

Malachi Then and Now  
God's Unchanging Love  
ii. A Call to be Real (Mal 1:6-14)

Malachi holds the priests responsible for the spiritual malaise of Israel. Well might he add, in a contemporary context 'as the pulpit, so the pew'. Three means of revelation saw the priests responsible for Worship, the prophet for the Word from God, and the sage for Wisdom. Worship, Word and Wisdom maintained the religious ethos of Israel, and all three areas, particularly worship were in a parlous state with devastating consequences for the nation as a whole.

Integral to Israel's worship was the sacrificial system both mandatory (the sin and trespass offering) and voluntary (the grain, drink and peace offering). The sacrifices in the Old Testament pointed forward to the perfect and final sacrifice of Christ. As such they had to be unblemished and perfect. However, the priests colluded with the people in presenting second-rate sacrifices, an insult to God which defiled worship.

The response is forthright: "Oh that you would shut the doors so that you would not light useless fires on my altar!" (v10) The outcome might be drastic but ironically would lessen the consequences for errant priests who would be precluded from further propagating false worship, reminiscent of the New Testament warning: "Consider how far you have fallen! If you do not repent I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place". (Rev 2:5)

Malachi offers God's solution and antidote, "Now plead with God to be gracious to us" (v9) echoed in God's initiative in the N.T. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person and they with me." (Rev 3:20) Nothing short of radical grace in answer to the plight of God's people will suffice.

Tragically Israel's faith had become parochial and their worship self-serving. Instead of being a light to the nations bearing witness to God, they had domesticated God for their own wants and needs. God's response is short and sharp, "My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets" (11a) i.e. morning and evening, from east to west, all the time and in every place.

God always has the final word, "For I am a great king, says the Lord Almighty, and my name is to be feared among the nations" (v14). Indeed there can be no greater privilege as that underscored by David "For you God have given me the heritage of those who fear your name" (Ps 61:5) and foretold in the N.T, "a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language standing before the throne and before the Lamb" (Rev 7:9).

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