

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

◆**Intro:** A man once attended a worship service in the company of his guardian angel. The church was mostly empty so it was easy to find a seat. The pianist leaned forward and began to run her fingers deftly over the keys of the piano, and the people stood to sing, while others trickled in from the foyer, but there was no sound. Soon the room was filled and the people's mouths were moving, but no words came out. No voice. No note of music. Then a prayer followed, and the leader, with eyes closed and lips moving, prayed, but there was only silence. Others lips of bowed heads moved slowly too, but no sound whatsoever in the entire room. The Praise Team next stepped up. The drummers sticks were flying, and the guitarist's arm was strumming, but still the room was silent. The man turned to the angel quizzically. "What does this mean?" he asked. "I see that these people are gathered for a worship service, but I don't hear anything they are saying." The angel replied, "You hear nothing because there is nothing to hear. You are experiencing this service in the spirit realm, as God hears it. In heaven, only what the heart speaks can be heard. These people are only worshiping with their lips, not from hearts in love with God.

◆Just then a small, young voice softly broke the silence in a whisper behind. "Our Father, who is in heaven... are you listening?" The man looked at the angel in surprise. The angel nodded, as the sound of the voice filled the room.

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

◆ In his book *Abba's Child*, Brennen Manning tells of a young man on a Scotland beach in the early morning with his grandfather. They were watching the sun rise when Granddad suddenly gave a little jump and skipped off down the beach. Later the boy asked why he had done so and Granddad replied, "Oh, because my Abba loves me!" Have you ever been overwhelmed by the truth that your Dad in Heaven loves you, such that it caused you to skip? On the other hand, have you ever stood there in a church service completely unaware of God whatsoever? Have you ever left a time of worship hurriedly and not been able to recall later a single song or point made that day? Can you -ven hear -- voice right n--? Have you ever wondered why you can't seem to *feel* the presence of God, or why you are not *overcoming* a difficulty? And if so, have we considered the possibility that God's love has not let go of us, but our love has let go of him? That he has not gone anywhere but our relating to him has become inauthentic?

◆ **1. When my love for God is inauthentic, it creates a barrier between us.** Do you understand what I mean? Its the same with kids on a playground. When you include another kid in your game just because you need a body, you might be playing, but you aren't feeling friendship. It happens in marriages all the time. Some married people are roommates, but hardly best friends, or husband and wife. They are going through motions: get up, shower, brew the coffee, toast a muffin, leave the house. They don't look into each others eyes an wonder how that other

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

person is doing, or what they're thinking. Their love is inauthentic. They don't ask, they just pass each other.

◆ This happens with God too. Israel as a nation had been following a system of sacrifices prescribe to Moses around 1500 BC! Now its approximately 400 BC. So Israel has been married to God about 1100 years now and they've kinda become roommates only. In worship terminology they're speaking only memorized prayers, not sharing anything from inside. Their petitions are more like a grocery list to the great unseen Grocer in the Sky. They went to temple once a month not because their hearts yearn to something deeper out of love and they believe God has it, but because the other folks at temple might talk if they don't show once in a while.

◆ So now you're wondering: how do I have authentic love for God? Well, how do you have authentic love for a girl, or a boy? You appreciate things about that person. You treat them lovingly, and honor them which in turn also makes your heart love and honor them more! Right? This takes effort. Write out your prayers. Make a list of how God has blessed you this week. Refuse to cover every God-thing that happened in your life with "Thanks for your many blessings." Nobody knows what those are, including you. One way to make make God's name great in your life is to name what he does for you.

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

◆ **2. My authenticity can be seen in my investment.** Israel was no longer invested in seeking God, so Israel didn't see God much as a consequence. God uses the image of "setting the heart" in 2:2. Even says it twice!

◆ *"If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honour my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honour me." Malachi 2:2, NIV.*

◆ Jesus put it, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." He did not say, "Where your heart is you will put your treasure." Ever wonder why? Your heart move is a decision. We chose to set our heart and then we invest there. You want to know where someones heart is, look at what they spend themselves on. The tell-tale sign of Israel was their lack of investment in their God. It was cut-corner religion. What do we *have* to do to get by? Take a look at verse twelve.

◆ *"But you profane it by saying of the Lord's table, 'It is defiled', and of its food, 'It is contemptible.' And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD." Malachi 1:12, 13, NIV.*

◆ Here's my definition of contempt: *contempt is when you openly show that something or someone does not mean much to you and you don't even care if they know.* Like "contempt of court": being openly disrespectful in a court of

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

law. It shows you don't care. Israel was like a guy in one of my previous churches who, as soon as we opened the Bible he'd fold his hands across his lap, shut his eyes, slide down in his chair, and prop one knee on the seat in front of him. He was basically saying, "I come here because my wife makes me."

◆The key complaint in Malachi's church comes in 1:8. According to mosaic law, an animal brought for sacrifice had to be the best one you could find. No funny fur spots on their coat. No limp. No lamb with one tattered ear. This was both a sign that God was worthy of your best, and that you trusted him to take care of you. If you bring the best male specimen of the heard, the one you want to keep and breed, well... that don't make economic sense! Lets sacrifice that scraggly goat that can't keep up, has one eye, and belches up all the time! That's what Israel was doing and the priests didn't care.

◆Well that's kinda like having a friend over for lunch and giving them a sandwich with a bite out of it and an apple you didn't finish at lunch yesterday; you know all turning brown and everything! It's like buying new ABEC 5 bearings for your skateboard and saving your old ABEC 1 bearings to give your brother for Christmas. It's one less present you gotta buy. Malachi's church was giving God their leftovers. They never call them the "right-overs" because everybody left them! They didn't want them.

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

◆“Just leave the waitress the change. (“Leave”. You give it if you value it. You leave it is you don’t.) All we had was pie and coffee so it don’t matter.” - “No, we better leave her a buck or two. Save the change for church!”

◆B. The obvious question is “Do I give God my efforts or my leftovers?” We might wonder if the Levites led worship with dull expressions on their faces. You see, those who represent God color his name in the world! The priests didn’t treat God with honor, and so the church didn’t either! That reminds me of A newly ordained priest, nervous about hearing confessions, who finally asked an older priest to observe how he does and give him some tips. After listening in on the second confession, the older priest suggested that the younger man fold his arms, maybe rub his chin with one hand while saying phrases like "I see" or "I understand" or "Yes, my child. Go on". The young priest put the suggestions into practice and later told the older priest how much it has helped getting more information from his flock. "You've done well," said the older man. "Isn't that much better than slapping your knee and yelling **"No way! What happened next?"**"

◆C. Probably the number one misconception about worship is that it is about making the people feel good. It isn’t. It is about the people honoring and meeting God. It is our “service” to him, to his name, or his honor. It’s not like a concert meant for the audience. In real worship God is the audience and we are the

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

performers singing, and dancing, and even listening in his honor, and in his name.

◆ God mentions his “name” eight times in our text! Example:

◆ “My name will be great among the nations, from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name, because my name will be great among the nations,” says the LORD Almighty.” Malachi 1:11, NIV.

◆ What makes God’s great name great among other nations of people who don’t know him? The people who do! In fact in the tradition of the Reformation, that’s why congregational members are often referred to as “the priesthood of all believers.” The Catechism puts it like this.

◆ *Why are you called Christian (which means anointed)? Because by faith I am a member of Christ and so I share in his anointing. I am anointed to confess his name, to present myself to him as a living sacrifice of thanks, to strive with a good conscience against sin and the devil in this life, and to afterward reign with Christ over all creation, for all eternity! HC32.*

◆ You and I are God’s priests in this world! We are the worshipers. Those people up front are only the Lead Worshipers. In a very real way, We are the priests! Now priests, if you want to honor or love someone, or even learn to love them, you need to spend yourself on them. That’s what a true priest does.

◆ “My covenant was with [Levi], a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. “For the

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction--because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty." Malachi 2:5-7, NIV. (By the way "messenger" is the same word as Malachi.

Tuck that away for later.)

◆ Here's an example. I have a friend who is a florist. His name is Nick. Now Nick is a very generous fellow. And because we were friends he would often drop by with nice flowers and say "Here, give these to your wife." There was only one problem with the arrangement. Sandi knew Nick too, so it became really hard to get any credit. If I came home with flowers, Sandi would take them and say, "Why thank you, Nick." If I wanted her to feel my love I had to force money on Nick so I could say I bought them (even if it was only 50cents for a dozen roses). We spend ourselves on what we love. If we love God, we spend ourselves on him.

◆ **3. Inauthentic love makes God look bad.** That's why he says in verse 10 that we might just as well nail the church doors shut as to come here to pretend. The most unbelievable thing to an unbelieving world is that so many Christians are unbelievable. You've heard the accusation, haven't you. "Ah the church is full of _____ (hypocrites)." (I always want to say, "And thieves, and cheaters, and killers...so you should feel right at home!" -But I don't think it's would be a draw for them.) You're probably like me, and have talked to people many times who have been turned off by the church because they "jammed religion down my

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

throat." Wow, that's a tough image, but probably true. People in the church on fire for God speak in terms of a relationship with him. Many have replaced a relationship with a religion. Don't! Just so you know, here are a few characteristics of religion vs relationship with God.

◆1. You go to sit an hour in a room where they talk about God but the only time you mention him at home is when you stub your toe.

◆If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless. Jms1:26

◆2. The whole family is there to hear the priest read the Ten Commandments. And then the teens hurry to their girlfriends house to break a few of them that afternoon.

◆"Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says." James 1:22, NIV.

◆3. Parents tell their kids they have to go to church but that they get to go to the mall.

◆4. Kid's can't remember ever seeing Dad or mom reading the Bible at home.

◆Lets **conclude** by thinking about how to be authentic about God. If you want to be a real priest, or messenger for God... If you want to have relationship instead of religion... If you set your treasure in heaven so your heart winds up there, then do what any sportsman does. (Since it's bow season...)

LETTING GO OF GOD?, MAL.1:6-2:9

A Love that Wont let Go #2

- ◆1) Make time on your calendar for God. Real bow hunters spend time in trees to pattern deer. Real hunters for God spend time seeking him.
 - ◆2) Make preparations to meet up with God. Real bow hunters go to bed early so they can get up before dawn to be in the woods while it's still dark to meet up with deer. So lets say you stay up Saturday night watch a horror flick. How ready will you be to experience any interaction with God on Sunday morning?
 - ◆3) Make investments with God. Real bow hunters read hunting magazines, have hunting apps on their phone, are always talking about the terrain, looking at maps. They have gun racks and they chew and spit... well, maybe not all that. Even so real God-hunters read literature about his ways, they get their own nose in the Word, they open their mouth to sing, they whisper their own prayers instead of falling asleep with the preacher prays.
- ◆You get the picture. If your relationship with God has become dull religion, it's likely not because God's love has let go of you or me. Malachi is all about how that's not gonna happen. But in a fallen world, we do pretty well at letting go of God.
- ◆“Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” Jeremiah 29:12, 13, NIV.