

Introduction:

1. Ben had a birthday this week! He turned 35 on August 27. What gift did you get for him?
  - a. I gave Ben a broken nine-iron. Never mind that Ben doesn't play golf, and doesn't care to. And never mind that that if he did play golf, the broken club would be of no value to him.
  - b. But, I gave him that club because I had to give something to him—and it was of no value to me!
2. This scenario is one that was a little bit of fun. I would never treat my brother that way. But what we would never do in relation to a brother is exactly what some do in relation to the excellent God!
  - a. You say "No one would ever do something like that to God!" Some indeed did. And some do!
  - b. Our study this morning is for everyone present—members and visitors. Let's go to Malachi.

The Lesson:**I. Giving God junk.**

- A. In the book of Malachi God announced His absolute displeasure with *His own people*. He called on them to repent; judgment was coming on a careless and disobedient people. Their worship had degenerated into a malaise and malady that treated God in a way they would never treat any person of honor. Instead of giving God their best, they became accustomed to giving God the equivalent of junk! God was dishonored in their offerings, Malachi 1:6-9.
  1. *Verse 6*. They dishonored God but were shocked when God charged them with disrespecting (despising) His name. The charge is against the priests—men who clearly knew better.
  2. *Verse 7*. They offered polluted food (sacrifices) to God. The priests would gain favor with the people by accepting from them what should have been rejected.
  3. *Verse 8*. The people brought the worthless lamb as an offering—what was of no value to them. Since the animal was to be burned up anyway, what's the difference? It was an offering to God. It should have been the animal that would win the blue ribbon at the state fair—the one that was of most value. God deserved the best.
  4. *Verse 9*. Did they believe God would look on them with favor after such an offering? A poor beggar on the street might be happy with such a gift; God would not. God is not the poor beggar Lazarus, waiting for garbage to fall from someone's table!
- B. Would you agree that God deserved better? And not just better—but their best?
  1. He deserves better today. If we offer our God cheap, halfhearted efforts when it comes to worship and service, He will be no more pleased with us than with those in Malachi's time.
  2. "Oh," but we say, "it's for God. And He doesn't require that we reach some high standard." The correct understanding is that God requires a *high effort*. While we may never reach perfection in all that we do, that doesn't mean we settle for mediocre efforts.
  3. That's why here at Dowlen Road we are committed to giving God our best efforts both inside and outside this place of worship. It makes a difference what we do.

4. Have you ever been in a dirty church building with smelly restrooms? The community drives past a facility and sees grass that should have been cut three weeks ago; they see a broken sign that can't be read. Would Christians maintain their own houses and property that way?
  5. Brethren have said, "We don't want to try to impress the public with how our buildings and landscaping look. We want to draw folks with the gospel." But when a building is unkempt, you keep folks away before they ever hear the gospel! Some kind of impression—good or bad—is made by how you maintain your facility. We are committed to giving God our best!
- C. What is true of the facility is true of worship in the facility. Carelessness and mediocre efforts don't cut it. Shoddily prepared sermons don't attract people to Jesus. Poor efforts at songleading don't impress anyone with how much you are devoted to God. Poorly prepared Bible class teachers and low quality material don't draw people to Christ. If people are converted under these circumstances, it is in spite of such efforts, not because of them.
1. In all that we do, "good enough" is not good enough for our God.
  2. Why would we think that half-hearted efforts would be accepted by God in our time, when they were not accepted by God in Malachi's time? Has God changed? See [Malachi 3:6](#).
  3. I want to share with you a list of 21 things that we want people to see when they look at us. Before I read the list, I already know someone is going to ask, "Are you trying to impress people in this community?" I am (and I would hope all of us are). We want to impress this community with how great and awesome our God is. He is majestic, wonderful, deserving of honor, dignity and respect. We must not give Him less than our best.
  4. As I read this list of 21, some (not you!) might disagree with some of the things on the list. I hope you are a person who sees value in serving the excellent God in an excellent way. But some brethren just don't get it. They seem to think that they can offer just about anything to God and He will be glad to get it (crumbs from the table). God was not pleased with that bunch in Malachi who had that kind of attitude; neither will He be pleased with us.
  5. The pursuit of excellence in God's service tells non-Christians that we value our God. Here is the list of 21. This is what we want people to see when they take a look at us.
    1. A neatly kept building when they pass by.
    2. A sign that can be easily read from the street.
    3. A well maintained lawn and parking lot.
    4. Someone greeting them as they enter the building.
    5. A visitor's packet that welcomes them and gives relevant information.
    6. Someone helping them find a seat in the auditorium or Bible class.
    7. Services that begin on time (with the members present on time).
    8. In Bible class, a teacher who is well prepared and visitor conscious.
    9. In the assembly, a call to worship that welcomes visitors.
    10. A song service where the leader is well trained and well prepared.
    11. A song service where the leader and members all know the songs.
    12. A song service where all the members participate in singing.
    13. Prayers that are clearly spoken into a microphone so all can hear.
    14. The Lord's Supper conducted in a way that is relevant and reverent.

15. Generous giving to the Lord by Christians as they show love for God.
  16. Preaching that is well prepared and well delivered.
  17. Audio aids and visual aids that help the visitor learn.
  18. An invitation that appeals to the hearts of men to follow God.
  19. Closing remarks emphasizing church family and urging visitors to return.
  20. A dismissal prayer that is a dismissal prayer.
  21. Christians who greet visitors and give them special attention.
6. You can take everything in this list and turn it around. What if people drive up to a building where the grass always needs cutting? They can't read the sign because it is weathered or broken? They walk into a building and no one speaks to them or treats them with courtesy? The Bible class teacher just starts off with the next question in the workbook with no acknowledgement or welcome to the visitor? The worship assembly begins with ten minutes of rambling announcements and an explanation of Aunt Sally's gallbladder surgery? Do you see any problems here with first impressions on guests? None of this gives glory to God. There is no excellence and honor toward God in any of it. There is no excuse for this. The only thing that may have happened up to this point in the visitor's mind is that he wonders why he came to this place. And, remember, we haven't even got to the song service or preaching yet! The visitor may start wondering if he can slip quietly out the back and no one will notice (after all, no one seemed to notice when he came in).
7. *To our visitors:* We want to impress you with the greatness of our God. That's why we strive for excellence! And sometimes we may fall short—but we try to do better. If you see that we don't care about excellence in worship to our God, giving Him junk, why should you care about our God? Are you motivated to give your best to God if we don't give our best? Are you moved to give your heart to Jesus if we don't have a heart for Jesus?
- D. Our God is not the junk man. We don't give our God junk, 1 Corinthians 10:31.

## II. Shut the gates!

- A. That's what God appealed for, Malachi 1:10. God makes (what seems) a radical statement. Someone says, "God didn't really mean that!" If we think that, it is because we don't take worship of God very seriously. God will not accept halfhearted efforts, offerings and service.
- B. Our God is great, Malachi 1:11. A purpose of our worship service is to proclaim His greatness, 1 Peter 2:9. There is blessing in pursuing excellence and danger in accepting mediocrity! There is no one like our God. Our mission and purpose in life is to praise Him and win others for Him.

### Conclusion:

1. Ben had a birthday this week. Preachers don't need—and should not expect—everyone to get them gifts on their birthdays. But God does expect us to give gifts unto Him! And we give Him our best.
2. Only our best effort is good enough for our God. In our day, let us give God our best! Whatever your role or function in the church, give the excellent God an excellent effort.
3. And, in our day, we appeal to all men to enter His gates, Psalms 100:1-5.