

AROUND THE WORLD IN ONE DAY!

Today's Text: Malachi Chap. 1

Extracts:

“A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence? ...For from the rising of the sun even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations,” says the Lord of hosts [Mal. 1: 6, 11]

The Beatles, a British pop group in the 1960's, continues to be adored by pop music lovers all over the world. In 1964, the group held the five top positions of the Billboard pop chart, a feat that has not been equaled before or since.¹ Two of its members, John Lennon and George Harrison, are dead, leaving behind Paul McCartney and the group's drummer, Ringo Starr. To mark his 68th birthday on Monday, 7 July 2008, Ringo Starr asked people all over the world to take a moment at noon (their own local time) to wish for peace and love. To ignite the event, thousands of people joined him in Chicago, USA, where he began his 10th “Ringo Starr and his All Star” tour. Within twenty four hours, that event was staged all over the world.

Ringo Starr had no power or authority to punish those who did not join him nor did he have the means to reward those who did. Why then did they do it? It was because they respected him and wanted to honour the memory of the Beatles. Most of us would do a similar thing for the ones we care about or respect. But why do we not extend the same reverence to God? Why do we not fear Him even when we know that He is “able to destroy both soul and body in hell” [Matt. 10: 28]?

God posed that challenge to the children of Israel in the Bible text for today's lesson. He made the important point that whether or not they praised and worshipped Him, they could not stop the world from doing so from the rising of the sun to its going down. In other words, God is praised round the clock around the globe and over time till eternity! How you can be part of that great movement? Let us find out from today's study .

¹ Based on “Beatle celebrates birthday with ‘peace and love,’”
www.cnn.com/2008/SHOWBIZ/Music/07/08/ringo.starr/index.html?iref=mpstoryview

1. Background: When worship turns sour!

Malachi's prophetic ministry came during the post-exile period after the rebuilding of the temple and before the coming of John the Baptist. Following the encouragement of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, the returnees from exile looked forward to the imminent return of the Lord to establish His earthly kingdom. The people waited and waited but He did not come. When was the El Dorado promised by the prophets going to happen [**Hagg. 2: 18-23; Zech. 14: 16-21**]? Despair set in and their worship turned hollow.

Does that ring familiar to you? Some of us have responded favourably to the gospel of Christ because of the promise of blessings and God's favour. We expected things to happen quickly. Yet, several years down the road, things have got worse instead of better. You gave up a life of fraud and deceit for holy living but you have not found a job in spite of your compelling qualifications. You have decided to get right with God by marrying properly and yet the child you desperately seek has not come and your menopause is knocking at the door. You were led by your pastor or priest to embark on an "intensive" prayer and fasting session for "a major break-through" but when you were through, you were the one broken and nothing else happened! At that point, God looks remote and "aloof." Is He still there?

Take the case of Job's wife. Within a matter of days, she lost all her children and valuable property. Her husband that used to be the greatest of all the people of the East had become destitute and riddled with painful boils. She could not handle it anymore. She cried out at her husband, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" [**Job 1; 2:1-9**].

The children of Israel had a similar frame of mind when God came to them through the prophet Malachi. Using a question-and-answer format, God dealt with the people's complaints one by one. In this week's study, we shall concentrate on one aspect of the didactic: *true worship*.

2. Your case and God's 'defence'!

Let us pose the people's case by way of questions and God's response by way of challenging posers as follows:

a) *In what way have You loved us?*

They asked the Lord, "In what way have you loved us?" [**Mal. 1: 2**]. In response, He reminded them of how He had loved their ancestor, Jacob, over his twin-brother, Esau [**vv. 2-3**]. They were the chosen race on account of that eternal love. For attempting to seek vengeance against the children of Jacob, the Lord had "laid waste (Esau's) mountains and his heritage for the jackals of the wilderness" [**vv. 4-5**].

For the sake of the children of Israel, the Lord had magnified His name among their enemies from Egypt to Babylon. Even while in exile in Babylon, the prophet Jeremiah had sent a letter of encouragement that conveyed God's words of love, saying, "For thus says the Lord, 'After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place, for I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope'" [Jer. 29: 10-11]. That promise was fulfilled. So how else did they expect Him to demonstrate His love for them?

God is directing that same .poser at you right now. You are complaining and whining that God no longer loves you. Yet, each night you go to bed, you wake up in one piece the next day. Do you know what could have happened to your limp sleeping body when you were hardly conscious of anything? You are complaining that you do not have enough food. Have you thanked God that you even still have appetite and feel hunger? Do you know how many people steer down at delicious food that they cannot eat because they have no palate? You are complaining that you are homeless. Yet you sleep soundly every night. Do you know how many rich people lie awake all night on their feather beds and use tranquilizers to get some sleep? God so loved you that He gave His only begotten Son to die for your sins and to gain you salvation [Jn 3: 16]. Can love be greater than that?

b) *In what way have we despised Your name?*

When people love us, we show appreciation by at least loving them back. We respect and honour them when we *choose* to do so. But that was not what the returnees did. God asked them back, "A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If then I am the Father, where is My honour? And if I am a Master, where is My reverence?" [Zech. 1: 6]. The priests and the people despised the Lord's name. They offered "defiled food" on God's altar. They offered as sacrifices animals that were blind, lame or sick. Yet, they expected God to accept their offerings favourably [vv. 6-8].

The Lord made it quite clear to them that He had no pleasure in them, nor would He accept any offerings from their hands [vv. 9-10]. Why would they expect Him to accept from them offerings that were stolen, or made from a deceitful heart [vv. 12-13]?

If Jesus were to visit some modern churches, He would again take a cudgel to drive away traders and money changers from His temple! You hardly hear sermons on repentance and salvation. You hear more about prosperity and financial break-through. Worshipers steal from their employers at work or customers in business, and come to church to pay

huge tithes on the loot to the admiration of their priests. Spiritual offices are distributed through political or earthly considerations. Consequently, the word and work of God suffer. Unbelievers are given evidence to blaspheme God on account of the waywardness of the people of God.. When things go terribly wrong, they turn around and ask God, like the children of Israel, “In what way have we despised Your name?” He will reply, “I am a great King and My name is to be feared among the nations” [v. 14].

3. God has had it!

Most of us behave as if God needs us more than we need Him. John the Baptist said to the multitudes that came to his baptism by the Jordan, “Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Therefore, bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones” [Lk 3: 7-8].

The generation of John the Baptists were the descendants of the generation of Malachi.. God was so fed up with that generation’s hypocrisy and deceitful worship that He told them in clear terms [Mal. 1: 11]:

From the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place, incense shall be offered in My name, and a pure offering; for My name shall be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

Let us pay attention to the following critical aspects of that statement:

a) *From sun rise to sun set*

No matter where we live on earth, we see the sun rise in the East and set in the West. However, sun rise in China is sun set in California (USA) as we recently experienced during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. It follows that on an average day, people are awake every hour in different parts of the world. Even if it is only one person that praises God in each location, His name is praised from sun rise to sun set *every day*. So, whether you praise Him or not, He does not miss it because there are millions and millions of others who will do so.

b) *Among the Gentiles*

The Gentiles were the non-Jews. All through history, God’s name has been great among Gentile kings and nations. For example, when Pharaoh the king of Egypt refused to set the children of Israel free from bondage, God used Moses to plague him and his powerful nation until they were

reduced to nothing. In the end, Pharaoh called Moses and said, “Rise, go out from among my people, both you and the children of Israel. *And go, serve the Lord, as you have said... and bless me also*” [Ex. 12: 31].

In another example, when the children of Israel were in exile in Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar attempted to impose idol worship on everybody, including the Jews that worshipped the true God. In spite of the fact that they did not have the power to defy the king’s order, three young Jews, Meshach, Shadrach and Abed-Nego, stood by their faith in God. When the king threw them into a fiery furnace, they were unhurt. Instead, the king saw in the fire a fourth person who was like “the Son of God.” In awe, Nebuchadnezzar made a decree “that any people, nation, or language which speaks *anything amiss against the God of Sharach, Meshach and Abed-Nego shall be cut in pieces, ... because there is no other God who can deliver like this*” [Dan. 3: 25-29].

Even today, there are testimonies of the great name of God and Jesus His Christ in Moslem communities in the Middle East, Africa and Asia. God knows how to defend His integrity among the Gentiles.

c) *Incense shall be offered in My name and a pure offering*

While in a trance on the island of Patmos, John the apostle saw in heaven an angel with a golden censer, and he came and stood before the altar. “He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne, and the smoke of the incense, with the prayers of the saints, ascended before God from the angel’s hand” [Rev. 8: 1-4]. Incense symbolizes the prayers of the saints [Rev. 5: 8]. Since God’s will be done on earth as it is in heaven [Matt. 6: 10], it follows that God will not tolerate the misuse of incense in earthly worship. That was why He clearly revealed to Moses how incense should be prepared and used in worship [Ex. 30: 1, 34-38].

It follows that in churches where incense is used as part of worship, they have to be careful to use it out of a pure heart and with reverence so as not to invite God’s wrath. For example, the sons of Aaron were struck dead on the altar during worship because they “offered profane fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.” God told Moses, “By those who come near Me I must be regarded as holy; and before all the people I must be glorified” [Lev. 10: 1-3]. In a recent example, thieves reportedly broke into one church in the Northern (predominantly Moslem) part of Nigeria, and stole some sacred items, including the incense burner. The following morning, police found the stolen items carefully left on the banks of the Kaduna River while the thieves drowned themselves! God can always defend His name.²

² Testimony that I heard in our church in Lagos, Nigeria (1985).

d) *The God of all nations*

When Jesus came in flesh, He did not step outside of the land of the Jews to preach the kingdom of God. But when He was about to ascend into heaven, He commissioned His followers to “make disciples *of all the nations*” and He would be with them always, even to the end of the age [Matt. 28: 19-20]. Today, His word has been fulfilled because there is hardly any nation on earth today that has not heard of Jesus and His Father. Cable television and the Internet have carried the gospel into non-Christian homes all over the world, to the extent that some people have received direct visitations from Christ. His Father has become the God of all nations because that has to happen before Christ’s return to judge the world [Matt. 24: 14].

4. Conclusion: It is a privilege to serve God!

God will never change His plan but He can change the workers He uses. For example, king Saul failed and He chose David to replace him. Judas Iscariot killed himself (after betraying Jesus) and Matthias was chosen to replace him as one of the twelve apostles [Acts 1: 14-26]. When you complain and whine, you are telling God to replace you with somebody else! But I have good news for you: God has enough volunteers to do His work for eternity! They are among those who praise Him from sun rise to sun set each new day.

Stop whining. Shut up and join them!