

Malachai 1:6

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[0 : 00] Father's Day For those of you whose father is still alive, can I pose a more serious question?

How is your relationship with your father? For those of you who have lost their father, be assured of the truth of what we sung just a moment ago concerning our God as a father to the fatherless. But if your father is still alive, I do repeat the question, how is your relationship with him? There is something very wrong and very sad about a broken father-son or father-daughter relationship. We recoil when we hear of a father forgotten or a father spurned. It's not right. It's not meant to be that way. This morning I want us to consider a passage that speaks of a father spurned. A passage from which we can draw principles that apply to our own father-son or father-daughter relationships, but that principally challenges us concerning our relationship with our heavenly Father.

[1 : 38] In Malachi chapter 1 and in verse 6, God expresses himself in this very suggestive way. A son honors his father and a servant his master.

If I am a father, where is the honor due to me? And I want us to consider this passage under a number of headings all revolving around the figure of God as our father.

And we want to think of these different aspects that we find here. First of all, we're going to notice the father's presupposition. That may sound a rather bizarre heading, but we'll explain in due course what we mean by that.

The father's presupposition, but then the father's claim. Then, and this is the heart of the matter in many ways, the father's pain and protest. And along with that, the son's defense.

We'll also notice the father's confidence. And then finally, the father's invitation. We'll find all of these things, I hope, in the verses that we've read.

[2 : 40] But before we do that, before we look at these aspects of God as our father, as revealed to us in this passage, we do need to spend just a little time placing Malachi within the big picture of God's big story.

Now, those of you who were able to be here last week will remember that we met Zephaniah. Zephaniah was a prophet who ministered in the century or so between the fall of Samaria, the northern kingdom to the Assyrians in 722 B.C., and the fall of Judah, the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. under the Babylonians.

And the fall of Jerusalem was followed as prophesied by the exile in Babylon. In fact, there had been some exile even before the fall of Jerusalem.

And that exile ended with the conquest of Babylon by the Persian Empire under Cyrus the Great, described in the Bible rather amazingly in some regards as God's anointed one, though he was a pagan emperor, but used of God to bring freedom to the exiles in Babylon.

And when Cyrus conquered Babylon, he immediately issued a decree that the Jews could return to Jerusalem. And indeed, he facilitated the rebuilding of the temple.

[4 : 13] Now, that initial return following the exile is documented by, among others, the prophet Zechariah. Some of you will have fond memories of Zechariah from the Neighborhood Fellowship Study Guide used last year that you managed to endure through over a few months.

And as you recall from that, you'll remember that it was during that time that the temple eventually, not immediately, but eventually was rebuilt.

And that was concluded in about 516 B.C., though it was a pale shadow of Solomon's temple that had been destroyed 70 years before.

There then followed other, what we might call, returns from Babylon. It wasn't simply one group that returned at the very beginning. Others followed, notably among them, the return of Ezra in 458 B.C.

and Nehemiah a few years later.

And notice, if you've been following the years, I know it's difficult when we're running through it so quickly, but perhaps you've noticed the time that elapsed between the temple being rebuilt, and that was concluded roughly in 516, and Ezra and Nehemiah returning around about 450 B.C.

[5 : 35] So, a considerable amount of time, 60 or 70 years have elapsed. And you might say, well, when we read Ezra and Nehemiah, we see that things are not well.

The wall is still not being built. There is much that is not as it ought to have been. And that indeed was the case. Though the returning exiles had been in Jerusalem for many decades, things were not going well for them.

The people are discouraged. Their initial high hopes and pious, and I use that in a good sense of the word, their pious expectations of great days ahead have not materialized.

And just to get in perspective the situation in Judah, Judah at this point in history was a minuscule territory, really just the city of Jerusalem and a little bit of the surrounding territory.

It's reckoned that maybe the total extension was of 20 by 30 miles, and with an estimated population of some 150,000 people.

[6 : 42] In terms of the size of Judah, again, just to get it in perspective, Aberdeenshire would be about seven times larger than Judah. So, it's a far cry from the glory days of King David and Solomon.

This is the circumstance, or these are the circumstances in which we find God's people. And the people, in as much as we know and we're given a fair amount of information in the prophets who ministered at that time, the people, by and large, have not abandoned the faith.

They've not embraced idolatry in a brazen or vulgar way, as had been the case in the past. They've not entirely abandoned a lifestyle that reflected God's commandments.

But the spark has gone. The zeal is missing. The serious commitment has waned. And much of their religion is dry and formal and powerless.

Maybe orthodox, we might say, but very dry and lacking power. These are the circumstances in which Malachi ministered.

[7 : 52] It's difficult to place Malachi with precision. We don't have in the book itself precise chronological information, but it seems reasonable to understand that it was either during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah or perhaps in that period between the first returnees and the arrival of Ezra and Nehemiah.

There's a period there, as we noted, of maybe 50, 60 years. It's around about that time, in any case, that Malachi served and ministered and prophesied.

But as we just sketched out something of the circumstances in which Malachi was serving God and prophesying, I wonder if any of what we said resonated with you.

We could compare the historic scenario outlined to the life of a congregation, to the life of our congregation. We could, say, to compare it to the wider church in a nation, in our nation.

But what I want this morning to do is, though we could profitably do what I've just suggested, I want us this morning to make it a little bit more personal and ask you if you can look back to a time in your own Christian life when you were excited about being a Christian, expectant about what God had in store for you, but now, perhaps for some, it's all just a bit pedestrian.

[9 : 17] You've not abandoned the faith. You're here, after all, and that's good. But you're just, in some measure, going through the motions. If that, in any way, is something that you can identify with, then maybe you're not so far away from the people of God as described for us in the book of Malachi.

And so, given that that is so, what God had to say to the people in that day, God as their Father had to say to them in that day, is a word from God, your Father, to you today.

We do need to do one other thing before we look at the different aspects of God as Father. And what we need to just briefly do is to comment on the literary technique, I suppose we'd have to call it, used by Malachi in this prophecy.

Throughout the book, it's a very short book, but throughout the book, there are what are called disputations. That's one name that is given to them. And basically, what we have is Malachi recreates a dialogue or dispute between God and the people, where he, Malachi, plays the part of both actors.

He expresses the message he has received from God. The message is from God, let that be very clear, but he's the one who expresses it, who verbalizes it to the people.

[10:43] But then he also is the one who verbalizes the response of the people. Now, clearly, that's on the basis of what he perceives and discerns of them. But this is the method that he uses to get across the message that he has.

Now, having kind of laid the foundations or cleared the ground a little, giving a little of the background, we can move on and consider the different aspects already intimated that we find in this passage.

The Father's presupposition, the Father's claim, the Father's pain and protest, the Father's confidence, and the Father's invitation. First of all, then, the Father's presupposition.

Now, what do I mean by this rather unpromising heading? Well, what have we read in verse 6 of Malachi chapter 1? A son honors his father, and a servant his master.

A son honors his father. Now, what is going on here? Why does God, through the prophet, begin his dispute with the people with this statement?

[11:50] Well, what God is doing is he is identifying and stating what he evidently considers a self-evident or universal truth. He begins with this presupposition.

It's as if he's saying, well, everybody knows that a son honors his father. Surely we can agree on that. You know, we're going to disagree on a few other things as we go through this argument, but on this, surely we are agreed.

And God clearly anticipates that the response, albeit the silent response, of his audience is, yes, of course. Well, of course a son honors his father. That's just the way it is.

It's the understood, given in this dispute as it begins. This isn't a point that needs to be argued or requires evidence to back it up.

Everybody just knows that this is so. And effectively, as we observe, as we look across religions and cultures and generations, is this not largely what we find?

[12:54] Is this not something on which peoples of every nation of different religions would agree, and they would say, yes, we agree with that. A son is to honor his father.

Indeed, I'm reminded of what Paul said about any believer who failed to provide for, to honor his parents.

And how does Paul respond to that bizarre possibility? He says, do not even pagans do that? He says, even pagans honor their parents. Like, that's just a given.

How could you even imagine not doing that? And this is what God is doing here. A son honors his father. Stepping back just for a moment, I think we could argue that any society that fails to respect, provide for, and protect fathers and mothers, and very particularly as they enter into their older age, such as society is at a very fundamental level, sick to the core.

And with that in mind, it's a sobering thought. In the light of the legislation on assisted suicide that is making its way, we trust, without success, through the parliament in Edinburgh, where the danger of such a legislation is that it is but one step in a trajectory to a very dark place indeed.

[14:20] In and of itself, it's bad, but perhaps even more chilling is what it could be a step in the direction of. We're not prophets. We don't know what will come, but it's certainly a concern.

What about you? How are you doing in the matter of honoring your father and your mother? Do you honor them? How do you honor them? We're not going to dwell on that this morning, but this presupposition that God begins with certainly reminds us that this is something that we need to be careful about and serious about as sons and daughters.

Now, we're calling this truth, a son honors his father, self-evident and universal, and yet for the Jews in Malachi's day, and for us, the matter was, is, even more clear-cut, as God's law explicitly identifies honoring father and mother as a central covenant responsibility.

And clearly here, God is also alluding to this. It's universally recognized, but it is explicitly legislated for in the book of the law, in the book of the covenant, in the Ten Commandments.

So that's what we're calling the father's presupposition. But moving on to what we're calling the father's claim in that same verse. A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due to me?

[15:49] If I am a father, where is the honor due to me? And the question that God poses through Malachi is rhetorical. This is a claim that is being made by God.

God is saying, I am a father. And I wonder, even as we just think of the language that is employed here, and we have to be a little bit careful to not maybe read into this more than is legitimate, but I wonder if it's significant, and poignantly so, that God says here, if I am a father, rather than saying, if I am your father.

Of course, he would have had every right to say to the priests and the people, I am your father. And yet, the coldness of the people, and the distance of them, and the half-heartedness of their worship leads God to express himself in this more distant way.

If I am a father, where is the honor due to me? Of course, he was their father. He was their father in two senses. He was their father by creation, as their creator, as he is in that sense, father of all men.

But very especially, he was their father by adoption. He had chosen Israel as his firstborn son. Listen to what God says to Pharaoh through Moses in Exodus in chapter 4.

[17:14] Then say to Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says, Israel is my firstborn son. Israel was chosen by God from among the nations to be his firstborn son.

He was their father by adoption. That is something that we need to ask ourselves. What is our relationship to God? We can't simply assume that he is our father.

He is our father as creator, but as a redeemer, as the one who has adopted us. Well, that is true of those who have received his son, who have believed in Jesus.

As John reminds us so eloquently and so clearly in the first chapter of his gospel. Yet to all who received him, that is to all who received Jesus, to all who believed in the name of Jesus, he gave the right to become children of God.

So this is the father's claim. I am a father. I am your father. But before we move on, notice that that's not the totality of his claim. God does not only claim to be Israel's father, he also claims to be Israel's master.

[18:26] A son honors his father and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due to me? If I am a master, where is the respect due to me? Now our concern this morning will be on God as father, but we shouldn't miss this reality that God presents himself as both father and master, both father and king.

And this recognition of God's dual identity as father and master guards against the twin dangers of over-familiarity.

On the one hand, if we think of God only as father, but also of distant and impersonal subjection on the other. If we think of him or consider him only as master or king, he is both.

And we must maintain that balance in our own conception, Bible-shaped conception of God. So the father's claim.

But moving on to where we want to just spend a little bit more time. The father's pain and protest, and together with that, the son's defense. And the way we're going to do this is to consider it under three logically sequential elements in this disputation.

[19:44] You have the father's pain and protest, you have the son's defense, and you have the father's evidence for the accusation that he makes. Now these three elements are interspersed throughout the passage, but we're going to divide them out in this way.

First of all, the father's pain and protest. Now we've already noted the painful poignancy of the language employed by God, if I am a father.

But the question, of course, continues, if I am a father, where is my honor? This is the pain and indignation of a father spurned. A pain that is justly accompanied by God's protest, found in the questions and accusations leveled at the priests and the people.

In the first instance, we notice it is directed at the priests, but when we see the content of the accusation, it's entirely reasonable to see the accusation as spreading beyond the priests and encompassing the people also.

Well, what were these questions or accusations leveled at the people? Well, let's limit ourselves to two fundamental ones with which the disputation begins. The one we've already seen there in verse 6.

[20:58] If I am a father, where is the honor due to me? And then God goes on in that same verse, at the end of the verse. But you ask, how have we shown contempt for your name?

Or in the words of God, you show contempt for my name. This is the protest of a God. And these two things go together.

The absence of honor and the presence of contempt. They're two sides of a very unpleasant coin. You don't honor me, but rather you show contempt for me.

This is the heart of the accusation that God brings to his people. But let's turn to the son's defense. How does the son defend himself?

The son being the people, the people of God. How do they defend themselves? Well, notice what Malachi verbalizes as the son's defense in these first couple of verses, in verse 6 and in verse 7.

[22 : 03] And the son's defense comes in the form of questions. How have we shown contempt for your name? You accuse us of showing contempt for your name.

But how have we done so? And then they go on in verse 7. How have we defiled you? This is how they defend themselves, by posing these questions in response.

Now, the first thing that I think we can say about the son's defense, the people's defense, is that in as much as we can gauge these things from the printed page, is that it appears sincere.

I don't think that the people here are guilty of crass hypocrisy, that they know that they're dishonoring God, that they know that they're showing contempt for God, but they very hypocritically question whether that is so.

I don't think that is the case. I think that people are sincere. They're genuinely bemused by the accusation that has been leveled at them. I wonder if they thought that Malachi was maybe just making it all up, or at least embellishing on what God had actually said, this severe prophet, and he's just coming down so hard on us.

[23 : 17] But really, it's not that bad. You know, we're not really guilty of these things, are we?

Now, if that is indeed what the people thought, it's interesting to note just how time and again Malachi insists in this prophecy that everything that he is bringing to them is that which has come from God.

And this expression, says the Lord Almighty, familiar in the prophetic literature, is particularly found in this prophecy.

More than in any other, Malachi continually insists that what he's saying is what says the Lord Almighty. So the son's defense, first of all, in identifying is, I think it is sincere.

I think we can reasonably describe it as sincere, but sincerely wrong. And let's just pause there for a moment. And let me just warn myself and you of the great danger of being sincerely wrong.

We live in a day when often we're led to believe that all that really matters is sincerity. As long as you're sincere, well, that's really all that matters. Well, that's not true. You can be, I can be sincerely wrong.

[24 : 30] And in the matter of the worship of God, that is a very serious matter, to be sincerely wrong. Sincerity doesn't grant any merit to the position that you hold or to the behavior that you engage in.

Be very careful in that regard. So they're sincere. But what then is the problem? Well, I think we can capture the problem of the people by describing the people's defense.

We're thinking of their defense against these accusations that God brings to them. We can describe the people's defense as unspoken words in defense of unseen sins.

Maybe in that way we can kind of remember more easily what's going on. unspoken words in defense of unseen sins. Why do I say unspoken words?

Well, picking up on what we've already said about this literary technique that Malachi is employing of a disputation, where Malachi plays the part of both God and the people.

[25 : 31] I think what's happening here is that Malachi, with the insight and discernment granted by God to his prophet, he discerns the attitude of the people and puts their unspoken thoughts into words.

Now, we can't state that categorically, but it seems to me that this is what is happening. It's not that the people were verbally protesting in this way. They weren't verbally saying, no, we don't defy you. We are not contemptuous of you. This is what they were thinking. This is what their attitudes, or rather their behavior revealed, and Malachi was able to discern that and identify that, and he incorporates it into this disputation that forms his message and his prophecy.

And if that is indeed what is going on, is that not so much like us? Often we're too polite to shout out in protest at God or his word, but silently and stubbornly we resist and reject the protests and accusations of the Father that we have spurned.

Unspoken words, but unspoken words in defense of unseen sins. And this goes back to the people's sincerity and their shock at being accused by God.

[26 : 51] You see, the people really don't get it, and they don't get it because they can't see what the problem is. Contempt for God? Me? Dishonor? Moi? Defiling God's temple?

How? When? What is this all about? Unseen sins that leads them to be so affronted by the accusation that is made against them.

But God graciously would have them see. And so, because it's important that they do see, we also find the Father's evidence. There is His accusation, there is their attempt at a defense, but there is evidence that is leveled against them.

And it's interesting that God points to the externals of worship, what we might call the externals of worship, to demonstrate the heart problem. In this case, the sacrifices that they were bringing. And externals are important. In and of themselves, they are important, but especially in what they reveal. And in the case of the priests and the people, it all revolves around their offerings, their sacrifices.

[27 : 59] And let's just notice some characteristics of their offerings that we find in the passage. And here we're going to have to run through very swiftly. First of all, we can say that they were flawed. That in verse 8, when you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong?

When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? They were flawed. But also, they were miserly. It's almost, what could we say, humorous, but in a dark kind of way, what Malachi says there, immediately following in verse 8, try offering them to your governor.

Would he be pleased with you? Just as a curious historical aside, the language of governor is what helps us identify this as being post-exilic. Because this is a word that's only used of those who were appointed by the Persian emperor.

And so that is a clue as to when Malachi ministered. But that's just a little aside. The point that Malachi is making is you would never offer such things to the governor. If you had to pay your taxes, you wouldn't shortchange the governor.

You wouldn't bring something that wasn't acceptable. You're so miserly. But with God, oh, anything will do. Anything will do. This is good enough for God. That wouldn't be good enough for others.

[29 : 17] So their offering was flawed. It was miserly. The offering that they bring, the service that they render, it was wearisome. In verse 13, you say, what a burden.

What a burden. What a drag. Always having to worship and give and to serve God. This is just so wearisome. So tiring. Got better things to do.

And it was selfish and dishonest. Verse 14, cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it but then sacrifice a blemished animal to the Lord.

He's got to choose. The worshiper, I've got this really good lamb that will get me a good price in the market and I've got this crippled lamb that isn't worth anything. Oh, I'll give him the crippled one. That'll do. Even though I promise to give him the other one, this crippled one will do.

Oh, it's just for God. That'll do. It's not a problem. Now all this was visible to Malachi. You know, Malachi can't see the people's hearts just as we can't see people's hearts but he could see these things.

[30 : 20] These were the externals that he could see. At least many of them. Maybe that last one he would have had more difficulty in seeing but the others were visible as it would have been to any discerning observer.

But what is visible reveals the heart or the spiritual problem and that is a failure to appreciate the worthiness of God reflected in the failure to offer wholehearted service to God.

This is the problem. Let me just say that again. A failure to appreciate the worthiness of God reflected in the failure to offer wholehearted service to God.

And what about you? Do you appreciate God's worthiness grounded in who God is and what God has done? And does your service for God reflect His worthiness?

In your use of your time do you give God the best of your time or the dregs what's left over when all the important stuff has been done? Of your money do you give what you can afford and all this will do?

[31 : 26] It's not maybe what I realize I ought to give or I'm called to give but this will do. Of your gifts of your life. Are you going to give God the dregs of your life?

I couldn't go through a sermon on this Sunday without mentioning the World Cup so forgive me but some of you may be interested in the football thing as it was described last Sunday. But there was something I saw about some of the footballers who claim to have some kind of Christian commitment. I don't mean that in a questioning way but different levels of Christian commitment and one of them curiously is the big new star of England Raheem Sterling. Those of you who stayed up last night will have seen what a great game he had. Well it's interesting he is quoted as saying the following in regard to his Christian convictions and I hope that the quote that I have is a genuine one or certainly an accurate one but this is what he is reputed to have said when the time is right I will fully be Christian.

Isn't that an interesting way of looking at Christian commitment? When the time is right well maybe not just yet I'm young I'm talented I'm successful and well this isn't really a very convenient time to be fully Christian however he understands that expression.

[32 : 46] But isn't this the problem? Isn't this the problem of the people of God in Malachi's day well we want to be Christians but not fully Christians we want to be committed but not fully committed we want to be part of God's family we want to have God as our father but we're not very keen on all that that brings with it.

A failure to appreciate the worthiness of God reflected in the failure to offer wholehearted service to God. But we have to move on. We have two other things we want to notice and the penultimate thing is the father's confidence.

Try and place yourself in the place of the father. Now given that we are speaking about God that is not a simple task but think about it what a sorry panorama for God as the faithful father of his people.

How must God feel? Again that's a very deep question for us to tread very carefully with. Is God downcast?

Is he depressed? Does he feel hopeless in the face of what is before him? And I would say no and never. I think we can legitimately using the language of scripture speak of God's pain and sadness and anger.

[34 : 00] Verse 10 paints a picture of a spurned and angry father. Oh that one of you would shut the temple doors so that you would not light useless fires on my altar.

You've got the temple it's built now well just close the doors because there's no point in what you're doing when you gather there. But for God the panorama is never hopeless.

And so we speak of the father's confidence. In the midst of all the gloom we are confronted in verse 11 with the seemingly incongruous vision of the father's confidence.

And notice the object of the father's confidence and the grounds of the father's confidence. Let's read the verse first. My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun in every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name because my name will be great among the nations says the Lord Almighty.

In the midst of all the gloom in the midst of all this mediocre service God is able to assert with confidence my name will be great. And you can't frustrate that.

[35 : 10] You can ignore what I say you can reject what I say but my name will be great among the nations. This is the object of the father's confidence.

What is the father confident about? The picture painted is of the nations of the world offering uninterrupted praise from the rising of the sun to the setting of the sun all over the world all around the clock 24-7 uninterrupted praise and worship to God.

God and for the avoidance of doubt if there were any doubt but for the avoidance of doubt this is not some multi-faith utopia where all the peoples of every religion are somehow all engaged in worshipping the supreme being.

This is not what Malachi is saying it's not what God is saying. No this is the worship of the Lord this is the worship of Yahweh. Notice the repeated insistence of God on my name in this confident assertion my name Yahweh will be great among the nations in every place incense and offerings will be brought to my name because my name will be great among the nations.

This is the object of the father's confidence this is what he's confident about that this will happen. But what do the nations offer? What is it that they offer? And this brings us to the grounds of the father's confidence.

[36 : 38] The nations we're told will offer incense and pure offerings. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to my name. And we read that and it sounds very antiquated and we

think well I'm not sure what that's all about.

But the language that is employed is very significant. There is of course this stark contrast to the Jews and their blemished offerings. God here speaks of pure offerings.

What you bring is blemished, corrupted, defiled, but what the nations will bring they will be pure offerings. And the language particularly of pure offerings is very intriguing.

The word translated offerings is a very general term and does not or certainly need not refer to temple sacrifices. And the word translated pure is never used elsewhere in the Old Testament to describe sacrificial offerings.

It's a word that implies a purity that goes beyond the merely ceremonial or external that what was required of the offerings that were brought to the temple.

[37 : 42] That was important that they be brought from a pure heart but the offerings themselves as long as they tick the boxes then that was acceptable. This purity that God is speaking of goes beyond that.

Now what has this got to do with the grounds of the Father's confidence that what he is painting will actually happen. The question is how can pagan nations offer pure sacrifices that God's own people seemed incapable of offering?

Of course the answer to that is that in the whole course of human history there is only one worshiper who has offered an altogether pure offering. And Malachi in this very prophecy will soon point us in the direction of this worshiper.

In chapter 3 and in verse 10 sorry no that's not the right reference.

In chapter 4 certainly there were two references but we'll limit ourselves to chapter 4. In chapter 4 and in verse 2 notice what we read as Malachi brings his prophecy to a conclusion. But for you who revere my name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings and you will go out and leap like cars relieved from the stall.

[39 : 07] And then he also speaks in the course of this prophecy of the messenger who will come. In chapter 3 and verse 1 see I will send my messenger who will prepare the way before me then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple.

somebody whose way has been prepared will come to his temple and he will offer a pure offering. For the very first time that an altogether unblemished uncorrupted undefiled in every possible way is to be offered it will be offered by this one to whom Malachi is pointing.

And of course we know of whom we are speaking. Jesus Christ the eternal son of God is the pure offering that delights the father and what the nations will offer what we offer becomes pure in him. Indeed his offering of himself is described in the New Testament as a once and for all sacrifice once and for all because it is altogether pure and does not require to be repeated.

In Hebrews in chapter 7 the offering of Christ is described in that language a once for all sacrifice. And so the father is confident that even though the panorama is dark and gloomy yet he can declare the nations will worship me.

[40 : 37] My name will be great among the nations and how will the nations come? How will they be able to approach God and offer pure offerings? Well as they do so in the name of the one who has offered the altogether pure offering the altogether perfect sacrifice for sin.

But notice before we just look at the final thing that there is a solemn side to the father's confidence. The father does not need any one people in any age to worship him.

If we refuse to worship he will draw others to do so. Remember what Jesus said to the Pharisees concerning the exuberant praise of the disciples. If they keep quiet the stones will cry out.

But finally and very briefly the father's invitation. In verse 9 we read now implore God to be gracious to us. These are words directed to the people to those guilty of mediocre worship.

Now some suggest that this call to implore God for mercy is loaded with irony. There is an ironic edge to it. It's difficult to detect irony on the written page but they may be right in that conclusion.

[41 : 50] But if we take the words at face value they do constitute an opportunity and an invitation for all including half-hearted worshipers guilty of flawed and miserly service.

What can we do if that describes us? Well we can implore God to be gracious to us. But how will you come to God with this plea that he be gracious to you?

What offering will you bring? Will come as the prodigal son came home to his father. I have sinned against heaven and against you and we know what happened even before the son could utter the words.

But while he was still a long way off his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him he ran to his son through his arms around him and kissed him.

That is the reception that a son who has gone far away receives as he returns. There's always room in the father's house for a returning and repentant son.

[42 : 56] And so will you return? Will we return? Will you gladden the heart of the one you have espurned? Now implore God to be gracious to us.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father we do thank you for your word. We thank you that you are a God who speaks to us. We thank you that you are a God who is gracious. We thank you that you are a God who has opened up a way for sinners as such as we are.

We thank you for Jesus. We thank you for the pure offering that he was able to give of himself in our place. We thank you that it is indeed a once for all sacrifice for sin.

And as we would but recognize its value and efficacy in our behalf and as we would put our trust in Jesus so we are made partakers of that right and privilege to come confidently into your presence.

May that be true for all of us. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.