



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Malachi 1:6-14

“The Worship that Enrages God”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee again for Thy word which is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword. We thank Thee that it pierces even to the dividing asunder of soul and the spirit, of the joints and the marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And we thank Thee, too, Lord, that it is with this word that we have to do. We praise Thee that Thou hast given it to us. We pray that it may minister to us tonight in our studies together. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Message] Tonight we're turning again to Malachi chapter 1 and our subject is "The Worship that Enrages God." Malachi, like all of the prophets, was a prophet of reality. To him hypocrisy was a curse. The Greek word hypocrisy is an interesting word. It originally was a word that referred to a play actor. It literally means to judge under. And since many of the ancient actors acted with masks on, hypocrisy came to be referred to as that kind of speech that an actor would give in which he with a mask on spoke as if he were some other character, so that when a man is a hypocrite, he really was play-acting. And that was really the meaning of the word. So to Malachi, hypocrisy was a curse.

Many years ago they were having a Scriptural examination in Britain with some children, and they were being asked questions as is custom, or was the custom in Britain. Everyone had to pass a Scripture exam. And the questions came around to the prevailing religions of various nations. And someone asked: What is the prevailing religion of India? One of the kids replied, Hinduism. And they asked about several other countries. And finally the teacher said, And what is the prevailing religion of England. And a child blurted out, Hypocrisy! [Laughter] Well, Malachi has a great deal to say about hypocrisy in this section that we're looking at.

You remember that the children of Israel in remnant form have returned to the land. They have rebuilt the temple, and through the work of Nehemiah, they have also rebuilt the walls of the city. But evidently in the midst of this revival of religion, if we may call it that, there also existed a departure back, a departure away from the truth. Like the Ephesians who had had the privilege of the ministry of the Apostle Paul, the Israelites in Malachi chapter 1 are people who have left their first love. And so now God must defend himself.

It seems strange that God should have to defend himself and particularly defend his love for Israel. But that is precisely what he does in the opening verses of the chapter which we looked at last time. "I have loved you," said the Lord. But you say, 'How hast Thou loved us?'"

And you remember that last week as we studied those opening verses, the prophet pointed out that God had loved Jacob and had hated Esau. And that one could look at the history of the nation of Edom and see the blessing of God upon Israel. And furthermore, if one had had the opportunity to study the history of Edom, the words of the prophet would have had an even greater significance. The last few verses of that section describe the destruction of Edom and the inability of the nation to do anything about it because God's judgment rested upon them. But in the case of Israel, he has

loved Israel because he has loved Jacob, chosen Jacob and his seed by an unconditional covenant, and he will surely bless them.

Now a second question is raised. And we read in verse 6 of the 1st chapter of Malachi,

" 'A son honors his father, and a servant his master. Then if I am a father, where is My honor? And if I am a master, where is My respect?' says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise My name. But you say, 'How have we despised Thy name?' You are presenting defiled food upon My altar. But you say, 'How have we defiled Thee?' In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is to be despised.' But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts. But now will you not entreat God's favor, that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" says the Lord of hosts. Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you. For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts. But as for you, you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled, and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised.' You also say, 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it," says the Lord of hosts, "and you bring what was taken by robbery and what is lame or sick; so you bring the offering! Should I receive that from your hand?" says the Lord. But cursed be the swindler who has a male in his flock and vows it, but sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord, for I am a great King," says the Lord of hosts, "and My name is feared among the nations." "

In the 6th verse, the prophet opens up with the statement of a principle. He says, "A son honors his father, and a servant his master." Now you can see what he is trying to establish. He's trying to establish the fact that if one is a son, the normal response is the glorification of the father. That word honor is really the Hebrew word that means glory. And if one is a servant, then the natural response to a master is to honor and respect the master.

But now Israel is a son, and Israel is a servant. The Old Testament has made that very plain. She has been selected for sonship as a nation. Remember, Hosea said, "Out of Egypt have I called my son." And back in Exodus chapter 4, God speaks of Israel as his son, as the collective son, not as an individual son, but as a nation that belongs to the Lord.

In Jeremiah chapter 31 and verse 9, he says the same thing. Over in that verse, I think he says that he has begotten them just as a father would a son. Jeremiah 31:9 reads, "With weeping they shall come and by supplication I will lead them. I will make them walk by streams of waters on a straight path in which they shall not stumble, for I am a father to Israel and Ephraim is my firstborn." So you see, what he is saying is that Israel is God's son.

In Isaiah chapter 42, Israel is said to be the servant of Jehovah, and God selected Israel from among the nations for a distinct purpose. He not only elected them in order that they might be saved, but he elected them in order that they might be a missionary nation to the nations of the earth.

When in the New Testament we read, "You are my witnesses from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth," that language is derived from the Old Testament and the language that Isaiah spoke with reference to Israel's calling. They were elected for a purpose, just as you and I are elected for a purpose. We're not elected in order simply to have

salvation and rest in Believers Chapel in the pew for the rest of our lives. But we are elected for service. We are elected for salvation, but we are elected for service.

So Israel was a servant of Jehovah and they were a son of Jehovah. And so God naturally asks: Where is my honor? Where is my glory? Where is my respect? Isn't it one of our contemporary comedians who likes to say, I don't get no respect.

Well, God is not getting any honor and any glory from Israel. So these two relationships that are set forth here, the relationship of sonship and the relationship of servanthood, are designed to suggest that Israel, out of this relationship that they have, should be honoring God in proper spiritual worship.

Now, whenever I read the first chapter of Malachi, I think of the first chapter of the greatest of all the prophets. And if I may be allowed to pass judgment upon the prophets, I don't know whether I'll be so bold as to say that when I get to heaven, but nevertheless, in my present limited understanding, I think Isaiah is the greatest of the prophets. And he begins his prophecy by saying in the opening verses of the 1st chapter, verse 2,

"Listen, O heavens, and hear, O earth; For the Lord speaks, "Sons I have reared and brought up, But they have revolted against Me. An ox knows its owner, And a donkey its master's manger, But Israel does not know, My people do not understand." Alas, sinful nation, People weighed down with iniquity, Offspring of evildoers, Sons who act corruptly! They have abandoned the Lord, They have despised the Holy One of Israel, They have turned away from Him."

Sons, twice he calls them that. As a matter of fact, Israel is so dumb that they do not even have the sense of an ox or a donkey. At least they know their master, but Israel does not even know that.

Well, now having established the principle, the prophet turns to the priests. And evidently the prophet regards the priests as one of the chief causes of the situation in Israel, for the priests were those who had the responsibility of the word of God. It was they who were to teach it. In the 7th verse of the 2nd chapter, the prophet says, "For the lips of a priest should preserve knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth; for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts." So evidently, the attitude of the priests is such that Malachi under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit regards them as chiefly responsible for the condition among the people.

You know, this prophecy begins with a burden. He says the burden or the oracle, "The burden of the word of the Lord." You can see that this prophecy was a burden for him, and it was a burden to his hearers, and it was a burden to God. And he's expressing some of that now. So he turns to the priests.

Now, according to the Ten Commandments, and specifically the commandment with reference to a child and his parents, there should be the response of honor. Remember the statement made in chapter 20 and verse 12, "Honor thy father and mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you."

So one would expect honor and respect, then, for God. But his questions lay bare the spiritual declension of the priests. "If I am a father, where is my honor? If I am a master, where is my respect?" says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests who despise my name."

He has loved them. He has loved them to the exclusion of Esau. He has had particular love for them. He has had special love for them. He has had Calvinistic love for them, distinguishing grace, marking them out as the recipients of this special direction and special blessing. But they have not responded. And so, in spite of his love for them, they manifest a total lovelessness.

And their despite for him, their despising of his name is expressed in unacceptable sacrifices. Now I understand, and I'm assuming that you understand in general the Mosaic

system, the Levitical system of sacrifices. Well now, you can see how even something given by God can be perverted.

Listen when he says where is my respect. "You say," he said, "How have we despised Thy name?" And the Lord answers, "You are presenting defiled food upon My altar." Incidentally, in the Hebrew text here, the words "upon my altar" are emphatic in their position. "Upon My altar, you are presenting defiled food."

The reason he calls the sacrifices food, incidentally, is because God feeds upon the sacrifices since they represent typically the ministry of his son the Lord Jesus. And God delights in Jesus Christ.

And incidentally, he only delights in you and me when we represent him, when he is seen in us. He never delights in us per se. There is nothing in ourselves that may delight the Lord. But it is only insofar as we are identified with him, and insofar as we reflect him, insofar as he is seen in us that he is delighted in us. Because he is an infinite God, he cannot be delighted by anything but that which is infinite.

So it is insofar as we are identified with him, and insofar as he is reflected in us that God is pleased with us. It's good to remember that. It's important to remember that he's not pleased with the little things that mark us out as different.

Now, he says "defiled food." What does he mean by that? Why, he means I take delight in Jesus Christ, and those sacrifices which Israel brought were sacrifices that were designed to reflect him. They brought the burnt offerings which expresses total obedience to the father. They brought the meal offering which was so beautifully representative of his character as well as his work. They brought the peace offering which suggested the fact that his offering had enabled God and man to enter into fellowship by reconciliation. They brought the sin offerings. And they brought the trespass offerings which signified the effect of sin toward men and toward God. And they brought other offerings which represented other aspects of the saving ministry of Jesus

Christ. So, every time an offering was brought in faith, that offer was saying in effect this animal is my substitute. Accept him for me.

And those that had spiritual understanding, and there were some that had spiritual understanding, came to understand that these represented the redemptive work that the Lord would do in the future. That's why he gave them that system, so they would be prepared when the "Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" should come. So when the offerings were offered in faith, God delighted in them because they expressed aspects of the future ministry of the Lord Jesus. It was his food. It was that that he fed upon.

So they were presenting defiled food upon the altar. What was the defiled food? He says, "But you say, 'How have we defiled Thee?'" Notice incidentally that when you present defiled food on the altar, you defile the Lord, "In that you say, 'The table of the Lord is to be despised.'"

The table incidentally in this context doesn't have anything of course to do with the Lord's Supper. It's a reference to the altar of the Old Testament, the altar where the offerings were made and also where they were burned, the altar of burnt offering.

Well, that requires a little more explanation, and so he gives the explanation in verse 8, "But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not evil?"

Now, they have admitted that the offerings are polluted. But they don't understand why the Lord is polluted if the offerings are polluted. They were trying to make a distinction between the Lord and the offerings, but the Lord identified himself with those offerings. And so they admitted they were bringing offerings they weren't supposed to bring according to the Old Testament, but they were surprised when he said you have polluted me.

So, he explains, "You have brought the blind." He's talking about animals, the blind animals for sacrifice. You have brought the lame and sick animals for sacrifice. And is that not evil?

Now, lying back of this, of course, are those statements in the Old Testament that say that when the offerings are to be brought, they were, generally speaking, to be without spot and blemish. In a few cases certain blemishes might appear. But now, when a vow was offered and an offering was made in order to accompany that vow, that offering specifically had to be without blemish. And in one of the later verses here he will make reference to vows. But generally speaking, even in the other offerings the animals that were offered were to be without blemish. Certain blemishes however were permissible, but it was not permissible that they should bring blind animals for sacrifice. And it was not permissible that they should bring lame and sick animals for sacrifice.

But you see, if a person had things to offer to the Lord, what would you offer? Well, if the animal is of no use to you anymore, or not as much use to you, offer that to the Lord. Offer him the worthless animal. Offer him the thing that doesn't really cost you much. And that's what they were doing. Even the sick animals they were bringing to offer to the Lord. And the priests, these wicked priests, were evidently consenting to it. Later on they complain about what they are getting, because they live off of what was left. But nevertheless, they permitted it, and so they were offering things that were contrary to the Old Testament.

What were they really saying? Why, they were saying God is a God of trivialities, as someone has put it. He doesn't really care about reality. All we have to do is to carry out the letter of the word, and even then, we can fudge a little bit. Just go through the motions. Bring the animals, and what difference does it make if one is lame or one is sick and one is blind?

Well, that's the kind of worship that enrages God. That's the kind of worship that displeases him. That's the kind of worship that makes him angry. And it's so easy to commit that, to accomplish that kind of worship in the twentieth century.

You know the Lord expects us to attend church on Sunday, so we'll be there. Of course, we're not really interested in being here. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones says he's convinced that people go to church on Sunday in order to go home. [Laughter]

I know exactly what he means. The moment you get here, you can't wait to get home. And if the lesson goes five minutes over time. Now, I know you're not, I'm not thinking about the 11:00 or the 8:30 service, because, of course, that never happens there. [Laughter] But about the other meetings, we immediately pull out our watch. Notice I said we; I'm just like anyone else. And we go through the motions of our spiritual worship.

But it's a very serious thing to go through the motions with God. It in effect says we don't really think it matters with him. He's not really careful about whether these things are real with us at all, just so that we go through the motions, just so we observe the things mechanically. After all, wasn't the temple just a building with a certain number of stones and corners, and the altar had a certain shape, and so many sacrifices were to be offered? And when they were offered, isn't that all that God expects? Surely, he doesn't expect anything more than that. And after all, if we get out of bed on Sunday morning or on Wednesday night and attend the meetings, isn't that doing something a little extra? And surely isn't he pleased with the fact that we do it, even when we don't really want to? This kind of thing is the thing that makes God angry.

You know, the thing that really pleases the Lord is when a person recognizes that it is not so much the gift or the offering that is the measure of the worth, but the measure of the worth is really what it costs the person to offer it. That's the measure of it.

You see this beautifully illustrated in our Lord's ministry when he stood over against the temple treasure watching people put money in the collection in the temple

treasury. And finally a poor widow came along and threw in two mites. And remember the Lord Jesus said, That woman has done quite well. No, he said a great deal more than that. As a matter of fact, he didn't even say, That woman has done more than any man. He said, She's cast in more than they all.

It's almost as if he were saying, take all of the gifts that the rich and the middle-class have offered, pile them all up, and those two little mites that the woman threw in, they're worth more than all that have been offered because she gave everything that she had. So you see, the measure of our service, the measure of our worship, the measure of our gift, is not what it is, but how much it really costs us, what it really means to us. Some of you may do a little thing which costs a lot. And someone else may do something that appears to be very large, and it may not be worth nearly as much.

Well, you can see that these people are people who would have been right at home in our Christian churches in 1977. Isaiah talks about this type of person "trampling the temple courts". And he says he was sick, God says he was sick of their sacrifices and he didn't want to have any more of them at all. And Malachi is going to say something even stronger in just a moment.

It's no wonder, you know, when we abandon biblical doctrine, we abandon the biblical teaching, it's not long before we abandon the biblical morals. And soon we don't really have anything but an outward connection with spiritual things.

When the offering plate was passed in a congregation in Britain many years ago, there was a little boy by the name of Bobby Muffet. And when they passed the offering plated, he asked the ushers to put it on the floor. And when they put it on the floor, he stepped out of the pew and went over and stepped in the offering plate. And he was signifying by that that he was giving himself to the Lord. And if you know anything about modern missions, you know that Robert Muffet became one of the great missionaries to Africa.

Now, that's the kind of giving that really counts with the Lord, when we give ourselves and then the substance.

Now, I love Malachi because he was a man who was really down to earth. So, when he said, If you offer the blind for sacrifice and you offer the lame and sick, that's evil isn't it? Why don't you try it out on the governor? Why don't you try paying your taxes sometime with some of those threadbare garments that you give to some of the social institutions around Dallas, too? It's that kind of thing.

You know we'll give to the church or give to the Lord something we really don't need any longer. We'll take a deduction too. That's alright, I'm not objecting to that. But try it out on someone who really counts. It won't work. And that's what he says.

"Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you?" The Hebrew is very expressive. Would he lift up your face? You know you come in very humble and give it. Would he be so pleased that he lifts up your face in his presence, the presence of the governor? So would he lift up your face, would he be pleased with it? No.

Now then, the prophet begins to speak for the Lord here. And this is God's answer. And this is a very scornful and ironic section of the prophecy of Malachi. I wish I had it within me to be as scornful and ironical as the Lord is through the prophets.

Beginning in verse 9, the text reads that I have before me, "But now will you not entreat God's favor (But that really is something like this, And now entreat, please, God's favor) that He may be gracious to us? With such an offering on your part, will He receive any of you kindly?" In other words, ask God to accept these things that you've been offering. Ask him to accept the lame and the sick. Ask him to accept the blind.

The Hebrew here is again extremely expressive, for the word "entreat" which is followed by a little particle that means something like please. "Entreat please." You notice the marginal reading in the New American Standard Bible. "Entreat please God's favor."

But the word entreat is a word that means to make the face sweet or pleasant. So what it really means is to soften up God. Why don't you? Why don't you try to soften him up by giving him and having him accept one of these sorry offering that you're offering? If not the governor, try it on the Lord. You can see he's being very, very sarcastic. Why don't you try some of that on the Lord?

Then he says in verse 10, "Oh that there were one among you who would shut the gates, that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from you."

Now here I'm reminded of Isaiah again. And in Isaiah chapter 1 and verse about 11, 12 and 13, he says something like that which Malachi is saying.

In the 10th verse of chapter 1 of Isaiah, the prophet writes,

"Hear the word of the Lord, You rulers of Sodom; Give ear to the instruction of our God, You people of Gomorrah. (Isaiah could handle himself pretty well too.) "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" says the Lord. "I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams And the fat of fed cattle; And I take no pleasure in the blood of bulls, lambs or goats."

Now remember, God had told them to bring these things. But now, he is saying he takes no pleasure in them, because when he told Israel to bring the offerings, he intended that they bring those offerings in faith. He intended that they should bring them out of a sincere desire in their heart to please the Lord, that is, to cover their sins if they were sin offerings. They were confessing their sin, and they were confessing that God had made a way of restoration to fellowship. But if they just go through the motions of bringing the offerings, he says he doesn't even want them. And yet he's commanded them.

" "What are your multiplied sacrifices to Me?" (And then in verse 12 he says) "When you come to appear before Me (in the temple), Who requires of you this trampling of My courts? Bring your worthless offerings no longer; their incense is an abomination to Me. New moon and Sabbath, the calling of assemblies— I cannot endure iniquity and the solemn assembly (and the church meeting)."

So in effect he's saying, if we come to the meetings of the Lord, and we come without any sense of acknowledgment of our need of fellowship with him through confession of sin if we have sinned against him, if we come without repentance, if we come without faith, if we come without a sincere desire to worship him, it is just as well that we not come at all.

So, he looks around for someone that would shut the gates to the temple area, "that you might not uselessly kindle fire on My altar!"

There's nothing automatically praiseworthy about opening church doors on Sunday morning. Sorry, deacons. All of our worship, all of our ministry, all of our spiritual activity, if it does not proceed out of an attitude of faith and trust and out of a sense of repentance too, we need that constantly, it's unacceptable to the Lord. So you can see how important it is that there be reality in the worship. Reality in Believers Chapel, too.

We read in the newspapers, Attend church Sunday. Nonsense, if that's all it is. Attend the church of your choice. Nonsense. There's nothing worthwhile in that at all if it is not meaningful, spiritual, personal, and of course, if it is not in accordance with the word of God.

I like this prophet. It really speaks to our needs because it's so easy to go through the motions, isn't it? And you may think that I'm jumping on you. But I'm really speaking to myself, because it is even easier for me to go through the motions, because I attend probably three or four times as many meetings as you do. I attend eight or ten, at least, a

week. And most of you don't attend that many. Sometimes I attend twelve or fourteen a week. And it's very easy to fall into the pattern of attending meetings and often not even knowing exactly why you're there. You sit there and add a new room to the house or something like that while the meeting is going on.

Now, the prophet concludes this section in verse 11 by saying,

" "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense is going to be offered to My name, and a grain offering that is pure; for My name will be great among the nations," says the Lord of hosts."

Now, it is possible to interpret this verse, the 11th verse, as a reference to the present time, that is, the time present to the prophet. So that we would read it, "For from the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name is great among the nations."

In the 5th verse we read, "And your eyes will see this and you will say, “The Lord be magnified beyond the border of Israel!”" And in verse 14, particularly, we read, "For I am a great King," says the Lord of hosts, “and My name is feared among the nations.”" And so some commentators have said that really what Malachi is saying is that you should be very careful about your worship of me because I am great among the nations.

Now, we don't have time to go into all of the details that make up the solution of this exegetical problem. But I think that in the light of the context of this epistle, and in the light of the history of the times which seems to indicate, incidentally, that there was no offering of incense to the Lord anywhere else except in the land, and no offerings offered among the Gentiles that were pure because they had to be offered in Jerusalem if they were pure offerings. In the light of these objections, probably we are to render this as the future and refer this to the millennial age, so that Malachi would be saying, It's a serious thing for you to carry on this ritualistic formalistic type of worship because I am a

great God and the time is coming when the whole of the earth is going to be worshipping me. My name is going to be great among them and they're going to be bringing pure offerings to me. And so your attitude now is entirely contrary to the future.

Well now, he turns to discuss in verses 12 and 13 the attitude of the priests. "But you are profaning it, in that you say, 'The table of the Lord is defiled.'" Now they weren't really saying this. What does he mean when he says "you are saying the table of the Lord is defiled"?

Why, he means by their actions they were saying that. When they bring a lame animal, a sick animal, a worthless animal and put that animal on the altar, they're saying, in effect, that the altar of the Lord is a despised thing, and so they will offer that which they despise on that altar. So, they were really saying by their actions what their attitude was; they really did despise the Lord. So, they were treating him as common by putting these things on the altar.

It's like the man who without thinking puts five dollars in the collection plate. We try to keep you from doing that in Believers Chapel, incidentally. But he puts in his money without any thought whatsoever of the worship of God. It's just so that the friend down the rest of the pew may see that he did give something. That's worthless. He may as well keep it. It's a waste of money.

Now the priests go on to say, "The table of the Lord is defiled and as for its fruit, its food is to be despised."

Now remember, the priests live by the offerings. You see, when I had sinned or you had sinned, we brought an offering. And it was the priest's duty to slay the offering, and he would take out, he would cut the offering up, do whatever is necessary to skin it and care for it. He was an expert butcher. And so he would take off that which would be offered, the parts of the animal, and then the remainder of it was for the priests.

Since they did not engage in business, it was necessary for Israel to support them. And they were supported by what was left of these offerings. So this is what they're

talking about here. "As for its fruit, its food is to be despised." They have reaped what they have sown. They have allowed through their preaching the Israelites to bring things contrary to the word of God. And so they were now suffering. They were having to live off of these lame and sick and blind animals.

You know, that is inevitably what happens. If we lose respect for the word of God, sooner or later we will have loss of respect for the ministers of the word of God. And if the ministers of the word of God attack the word of God, and affirm that it is not inspired, that it's not God's word, and teach people that it's not God's word, one of the ironic ways that God has of making that which we reap the product of what we sow is to inculcate on the part of those whom they have taught a despising of those who are living by that which is not even true.

That's why in so many of churches there is no respect for the minister, because he's already told them the word of God is not really the word of God. But nevertheless, he himself sets himself up as a minister of the word of God which is no longer the word of God and affirms by words things that he denies in his teaching.

And so these priests, now, are saying, "My, how tiresome it is!"

There are some young men who are sitting in the audience, and let me assure you that to preach the word of God does require hours of study if it is to be effective. You cannot sit down and prepare a message from the word of God in just a few hours. It might take you twenty or thirty to prepare one message that's worthwhile. And that can get a little old after two, three, five, ten, fifteen, twenty years. And if your heart's not in it, if you don't really feel that it's a delight, that it's a pleasure, that it's an inestimable privilege to minister the word of God then you'll say just what the priests do, "My, how tiresome it is!"

But if you allow the word of God to grip you and the truth of God to grip you and make it exciting and moving, then of course, it's an entirely different thing. It's not "My,

how tiresome it is," but it's something that you look forward to with supreme delight that God should lay his hand upon you to minister the word of God. What a great privilege.

Now of course, that pertains to every one of us, too, in the ministries which God gives us. You know the Christian life is exciting, really exciting and thrilling. And one of the saddest things in the world is to see a Christian who's lost the joy of the salvation and thinks of his Christian experience as a tiresome activity.

He says in verse 13, he says, " 'My, how tiresome it is!' And you disdainfully sniff at it." That word means to breathe in contempt. It's kind of like, you know, when you walk up by someone who may not be altogether clean. (Sniff, sniff) That's right, that's what it means. That's what they were doing, sniffing at these things that were offered on the altar.

Ritualistic Christendom is the expression of just what he is talking against here with the vestments and the choirs and all of the other outward things which are substituted for the reality and vitality of the truth of God. My goodness, what could be greater than to proclaim the gospel of a God of sovereign grace who through the gospel brings men to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, preserves them through their lives, brings them into the presence of God for all eternity? What could be more wonderful than that? But when we lose the joy of it, then what do you do? Well, you substitute for that. You substitute things to do.

Now, I'm not against a choir singing if they sing from the heart. But it's so easy to substitute things for the vitality and reality of the Christian worship. In the early days of this country, it was not unusual for people to gather in a barn to worship. When Whitefield preached, people did gather in barns. They didn't have to have a nice attractive little building like this building. They could meet in a barn because the reality was there. God hates this form and ceremony.

And the price of hypocrisy is stated in verse 14. I must stop; time's up. "But cursed be the swindler," the wily trickster.

Now, here is a man who is even trickier than some of the others. He had a beautiful male in his flock which was without blemish, and so he would vow that to the Lord. He would say a vow, and in order to make his vow valid, he would say he was going to offer this animal that was without blemish. But when it came to the time to offer it, he didn't offer the one without blemish. He offered one that was blemished. He was a trickster. That's what the Hebrew word means, incidentally, when it says "But cursed be the swindler" the wily trickster who makes a vow over one animal and then offers another one.

What did he want? Why he wanted to be known as spiritual. That's what he wanted to do. He wanted to be known like Ananias and Saphira as a person who really did things for the Lord. But when it came down to it, he cheated.

Well, we must stop.

[Prayer] Father, we thank Thee for these words and we do pray that, Lord, Thou wilt enable us to look at our lives in the light of the prophet's words. O God, give us reality individually and in our corporate worship as well. For Jesus' sake. Amen.