

Commitment: Are You All In?
Giving Leftovers to God
Malachi 1
3/12/17

- Imagine someone invited you over to their house for dinner. You're pretty excited because the person who invited you is a good cook. When you get there, your host starts to pull Tupperware containers out of the refrigerator, put the contents on plates and pop them in the microwave.
 - o After a few minutes of nuking plates of food, everyone is gathered at the table and the host presents everyone with their plates. They say, "I hope you don't mind. I made this four days ago and made too much, so we had a lot of leftovers. And, I thought rather than waste them, I would serve them tonight. Everything should still be fine, right?"
 - o Being a good guest, you would probably just smile and eat what was given to you. But, we all know what we would think!

- Would you serve leftovers to a guest you invited to dinner at your home? Maybe you would if they were family or a very close friend.
 - o But, what if you invited me – the pastor? Maybe you would because you know I'm pretty informal.
 - o How about if you had the chance to host someone really special like a town council person or the state governor?
 - o What if, somehow Joanne Njoku-Silva, in her travels to Martha's Vineyard ran into to Barak and Michelle Obama. They started a conversation and she was telling them about our church. They decided to take the fast ferry over here and check us out on a Sunday morning. What kind of preparation and arrangements would we make to host them?

- Leftovers are a fine thing. They make dinner preparation easier at times. Sometimes, leftovers taste even better after the spices and things have had more of a chance to meld. But leftovers are not what we would give to our guests. They just aren't that good.
 - o They certainly aren't good enough for God. But, here are the cold hard facts – we are prone to be people of giving leftovers when it comes to God.

- Even our children see it. On a rainy Sunday afternoon, a little brother and sister were inspired by a Bible story they had just heard in Children's Church. So, they decided to play "Noah and the Ark." An old shoe box was the ark; the bathtub was their flood; they had gathered a good collection of toy animals from their rooms.
 - o After the flood was over they decided to make an offering to God – just like in the story. Mr. Noah (the boy) said to Mrs. Noah (the girl), "Here, take one of your toy

animals as a sacrifice.” “No,” she replied, “Let’s use one of your animals instead!” Mr. Noah didn’t want to use his animals.

- When they could not agree, she ran to the attic. In a moment she was back with a toy lamb. It was dirty, it’s head smashed, and it’s tail missing. “Here,” she cried, “let’s give this as a sacrifice. We will never want it again.”
 - Her brother agreed, and they made their sacrifice. The little broken lamb they did not want was given to God.
- NOW THE SCENE SHIFTS. God was looking down at his earth. He saw the people in all of their wickedness and their weakness. They had no hope. All was dark. Something had to be sacrificed if they were to be saved from their sin.
- God had many angels he might have sent to help. Gabriel, Michael – strong, capable angels that he had used to make big proclamations and help his created people before. He did not even consider them.
 - Another was chosen instead: the best God had. His only Son. The Scriptures tell us why: “God so loved the world . . .” Let’s say it together...(John 3:16).
- The prophet, Malachi, in the Old Testament of the Bible, sets up the difference between two things – the great love of God given to his people and the leftovers people give back to him. Malachi compares God’s love and God’s worth to what the people were giving him.
- This morning, we’re going to transition in our Commitment series from our commitment to our families and marriages to our commitment to God. Are we all in when it comes to God or are we giving him our leftovers?
 - We’re going to look at all of chapter 1 in Malachi to see the leftovers we give to God. Let’s start with **Malachi 1:1-5**.
- Here, we find that we give God leftover love. God reaffirms his love for his people by saying, “I have always loved you.” What is the response of the people? “Really? How have you loved us?”
- That response shows a people who are losing or have lost their love for God. And, because they have lost their love for God, they are doubting God’s love for them. They have lost their love for God because they were looking at their present circumstances, rather than how God had proven his love for him before and rather than look at what God promised for their future.
 - God reminded them of what he had done for his people – he kept their enemies at bay. Their ancient enemy, the people of Edom, had tried to destroy them over and over, but they never could and they never will, the Lord says.
 - God is showing them that his love for them can be traced back to the origin of their nation. He could have listed many, many more instances of his love. But, he goes back to the beginning when Israel and Edom were formed to show them that because he chose them, he always loved them.

- How often do we forget the love of God for us? How often do we doubt God's love for us? How often do we find that our love for God has become less passionate? When we find ourselves in those states, we will find that we are giving God our leftover love.
 - o We give leftover love for God when we think that God loves like we do. Our love comes and goes according to what the other person does. We are so conditional in our love. When our spouse does something good, we love them more. When our children do what we want, our love for them soars. When they disappoint us or hurt us, our love wanes.
 - o God doesn't love like that. And, that is hard to wrap our minds around.

- How often do we say, "God loves us? Really? Then why did this happen to me? Why is this happening in the world? Why aren't things going better for me? Where is my blessing if God is such a loving God?"
 - o We are doubting God's love because he isn't doing what we think he should do for us! We are focused on our present circumstances and problems rather than remembering what God has already done to show that he loved us so much that he sent his best, not his leftovers, but his best – his Son.
 - o We are focused on our present circumstances and problems rather than hoping for what God has promised will come as a reward to our faith in him – the glorious inheritance that awaits us when we will rise victoriously to be with Him forever.
 - o Our wrong focus shows a leftover kind of love.

- Malachi 1 goes on to share another leftover we give to God. Let's read **verses 6-11**.
 - o We give God our leftover sacrifice which is a leftover worship. The sacrifice we give to God is our worship. Romans 12:1 tells us that our spiritual act of worship is to be a living sacrifice. Passages in both the Old and New Testament talk about the sacrifice of our praise.
 - o Worship is our sacrifice. To worship, to truly worship, there must be a sacrifice.

- Back then, the sacrifice was a literal sacrifice of an animal and giving of what they had of their crops. The sacrifices were dependent on the wealth of the family. People could bring fruit and grain, animals from their flock like a lamb or even a small dove.
 - o But, God had one requirement – bring me the first and the best of your crops and of your flocks. Leviticus 22 gave specific instructions that only pure and unblemished animals could be given to God. The people had to come to Jerusalem to give their sacrifices of worship at certain times and in certain ways as were outlined by God himself.
 - o Well, the people were coming, but they were giving God their leftovers. This is a clear view of the degenerate religious life of Israel. The people were bringing molded crops, blind, crippled and diseased animals for their sacrificial worship.
 - o And, the priests were allowing it! The people had to present their sacrifices to the priest first. It was the priest who actually put the sacrifice on the altar on behalf of the people. So, God is pretty upset with the priests for allowing these leftover acts of sacrifice and worship.

- When was the last time you sacrificed, really sacrificed your first and best for God? Do you routinely give your first and best or do you give when it is easy and convenient or in hopes of receiving something in return?
 - Let's be honest – we are a culture where easy and convenient reigns. And, if there is a sacrifice involved, we better see some rewards for that sacrifice! This is especially the case when it comes to how we, as a culture, respond to God.
 - Sacrifice that is easy or convenient or promises a certain reward is really no sacrifice at all.

- The fact that God loves us should be enough to love him back, to worship him passionately, to give to him exorbitantly, sacrificially. But, when we doubt his love and when our love for him is waning, it's just a matter of time before our sacrifice, our worship becomes leftover as well.
 - It's also just a matter of time that we give God our leftovers in another area. Let's read **Malachi 1:12-14**.

- This section speaks of giving God leftover service. The people are complaining, "It's too hard to serve the Lord! We're too busy and we don't have the time! God asks for too much! He wants our best. He expects us to do this and that and come here at this time. It isn't convenient! Who is going to serve us? What's in it for us?"
 - They still came. But their heart wasn't in it. They weren't passionate about serving God or giving back to God. They were complaining and moaning about it. They were probably checking out what other people were doing or not doing and griping about how much more they were giving or doing compared to other people.
 - Do we see the slippery slope here? Leftover love leads to leftover worship leads to leftover service. It all becomes about us and not about who God is, what he has done, what he is worthy to receive.

- On again, off again service is leftover service. Complaining about it when we do serve is leftover service. Service done out of obligation rather than passionate love for our Master is leftover service. Service done only when we want, when it is convenient, when we get something in return is leftover service.
 - Who of us has given that kind of service?

- So, if we would feel some kind of way about being served leftovers at someone's house when we were invited over, how does God evaluate the leftovers given to him? What he said in Malachi to Israel becomes a challenge to us today. Let's see God's evaluation of leftover love, leftover sacrifice and leftover service.

- First, our leftovers do not honor God.
 - We know that some relationships demand honor and respect. No Jew would deny that a son was obligated to honor his father, a servant his master, and a citizen his king. God asks in verse 6, "If I am your father and master, where are the honor and respect I deserve?"

- Then, he reminds the Israelites and us who he is. Eight times in this passage, God refers to himself as the “Lord of Heaven’s Armies.” This is one of the most majestic, awe-inspiring names of God in the entire Old Testament. It is used 24 times in Malachi and 260 in the Old Testament. The title emphasizes the fact that God has untold forces at His command and is therefore invincible.
 - He is the Lord over everything, He is Lord Almighty. He deserves, desires and demands the best.
 - The people forgot that. They had the audacity to offer to God blind and diseased animals. God says, “Try giving those kinds of sacrifices to the governor and see what happens!” Would the governor be honored? Would he accept that sacrifice?
 - How much above the governor or any human position is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies?
- When we offer God our second best, it shows we have an inappropriate concept of God. How we view God is wrong and inappropriate. Over and over in Scripture, we are told to fear the Lord. We fear him, not because we are afraid he is going to zap us, but because we understand who he is compared to who we are. He is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies. He is the Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning and the end. He is the first and last. He is above all, in all and through all. God is everything!
- Yet, he gave everything for us! Us! We’re just people. We’re just the created. *Psalm 8:4* asks what are mere mortals that you should think about them, human beings that you should care for them?
 - If Jesus Christ is God and he died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for him. He alone is worthy of honor. He alone is worthy of our best and our first. We must give him the honor that he is due!
 - When you think about who God is, what Jesus did for us and what we, then, give him in return, it is laughable. Even our first and best doesn’t compare. But, that’s what we have and when we give it, we honor God. But, when we give our leftovers, while keeping the best for ourselves or someone else, there is no honor in that. It is a disgrace to the heart and sacrifice of God.
- The second thing we can learn from this passage is that our leftovers do not please God.
- In this passage, God is so displeased, that he even tells the priests in verse 10 that it would be better to shut down the temple, to shut the doors, to cancel services, to just stop everything. Why do it if God is not being honored?
 - Instead, verse 11 says he would rather choose a new people and have people who had once been pagans, but who understand how to sacrifice and worship with their first and best. His name is going to be honored – whether by his chosen people or by another people. Scripture tells us that if we fail to praise him, to worship him – the rocks will cry out!
- But, do you get the implication for us, those of us who are gathered here, who come to church? Is our church one where God would rather have the doors closed?

- During our 24 to Double discussion and even before that, there was a question that has been asked. “If our church were to close our doors tomorrow, would our community even notice?”
 - Obviously, some people would notice. People who have connections here. There are many people who have connections here, mostly people of color. But, would our community as a whole notice? Even among those who have connections to our church, would they notice our church is closed until funerals or weddings can’t be done here anymore?
 - When asked that question, people usually start pointing to all that we do and have done – the concerts, the different activities, the music, the various traditions that we have had over the years. But, is that enough? Is that enough for God?
- Because, here’s the thing in this passage, the people in Malachi stayed busy. They hadn’t abandoned worship altogether. They continued to go through the motions of serving God. They kept having church week after week with no intensity or intentionality. They were checking off their to-do list of things that they were obligated to do.
- And, here, God, through Malachi, was addressing the priests who were supposed to be leading the people. The priests did not call the people to a higher standard. In their minds, everything was fine as long as sacrifices were offered. As long as they fulfilled the what of “doing church,” everything was OK.
 - But, God is concerned with the how, not the what. It mattered to God deeply how sacrifices were offered to him. It mattered to God deeply how the priests served him. It mattered deeply how the people honored God through what they gave.
 - Instead of giving their best, they were giving their leftover and created a culture of mediocrity.
- Mediocrity is sickening to God. Let me say that again. Mediocrity is sickening to God.
- We live in a time when mediocre is acceptable. You might accept mediocre in yourself – you can get by being mediocre by just getting passing grades in school even though you could do better. You can be mediocre by just doing enough at your job so that you don’t get written up, but you certainly don’t excel or go above and beyond. You accept that you have a mediocre marriage and you are raising kids that are mediocre. Only, we call it a different name – average. If we’re average, if we’re mediocre, we blend, we are like everyone else. And, something is better than nothing, right?
 - No, not right! That is not acceptable to God in our worship! God is saying, “If I cannot have the best of you, the best from you, then don’t bring anything to me!”
 - According to God’s system, something is not better than nothing.
- Mediocre bothers God because it violates his nature and behavior. God is an excellent God. His character is flawless. Excellence flows from the nature of who God is. Everything God has ever done has been excellent. Creation, the sunset, the ocean and his plan of salvation through the resurrection of Jesus all point to his excellent nature.

- Yet, instead of reflecting his excellence, the leaders and people in Malachi modeled mediocrity. God was frustrated with the leaders because they set the pace and the tone. The people took their cues from them. If the priests offered second best to God, the people would as well.
 - Leaders in our church (and I'm talking to myself as well) – if you offer God your leftovers, so will others. We have to lead the way. If you have fallen into the false idea that “Well, it's just for the church, so it's good enough,” you are not pleasing God! Don't settle for mediocre!
- At the same time, we all are responsible for how we love, sacrifice, worship and serve God.
 - 1 Peter 2:9 says that through Jesus, we are all royal priests, a chosen people of God, God's very own possession. We are all the temple of God. Every believer becomes a priest – someone who is showing others who God is and how he should be honored with their lives, their attitudes, their actions and their speech.
 - Therefore, we all, as God's church...for the God's church is not a building, it is us, the people... we all are priests who need to give up mediocre and give our first and best in all things! We can't put the blame on anyone else.
 - Don't settle for mediocre in your relationship with God or in your service to God.
- Because the fact is this - God does not want churches around just to have churches. God wants churches, God wants people who honor him – who come to give him their best and their first in love, in sacrifice, in worship and in service.
 - Listen, our tradition means nothing to God if he is not being honored. What we do here or what we have done here does not concern God as much as how we do it. Whether we sing hymns or worship choruses, whether we do Sunday School or LIFE Groups, whether we use a piano or a full band, whether we do communion once a month or every Sunday – it doesn't matter!
 - What matters is how we come here. Have we come here to worship the Lord and point people to a relationship with him? Have we come here to serve him and to serve others so that they might know him? Have we come here to give our first and our best?
 - Or have we come here to promote our own preferences? Do we serve only when it's convenient or comfortable? Have we come here to feel good about ourselves rather than share the good news with others? Those are leftovers! We are thinking about ourselves and giving God what is leftover!
 - God won't keep Peace Dale First Church of God around because we've been here for almost 90 years. He will keep us around because he is pleased with the impact we are making, the worship we bring and the service we do!
- Over the last almost seven years, I have been leading our deacons and other leaders to evaluate everything we do in our church. This has been ramped up in the last two years, especially since doing 24 to Double. In that process, we have determined that we want to keep things simple so we can do them with excellence. See, when you get too complex, doing too many things you get sloppy, you get mediocre.

- I don't want us to be mediocre. I don't want to be a mediocre pastor. I don't want to set an example of mediocre. I want to use our resources, time and energy as best as we can so we give our best and first to God. I want God to say, "Do you see that church? That's the Peace Dale First Church of God and I want to keep them around because they honor me! They give me their best and their first! Without them, this community would notice! I have a purpose for them and they're living out that purpose!"
 - We can't be busy for the sake of being busy. We can't do something just because we've always done it. If something doesn't line up with the purpose that God has given us to share the PEACE of Christ to our community through multicultural and family relationships, we can't do it. Programs have been cut, lots of times I have to say, "No, that doesn't fit with what we are doing." There have been folks who don't like it. That's fine. I understand that – to some degree.
 - But, understand this – we have to give our first and best to God's purpose for us and we can't let anything get in the way of that because we refuse to be mediocre toward God!
- Finally, we learn that our leftovers do not satisfy us. This is interesting and I don't think most of us realize this. We will only be truly satisfied in our relationship with God through Jesus Christ when we are giving our first and our best in love, sacrifice and service.
- Let's look again at what the people were saying about serving God in verse 13, "It's too hard to serve the Lord." Can you hear the whine in their voice?
 - The people were not willing to give their highest and best to God, but neither were they willing to abandon worship altogether. So, worship became a dull routine. Whatever we are not willing to give our best and instead are content with mediocre will become dull drudgery.
 - If you aren't willing to give your best in school, it becomes something you hate. If you aren't willing to give you best in a sport, you hate to practice. If you aren't willing to give your best in your marriage, you become a roommate rather than a spouse. If you aren't willing to give your best in your career, it becomes just a job and a paycheck.
 - If you aren't willing to give your best to God, you are discontent rather than a disciple and church becomes something that's easy to miss.
- Someone has said, "Religion is either an acute fever or a dull monotony." Which is it to you? If your relationship with God is dull and passionless, it is because you haven't given him your best and your first. If you aren't moved in the presence of God, maybe it's because you have a heart of leftovers toward God.
- Many people sit in church on Sunday saying to themselves, "When will this end so we can get on with something meaningful?" You are doing something meaningful!!! You are in the presence of the Lord of Heaven's Armies! There is nothing more meaningful than coming here to bring a sacrifice of praise, to worship him, to serve him, to express our love for him.

- When you serve, you are doing something meaningful! Greeting at the front door – meaningful! Caring for children – meaningful! Participating in a Kindness Outreach – meaningful!
 - In six weeks, for Easter, we have the opportunity to give our first and our best by inviting people to come to a place where they will hear about the One who gave his best, his all for us! We have the opportunity to serve and to show others who come that we take this seriously. This isn't a game to us or something we do out of obligation or something to do to be seen or something to do when we have nothing better going on. This is a relationship with the One who is worthy of our all. We are God's church! God's holy people! Are you going to take that opportunity or miss it?
- If you want more of God, then start to give him your first and best. You've got to have a fever, a fire, a hunger and that begins with how you love, how you worship, how you sacrifice and how you serve. A religion that costs nothing, is worth nothing, for it brings no lasting satisfaction to us.
 - You know, there is much conversation these days about radical Islam and the Muslim faith. When we think about folks in radical Islam who hate others so much that they are willing to kill them or blow themselves up to kill them, it confuses us.
 - This passage give us insight as to why they do that. They have found something that costs them something, something that calls for their sacrifice, even the sacrifice of death and in that, they find a purpose for their lives.
 - It's not the right purpose. As followers of Jesus, the Lord of Heaven's Armies, we have the right purpose – to love God with everything and to love others.
 - People will lay down their lives for that which brings them purpose and meaning, even if it's wrong. What are you laying down your life for? What are you giving your first and best?
 - Let me tell you – you are not worthy of your first and best. There is no other person in the world worthy of your first and best. Your career, your hobbies, entertainment – nothing is worthy of your first and best. There is only one worthy of your first and best.
 - The concluding statement of God on this whole matter was to pronounce a curse on the people for their hypocritical attempt to deceive him. Oh Church, may this curse not be pronounced on us. May this curse not be pronounced on my life or on your life. May God not look for other people who will give him what he is due because we will not.
 - Instead, may we be willing to give everything in the way we love, sacrifice, worship and serve the Lord of Heaven's Armies.