look, there were two brothers even from the same womb, Jacob (your father) and Esau (his brother). And while I have not loved Esau, indeed I have loved Jacob. Both were naturally corrupt, but before either was born, I have chosen to set my love upon Jacob. And this has carried over to the children of both. Indeed, while I have punished you, Israel, it was only for a time, to bring you back to Me. I have shown you grace. I have restored you; I have disciplined you unto restoration. But such is not the case for your brother Esau. I have destroyed Esau and his land; I have made it desolate, but I have no intention of restoring him. They will not receive the grace, which you have received; indeed, while both of you have committed horrible atrocities, which have offended My holiness, I have only restored you. For Jacob, I have loved, and Esau, I have hated. Both have received judgment, but only one has been restored, because my judgement upon you, Oh Israel, was restorative in nature. My covenant and My promises are with you, and not Esau; indeed, not with any other nation. And so, behold My sincere love for you!"

Now brethren, before we move on to see how God exposes the real problem, namely, Israel's lack of love for God, consider a very relative principle here for us, especially as we would ever question God's love for us, because He chastises us or removes some form of temporal comfort from us, for a time.

Consider brethren, that God's unique love for Israel, at the national level, is a mere shadow of His eternal love for us (for all, who are set apart in Christ). Indeed, God showed love to the nation of Israel in many ways; they had the oracles, they had the Temple and the sacrifices (which all foreshadowed Christ), they had the prophets, they had the physical Promised Land; indeed, God was with them in a special and unique way. But even then, not all *physical* Israel

was true *spiritual* Israel. Many, who received the physical benefits of being an Israelite, yet perished in their sins, sharing only the physical lineage of Abraham, and not the faith of Abraham. But brethren, we who are in Christ, have received infinitely more, haven't we? We have been chosen from before the foundation of the world, in Christ, to be among God's chosen elect; the few, who will be rescued from the guilt and power of sin, only to be conformed into the image of the Lord Jesus Christ! We have been adopted unto an inheritance that is eternal and which could never be defiled by the corruption of sin and evil. We have been redeemed by the shed blood of Christ, and none of that; no part of our salvation is thanks to us! It is all of God's work, according to the mysterious purposes of His sovereign will in election, and unto the praise of His great glory and grace! We have been given the most profound and the most precious and valuable privilege in existence. We have been chosen unto an eternal inheritance, being wholly delivered from the defilement of our sins; brands, plucked from the fires of hell, separated from our natural family in Adam, having been brought into the everlasting light of Christ!

And can we ever, ever complain, or question God's love for us, when He deprives us of any physical benefit or comfort, all in the process of forming His Son in us? Can we solicit sympathy and hand out invitations to our pity parties, the whole time portraying the illusion that somehow, God has given us the short end of the stick, in light of so glorious a salvation? Now brethren, I am not saying that there is no place for sympathy, especially in so far as it relates to suffering, but to complain against God; to question God's love for us, when circumstances become difficult and challenging, ought not to be. There is no material loss so great in this world, which amounts to a day's fraction of joy, to be had in the presence of Christ, in glory! Remember, most, by far, the exceedingly large majority, are going to hell, brethren! But you have been chosen for grace! Jacob's sons are few, but Esau's pervade the world!

II. Israel's Love Questioned [Read verses 6-16]

God has given His defense, by reminding Israel of the unique and particular love He has had for them, sparing them from the just desserts given Esau, while restoring them unto a good divine purpose. But now, notice how God turns the tables on them, showing that they are the ones, who have in fact, left their first love!

For the sake of time, brethren, let me give a summation of the major argument given here, by God. What is God saying here? In essence, He is saying, "Look, it is customary and expected for a son to honor his father, and a servant, his master. You all have no problem

understanding that. You go to great lengths, seeking to emphasize such principles of respect and reverence, as you lead your families...and rightly so. But that being the case, what about Me? If I am your God and Father; and if I am your Master, then is there not a measure of respect and reverence, which ought to be shown Me? Children are not to be careless with their parents, nor are servants to be casual with their masters...why then would you approach Me in a careless and casual fashion?"

And then, God moves on to show specifically *how* they consistently approach Him in an irreverent fashion. And the essence of the argument centers upon the quality of the offerings, which they were offering on God's altar. Remember, they were to offer the best of their animals, as sacrifices to God. The animals were to be without blemish, without spot, without defect; they were to look perfect and spotless. Living in an agricultural society, such an offering ought to have been among the coveted best, given freely as an offering to God.

But, what were they doing? They were offering God, defiled and blemished sacrifices. Rather than giving the best, which they were called to do, they were offering lame animals, sick animals, blind animals, stolen animals, and whatever was convenient, seeking to merely roll through the motions of keeping God's ceremonial law, in a careless and contemptible way.

Now brethren, what is the main problem with this? I mean, is God really that concerned about animals, and animal offerings? No. There are many things wrong with this, such as the symbolic importance of the unblemished animal, foreshadowing the coming perfection of Christ, the recognition of pure perfection alone, atoning for sin...etc. However, I want to emphasize one major problem here, which rests at the heart of this particular context, namely, this: The type of offerings, which the people had offered, were reflective of the condition of their hearts. In other words, brethren, in offering anything less than the best, let alone the sick, maimed and rejected livestock, the people had manifested the fact that they had no sincere respect for God. Their worship was not heart worship! It was routine, casual, common, going through the motions...etc. They were offering the offering of Cain; an offering, which reflected the fact that Cain had no real desire to love and worship God. Cain just gathered his food from the ground, and set apart an allotted portion for God, with no real commitment to giving God his best, which would have, like Abel, confirmed that Cain's heart was fixed upon God. You see, it is not the amount of the offering, which matters to God, is it? It's the heart! Remember the poor widow, who had nothing but two mites...less than a penny, which she tossed into the money jar, at the Temple. Jesus said that she gave more than everyone else who gave, why? Not because of the quantity of

money she gave. She greatly paled, in comparison to probably most, in that regard. But rather, she gave everything she had, because she had a sincere love for, and commitment to, God!

And so, back to our text; in failing to give God their best, in accordance with the law; in having no sincere respect for God, the Israelites were the ones who lacked, in the "love category." They were a bit caught up in everything else in the world; too busy with this and that and this and that; and God was virtually out of the equation. Oh yes, they dropped off their rejected animals; they fulfilled the family rituals; they went through the traditional motions; they offered some robotic chants of praise with their lips...but their hearts were far, far from God! [Note verse 13: "You also say, 'Oh, what a weariness! And you sneer at it...']

And brethren, here is the kicker of the whole deal: Indeed, the children were taught to greatly respect their parents; slaves certainly honored their masters, and God was not given His proper Fatherly respect. But the worth and value of God, far superseded, infinitely superseded the value of all else...and that is what made this reality most deplorable! [Read verse 14]

You see, God is not merely a Father to His people, but furthermore, He is a Great King; indeed, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords! He is the Lord of hosts; the eternal Creator of heaven and earth and all things; the God, who rules over myriads and myriads of angelic and heavenly beings! You see, this is no small matter, brethren, is it? The casual, laid back attitude of the Israelites was a gross and abominable offense! And yet, they were questioning God's love for them! This God is awesome; this God is great; this God has created all of us, and all things, for His glory...and to walk around casually, in a context such as this creation; to have been given the glorious gift of life, let alone the wonderful and awesome privilege of being a redeemed child of the living God, and to kind of treat God like a low grade, side item on the large menu of life...what a terrible affront upon His glory and holiness! He is a Great King...and His name is to be feared, honored, and revered by all nations, and all peoples! [The Lord's Prayer opens?]

Clearly then, brethren, the Israelites had lost their spiritual footing altogether; yes, they had all of the outward, ritualistic trimmings of religion, but their hearts were far from God...they lost their first love!

III. Conclusive Thought and Application

Well brethren, let's bring this home to us, right to our front doors...indeed, right into the soul of our very lives, this morning. You see, while we don't offer animal sacrifices to God, the very relevant principle, comes right home to us, doesn't it, front and center! Replace the animals

with our sacrifices of praise, our prayers, and all that we do, in accordance with the elements of worship prescribed to us, in the New Covenant, which evidence whether or not our worship is done in spirit and in truth; in sincerity and in accordance with God's revealed will (given in His Word). [Heb. 13:10-16: Offering the "*sacrifice* of praise"]

What kind of worship do you offer your Heavenly Father, even right here, each week? How do you approach the gathered assembly here on Sundays? Are you casual, indifferent, going through the motions, mimicking tradition...etc, or do you strive to give God your best? Do you prepare for worship? Do you consider it an honor and a privilege to worship God, or is it wearisome and burdensome...kind of an interruption in your already busy week?

Do you come here, with the joyful recognition, that you come before your gracious Heavenly Father, and with the sobering recognition, that you come before a Great King, who is to be feared by all nations? Let's talk about consistent, regular lateness, brethren! Virtually every week, there are droves of people, rushing in here, even after the second hymn has already been sung! Are you consistently late? Now, we recognize that there are providential hindrances, flat tires, emergency situations...etc., but constantly late? Brethren, this ought not to be! I want to suggest to you, that if you are constantly late to worship every week, more than likely, your heart is drifting away from God, and you don't even realize it. We have a Sunday School hour, on the Lord's Day, as well! Be here for that! And how are we singing God's praises? Are we striving to concentrate on the words, reflecting on their meaning and relevance for us, personally; are we striving to pray along during the pastoral prayer; are we tithing out of the firstfruits of our income; are we listening intently to the Word of God, as it is preached, what is the whole of our Lord's Day like...etc?

Are we offering lame, sick, blind and marred sacrifices...or are we seeking to give God our best! Oh brethren, what have we been given in Christ? If we are lacking in these areas, God calls us to repent, brethren! And by the grace of Christ, He will forgive, and He will restore! [Read verse 9].

Now brethren, let me highlight one more thing, that some of you may have caught, as we read through this chapter. [Read verse 6 again]. Who is God addressing here? The priests. Why? Because they were responsible for guarding the sanctity and purity of the sacrifices. In other words, the people were guilty for offering defiled offerings, but the priests should not have accepted them. Would it be fair to assume that, as leaders in the church, Pastor Doug and I ought to better protect the sanctity of the worship, here? Now brethren, we are not saying that we are

going to set up cameras, or interrogate the congregation...etc. We recognize that there are providential hindrances, and unique situations...etc. But we must address these things; we must, at the very least, sound the alarm, when the church seems to be losing spiritual ground, and in this case, most specifically, in the area of reverent worship.

Brethren, let's strive unto the goal, which God has in mind, and which He has already begun to achieve in the coming of Christ, and which He will ultimately bring about in its fullness: [Read verse 11]!

AMEN!!!

Benediction: Psalm 113