

Reading: Malachi 1:6-14

Theme: The Cause, Cure and Prevention of Contempt.

Last time we saw that in Israel during Malachi's day, spiritual matters had been downplayed, had been cheapened. Through Malachi, the Lord laid the blame at the door of the priests. They should have known better than to let downgraded, cheap so-called worship go on. While we saw it was aimed primarily at priests, it was for all the people to note. We saw how pastors, elders, deacons, those in authority in the church have greater responsibilities and yet because all believers are a royal priesthood, we all have a responsibility before God not to allow our own lives to excuse, or compromise, or downplay our worship of the Lord.

Last time we saw 2 of 3 headings - **1. Blunt Diagnosis** of the spiritual disease infecting the priests and the people - which was contempt for God's name, character and Being. They questioned this in v6b and the Lord laid before them **2. The Symptoms of Contempt** - the **first** was comfortable worship - not putting themselves out for God, that any old thing would do for Him - blind, lame, diseased offerings. The **second** thing was mindless worship in which they did not apply even common-sense, as they would certainly not have offered such low-quality gifts to the Persian governor, but sadly they felt it was okay to do so to God. The **third** thing was defiled worship - their attitudes defiled all they did and even the priests despised the Lord's table (*part of sacrifice presentation*) and they turned their noses up at the things associated with it. **Fourth** it was cheating worship as we see in v14 - vows had been made, but then gone back on and a blemished animal was given.

We noted how we can be infected with such contempt for God and it may show our attitude to serving Him, worshipping Him and living for Him in our lives and within the local fellowship of His people. It is so easy to simply go through the routine, even having excuses as to why we don't give of the best of our time, effort, worship, money, gifts and talents. This evening we will consider the 3rd heading that follows on from the two we saw last time:

3. The Cause, Cure and Prevention of Contempt.

With some illnesses and diseases, an outbreak of it can make the news e.g. a food poisoning epidemic in an area. The source of the infection needs to be found so that the disease can be readily and clearly identified, its source be found to prevent further infections as well as enabling medical treatment for those who are infected. This is true of illnesses on a national scale e.g. the Ebola virus - scientists and doctors are trying to find out how it arises and are trying to work on a vaccine to prevent it, as well as create a cure for such an aggressive disease which strikes parts of the world.

The cause, cure and prevention of the spiritual disease of contempt for God are all linked to our view of His greatness. In v11 & 14 we have the Lord speaking of the greatness of His name, that it is to be feared - reverential fear, respect and even awe. The glory and fear of the Lord is important for us to recognise. Without a biblically balanced view of such, we will have a tendency to downplay God's requirements and standards. We will be inclined to do things as we want to do them, as we feel it is okay to do and we will justify ourselves, our lives, our actions and get annoyed when God touches an area of our lives we do not want to be disturbed. We can, little by little, sink into a

contempt for the Lord, His character and ways. Before we know it, we too will be infected by the contempt virus.

A. The cause of contempt: as we read of Malachi's day, it should cause us to wonder and question how they got to that state. Realise that within their recent, even living history and memory there were examples of God's great grace, mercy and kindness to them as a people, as a nation. They had been restored from captivity, the temple had been rebuilt, worship there had been established and the walls of Jerusalem rebuilt. Yet sadly and quickly the contempt disease seem to spread through the nation and when the people emerged out of the time between the OT and the start of the NT some 400 years later (*the intertestamental period*), we find this contempt had fossilised into formalism, ritualism, legalism and the vibrant life and love of God's people had all but dried up, surviving in just a minority.

The priests and the people had forgotten the greatness of God. The Lord had to remind them of that in v11 and 14b. The people would not dare offer the Persian governor such rubbish offerings because he was important and powerful, yet they had no qualms about offering such to God - their Father and Master. Why? It was because they failed to recognise, to realise, to remember God's importance and power, to remember that He was "*the Lord Almighty*" (6x in v8-14) - , "*a great king*" (v14) and His name was to be great and feared by all the nations, by the heathen (v11 & 14).

Israel had lost a grip on God and lost sight of what they as a nation had to do. They were a chosen nation to bear witness to the greatness of God among the Gentiles. The nations should

have looked at them and been in awe and wonder at their God, at His dealings with them. As we read the OT, we find that initially this is what happened. Jericho was terrified of the people of Israel as they knew what God had done for them 40 years previously; some 200 years after the exodus, as the Ark was brought into the camp of Israel in the battle against the Philistine's - they feared because of what God had done for them in leaving Egypt. In David and Solomon's time people were amazed at God's dealing with them and had fear, reverence for the God of Israel.

Sadly, the people had become self-absorbed, self-pitying, self-gratifying. If it didn't feel good, they didn't put themselves out! Worship became subjective and depended on how they felt and what they felt they got out of it. They no longer had a view of the glory of God and felt they could go along, do their bit, else God would have no worshippers and therefore no glory! The temple became a place for their convenience, their comfort and their use alone. I wonder how many in churches feel the same in our times?

When the question is asked in v6 "*How have we shown contempt for your name?*" The people and the priests truly meant it, were surprised at it, for they had lost sight of God's glory and assumed He was pleased with anything and everything they did, because if they didn't do it, who would worship Him? We can feel so sorry for ourselves as we seem so small, we wish more would come and we may feel that if we didn't come along and support the work, well the work would decline and so we go and do our bit. We need to wake up! Our great God doesn't want our pity, but our praise; not joust our working, but our worship; not our condescension but our

contrition; not our sympathy, but our submission; not our leftovers, but our first love.

We are to realise that if we do not worship, honour and revere this great God, then He is well able to raise up others to do so. The Jews of Malachi's day thought God needed them to worship Him and anything would do. Yet God said basically "*Rubbish*" in v11 and He tells them that His name would be worshipped and be great among the nations. Many commentators such as John Calvin, Matthew Henry, T V Moore as well as others are quick to point out that this is the promise of the world coming to hear of and worship this God; it speaks of the gospel age and its success the world over. It is an encouragement of gospel blessing and success the whole world over.

We are not to kid ourselves that the Lord needs us here in this church or any church in Doncaster and if we weren't here that His plans and purposes would fail. Better people and churches than us have disappeared from the face of the earth and history and yet the Lord is still glorified. If we have been infected with contempt, be sure it began by a failure to recognise the glory and the greatness of God and living as if He didn't matter. Moving on we see:

B. The cure of contempt: the cure for such an infection is to again recognise the glory and greatness of God. He is not a God to be trifled with, to be treated with contempt, to be treated as a big pal or grandfather figure who sees all we do and is pleased with us in His ancient stupor.

The Lord challenged the priests and people concerning His greatness, of the privilege and honour of being His and

worshipping Him. He challenged them in v10 to shut the temple doors because He was held in contempt and if they did that, then at least no false fires would be made! Are we aware of, do we recognise the solemnity of meeting together to worship God, what it means when we pray and yet we can do so without recognising God's greatness and majesty? T V Moore wrote *"Better withhold your beggarly apology for religion and insult Me, and add to your own guilt by palming it on your conscience as an acceptable service of God."*

We, like these in Malachi's time, need to recognise the greatness, the majesty, the fear of God and not have an outward formalism and appearance of worship. We need heartfelt reverence that comes from the sincere recognition of God, of His majesty and greatness. The reverent fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7 etc.) Sadly, many palm God off as only friendly, jovial, fun, their generous providing genie, but they fail to see He is awesomely glorious and great. If we have lost the sense of His greatness, then pray seriously He will show us His glory - pray as Moses did; pray as if our very life and the life of the church depends upon it, because spiritually these things do depend such.

Sadly, believers can be like the churches in Revelation 2-3 and we can lose our first love, compromise with sin, even be lukewarm and yet feel that we are fine - but in reality, we are not! The cure for contempt of the Lord is continually re-occurring fresh views of His greatness and to recognise that He doesn't need us one little bit!

C. The prevention of contempt: the prevention of contempt is the same as its cure - to see the greatness of God. Moses saw the

glory of the Lord and it kept him all his life. Isaiah saw the glory of the Lord and even though he was told he would have a hard ministry, a hard and non-listening congregation, he carried on and presented the Lord of hosts, the Holy One of Israel. Ezekiel had a tough job, but he saw the glory of the Lord on His chariot throne and this kept him keeping on as a lone voice among a people who did not listen.

Please pray for the church officers here, that we would be men taken up with the Lord and His glory. That we wouldn't be concentrating on our ease, or our success, our prosperity, or on our achievements, but on God's glory and majesty first and foremost. If we were to see no one converted ever again in the life of the church and yet all of us beheld something of the glory of the Lord, that we came to love Him more and worship Him the better, then, in one sense, we would be truly blessed. Robert Murray M'Cheyne said "*My peoples greatest need is for my own holiness.*" That is true for every minister, as ministers need to be close to God and so be better able to present the Lord to their people and send them away thinking and considering "*How great a God and Saviour we have.*"

My aim as pastor is not to move you with novel ideas, sensational sentiments and slick teaching methods. I want God to meet with us all - in and through the ministry here. Should that happen, I desire that you would think the greater and better of our God and Saviour. I want us all to be struck with a sense of awe at this God and yet at the same time be in wonder and amazement that in Christ He loves us, He is tender and patient with us. As we all see that, I long for us all to recognise, realise and be determined that only our best is good enough for Him.

Oswald Chambers wrote a book *“My utmost for His highest”*, so that we will all be the best we can be for Him.

T V Moore wrote *“A cheap religion is always a cheat religion”* Matthew Henry wrote of the people of Malachi’s day *“They have the best wherewith to serve and honour Him; so bountifully has He been in His gifts to them, but they put Him off with the worst and think that good enough for Him, so ungrateful are they in the returns to Him.”* Let us pray and ask God we would not be like that, for we can easily deceive ourselves and others, but we can never deceive God. King David in 2 Samuel 24: 24 said that he would *“not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”*

We are to be serious as individuals, as church officers, as men and women of God, as a church and hold our God and His character with a high regard; to esteem Him. We are to live to please Him and honour Him in all we are, do and think. Those sentiments are easy to have and to say, but not so easy in the practical ongoing outworking in our lives and in the church we belong to. This church is not my church, not anyone else’s church, but it is the church of God and the Lord Jesus Christ and we are to serve and worship Him correctly here in our day by day lives, attitudes, motives, words, actions and thoughts. Please be praying that the Lord would be gracious and gentle even as He deals with us - so that we would be where we should be in our relationship with Him and we would please and honour Him in all we are and say in the life of the church and in our own lives and that we will have large and enlarging views of the greatness of our God and our Saviour Jesus.