

MBC – 5/31/2020 – Pastor Doug Thompson
“True Worship”
 Malachi 1:6-14

Last week we started our study on the brief book of Malachi – it’s only 55 verses. This takes place *post-exile*, after some of the Jews returned from the Babylonian Captivity to rebuild the Temple that had been levelled by Nebuchadnezzar. But it wasn’t long before they slacked off on working on the Temple to build their own houses. God sent the prophets Haggai and Zechariah to call the people to finish the work on His house. Then Nehemiah came back to help the people rebuild the walls of the city in just 52 days. But the spiritual condition of the people was dismal. They were backslidden, worldly; intermarrying with pagans; they had turned their backs on God’s covenant laws. And their worship was just going through the motions. God hated it.

So God sent Malachi – his name means “My messenger,” to call His people to repent of their sins and offer Him acceptable worship. These are serious words, let’s read them together—

- Malachi 1:6–14 ⁶“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’ ⁷By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised. ⁸When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts. ⁹And now “Entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us?” With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.
- ¹⁰Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand. ¹¹For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts. ¹²But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. ¹³But you say, ‘What a weariness this is,’ and you snort at it, says the LORD of hosts. You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD. ¹⁴Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

(Prayer : “All is vain unless the Spirit of the Holy One comes down.” We ask You, our Father, to send Your Spirit into our hearts now, to prepare us for Your Word; let it do it’s purging, cleansing, refining work in us. We want to be those who worship You in spirit and in truth, that Your name would be feared among the nations, through us. Glorify Your name. Amen)

Intro: *Worship – the ultimate priority.*

I remember well this conversation on a Sunday morning, many years ago when our kids were small—

My wife said: “Time to get up and get ready for church!”

She heard: “*I’m not getting up. I don’t want to go to church.*”

She said, “And why don’t you want to go to church?”

“*The sermons are boring and the people don’t like me.*”

She very sweetly replied: “But you have to go to church sweetie: it’s Sunday, and that’s what we do. And besides – you’re the Pastor.”

We joke about missing church to go fishing, falling asleep during sermons – but God takes our worship of Him *very* seriously—

- ⁶“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.

He even pleads for someone to pull the plug on the hypocrisy they called worship—

- Malachi 1:10 ¹⁰Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

And in case we don’t get His point—

- Malachi 1:14 ¹⁴*Cursed* be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.

Cursed! Damned, condemned. Why? “For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.” We might take worship lightly, but God does not.

Only those who worship God acceptably will go to heaven. Jesus said this in—

- Jn 4:24 "God is spirit, and those who worship Him *must* worship in spirit and truth."

The word for ‘*must*’ is the Gk. *dei* = of necessity. It is not optional: God must be worshiped in

spirit and in truth. Paul gave a concise definition of a true Christian in—

- Philippians 3:3 ³For we are the circumcision, (the true offspring of Abraham) who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh—

Maybe the very first evidence of a Christ-changed heart is *worship*: a person recognizes for the first time that they were under the just wrath of Almighty God, who has now reconciled them by the blood of Christ, and He deserves all praise and gratitude and glory!

Acceptable worship separates true believers from false believers. And it doesn't hurt to remind ourselves what true worship is: Worship is *expressing* the worth, honor, and glory of God; ascribing or attributing to Him the honor He is due because of who He is and what He has done. And worship is a verb. It's an *action*. It's not an idea, it's something you do. Let me read you something I wrote years ago—

- The act of worship demands that we commit all that we are, body and soul, to attribute glory, honor, and praise to God. When we worship God we draw attention to Him--all that He is and all that He has done. We sing about His great deeds; we remember His precious promises; we pore over His commands so that we might honor Him through our obedience. We humble ourselves before His majesty and holiness; we express our love, thanks and devotion to Him. As Ps.25:1 says, "*To Thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul,*" and as Rom.12:1 says, we even offer our "*bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable unto God.*" **All that we are, responding to all that He is--**that is true worship.

And this is exactly what Israel, and her priests were not doing. Their hearts were empty. They had motion, but without devotion. And God rejected their worship. This is a serious word from God, beloved. We need to hear it and pray that He would keep us from Israel's sins. Let's look at —

I. God's altar polluted (vv.1-6).

- Malachi 1:6 ⁶"A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor? And if I am a master, where is my fear? says the LORD of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name.

Our Lord Jesus quoted the 4th commandment—

- Matthew 15:4 ⁴For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.'

There's nothing more comforting thought than God as our heavenly Father! What security. But that's not what Jesus was pointing to here. He was pointing to the respect, honor, and obedience that we *owe* our earthly fathers. So much so, that it was literally a capital crime in the OT

to curse your father or mother.

So God argues from the lesser to the greater in Malachi: “If this is true of your fathers on earth, then how much more of your Father in heaven? And if you fear your earthly masters, how much more you should fear and respect the Lord your God? But where is My honor? Where is My respect?”

The people to whom Malachi is speaking had forgotten who their God is—

- At the heart of all worthless worship is an inadequate, unworthy view of God. When you don’t grasp the majesty of God; the infinity and eternity of God; His omnipotence, and omniscience, His sovereignty; and even His fathomless mercy, love, and kindness – then God isn’t worth much honor, or respect, or submission and obedience.

And worshipping this kind of God is – *boring*. You look at the clock, you check your messages, doodle on your outline, and mumble through the singing. You do this when your God is too small. Little sacrifice for a little God. And little commitment to His church.

And the corollary to this is that when God is small, the things of this world take on more importance, more excitement, more pleasure than the things of God. John Calvin said that the heart is an idol factory: if the true God and His glory doesn’t captivate your heart then other things will. If you don’t find your treasure in heaven, you will find it on earth.

- I said last week that by this post-exilic time, Israel had stopped worshipping the idols of the nations: Baal, Ashterah, Molech – but they were still idolaters because the God they offered sacrifices to was not—El Elyon, El-Shaddai, Jehovah-Jireh, Jehovah-Makkadesh, Jehovah-Shalom, Jehovah-Tsidkenu.

Beloved, if you have a problem with worship, if it’s boring, hard to drag yourself to church – even when it’s legal! – then you need a bigger God: the holy, holy, holy Triune God of Scripture who dwells in unapproachable light. A God who is sovereign over pandemics, and doesn’t flinch at the fires burning in our cities right now – this is the God who is worthy of our worship.

The response to God’s charge against them should have been a trembling repentance. But it wasn’t:

- Malachi 1:6 . . . But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’

Another snotty response like we saw in v.2: “How have you loved us?” Beloved, you only talk back to God like this when your God is a puny, inadequate God. So God gives them the proof—

- Malachi 1:7 ⁷By offering polluted food (or polluted bread) upon my altar. But you say, 'How have we polluted you?' (talking back again!) By saying that the LORD's table may be despised (contemptible – not worthy of respect).

It should have been a great honor to serve in God's Temple – but they hated their job. That's why God calls their sacrifices polluted and unacceptable. Then God gets specific—

- Malachi 1:8 ⁸When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

Animals offered to the God were to be without spot or blemish, no defects, because these were being offered to the Lord God! No three-legged sheep! No roadkill. God deserves the first-fruits, not the left-overs. It's not that God has anything against three-legged sheep, they just didn't make the grade for worship. Even the priests had to be without physical defects or deformities, for the same reason – to illustrate that God is worthy of excellence in worship, not mediocrity.

*Doesn't this remind you of Cain and Abel? Abel offered God a sacrifice from the first-born of his flock – it just says that Cain brought an offering from the fruit of the ground. Not the best he had. Not a sacrifice. His heart wasn't in it. And Cain's offering was not acceptable because Cain was not acceptable. And God asks a very pointed question—

- Malachi 1:8 . . . Present your blind, crippled animals to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.

Archaeologists have unearthed the palace of King Darius 1 of Persia from this same time: He's seated on His throne with a procession of his servants bringing him food and livestock as offerings. God says, "You wouldn't dare dishonor your rulers with the leftovers you offer up to Me and call it 'worship'" God says. "They wouldn't accept that, but you expect Me to?" "And you think I will answer your requests?" God speaks with great sarcasm here—

- Malachi 1:9 "And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us!" With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.

No respect, no honor. But when they needed something, 'Oh Lord, hear our cries!' Jesus said about the Jews of His day—

- Matthew 15:8–9 ⁸"This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; ⁹in vain do they worship Me.

What God says in v.10 is shocking—

- Malachi 1:10 ¹⁰Oh that there were one among you who would shut the doors, that you might not kindle fire on my altar in vain! I have no pleasure in you, says the LORD of hosts, and I will not accept an offering from your hand.

This is God speaking! “Stop this charade. It disgusts me. Lock the doors, and shelter in place.” He said the same thing in—

- Isaiah 1:11–15 ¹¹“What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of well-fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of goats. ¹²“When you come to appear before me, who has required of you this trampling of my courts? ¹³Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and Sabbath and the calling of convocations— I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly. ¹⁴Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. ¹⁵When you spread out your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

The prophet Amos said—

- Amos 5:21–24 ²¹“I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. ²²Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them; and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. ²³Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen. ²⁴But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

These are shocking words! This isn’t God talking to people who don’t go to church, you understand. This is God talking to people who are up to their ears in religion – taking great pride in all they are doing in the name of worship. But God hates their singing, their offerings, because their lives are full of hypocrisy. And the “God” they are worshiping bears no resemblance to the true, living God. Shocking. But would God ever say these things about your worship, or mine?

- But I think some folks have the idea that God is just happy to have anyone pay Him any attention. “I mean, you gave me a free will God, count yourself lucky I’m not a Buddhist! You know I make it every Christmas and Easter – that’s a whole lot better than never! Sure, I cut out before the sermon was over to get a good spot at the Poke – but hey, at least I made a showing! You should be happy with what you get, God.”

But here is what God says—

II. God’s Name profaned (vv.11-14).

- Malachi 1:11 ¹¹For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.

Careless worship is so unworthy of God because it fails to honor His infinite majesty and greatness—

- Romans 14:11 . . . “As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God.”
- Philippians 2:10 adds “in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth” – meaning, the living and the dead, even holy angels, and demons, and Satan himself will bow the knee and acknowledge the greatness of God.

Which answers the question: “Do demons have knees?” Yes they do.

But when God tells Israel that His great name will be praised and worshiped by the nations, they know that means *Gentiles*. Gentiles will offer Yahweh pleasing, acceptable worship – while *their* worship is rejected.

And there is something else here: This Gentile worship it won’t be offered in the Temple, but “*in every place*.” This is a prediction: He’s looking forward to coming of Jesus, 400 years later. Do you remember what Jesus told that Samaritan woman by the well?—

- John 4:21 ²¹Jesus said to her, “Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father.
- John 4:23 ²³But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

And that day is here because God has set Israel aside for a time to bring in a multitude of Gentiles through the Gospel—

- Matthew 8:11–12 ¹¹I tell you, many will come from east and west (Gentiles) and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, ¹²while the sons of the kingdom (unbelieving ethnic Israel) will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

God will not be mocked. And He will get His praise: if Israel won’t give it, Gentiles will. Then he goes back to how the priests were dishonoring God’s great name—

- Malachi 1:12 ¹²But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.

This isn't talking about communion! The Lord's Table here is the altar where sacrifices were placed. Part of the priests' compensation was what was brought for sacrifice: some of it was offered up to God as a burnt offering, and the priests took the rest for themselves. But they were complaining that God got the best stuff and all they got was the leftovers!

- Which is so ironic because they never should have accepted these defective sacrifices to begin with – it was their responsibility to reject anything defiled. But they did, and then they complained. I.e., they were complaining about their compensation! They had the honor of serving in the worship of the living, holy God – but they wanted a raise?

And their whole *attitude* toward serving God has abominable—

- Malachi 1:13 ¹³But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' ('Sigh. . . This job is a drag! Is it 5:00 yet?) and you *snort* at it, says the LORD of hosts. (They were saying, "This is an awful, stinky job!) You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick, and this you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

And God's final charge is going to sound familiar from our study in Acts. See if you catch it—

- Malachi 1:14 ¹⁴Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished.

Isn't this what Ananias and Sapphira did in Acts 5? They said they had sold a house and were giving the whole amount to the church – but in fact, they kept back some for themselves. They lied for the sake of looking spiritual. And God killed them for that lie.

And this is just what some of the people in Malachi's day were doing: *saying* they would give the best, then giving God the runt of the litter and keeping the best for themselves.

Why? It wasn't just greed and selfishness. It was that, but it was also because God wasn't great enough in their eyes to deserve their best.

- There is a reason that our worship offerings are called "*sacrifices*." We express the worth and greatness of God when we *sacrifice* something that is valuable to us, something that *costs* us. It *cost* the Israelites to give up a sheep or a goat or a bull or grain – it cost even more to give the best of their flock or their field. It *cost* them to give up one day of the week, the Sabbath, right? But the greater the sacrifice – the greater the expression of the worth of God. That's why God requires *sacrifice* in worship – in *our* worship.

At the end of 2 Samuel there is an interesting story about King David. He needed a place to put up an altar for sacrifice – he was seeking to avert a plague that was killing his people (timely illustration!). The threshing floor of a man named Araunah was perfect. When David offered to

buy it, Araunah said, “David, you are the King of Israel, you can have it, and I will even give you the oxen to sacrifice!” But this was David’s response, listen—

- 2 Samuel 24:24–25 ²⁴But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. (now listen) I will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.

No cheapo offerings for my great God! To David, no sacrifice meant no worship. “I will not offer up as worship to my God that which costs me nothing!” God accepted David’s sacrifice and stopped the plague.

But back to Ananias and Sapphira and their little scheme to sock away some fun money for themselves – God killed them. How dare they cheat God then lie about it? And God said “Cursed – damned – are those who Israelites who do the same thing. Why? What makes lame, self-serving worship so horrid in God’s sight? This is His answer—

- Malachi 1:14 For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

Let me sum this up—

*God rejects unworthy, half-hearted worship because it lies about who He is, and the honor He deserves. But it also hides His glory from unbelievers—

- Malachi 1:11 ¹¹For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the LORD of hosts.
- Malachi 1:14 For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

But there is even a deeper level to the sin of unworthy worship. Think with me: Everything those priests did in their sacrificial offerings prefigured and foreshadowed what? The sacrifice of our Lord Jesus on the cross – the spotless Son of God, the Lamb of God without blemish offered up once for all to atone for the sins of His people.

But every time the priests or the people took those offerings lightly, saw it as boring, a waste of time – brought leftovers and roadkill for their offerings – it obscured the lesson that God designed to prepare His people for Christ: that sin is high treason against God, and only the death of His own precious Son can atone for it. They were dishonoring and obscuring *the Gospel!* No wonder heaven went silent for the next 400 years!

And here is the great irony –

The cheap sacrifices of the people showed how little worth they placed on God. But God's sacrifice of His own beloved Son shows the worth and value He places on His elect!

"Can I doubt Your love for Me, when I trace that love's design?
By the cross of Calvary, I am Yours, and You are mine!

III. So what about us?

- Romans 12:1 ¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Isn't Paul saying here that worship, true worship is all that we are responding to all that He is, and all that He has done for us in His Son?

- What are you offering up to God as worship? And what does it say about the honor, respect, love, and obedience – that He deserves? How worthy is He? Beloved, our worship should correspond to His worth, shouldn't it? We should pray and sing and listen to the Word with all we've got because the intensity of our affections should correspond to the excellency of His perfections!
- Do you love and serve and worship God *sacrificially*? Because you *desire* to show how much God is worth to you? And you grasp the sacrifice He made to save you? I think about Mary, breaking that expensive alabaster jar full of expensive perfume to anoint the feet of Jesus. The Apostles said it was a waste. Jesus said it was true worship.
- And beloved, what does your life, and your worship say to unbelievers about your God? Does it say that you love and serve a great King, the Lord of Hosts, whose name will be feared among the nations?

"For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations."