

North Summit Church  
**Malachi 1:6–10**  
April 19, 2026

**Announcements:**

**Introduction**

- Have you ever poured yourself into a relationship—fully, consistently, over a long period of time—and then one day realized that the other person has just seemed to stop caring?
- Not stopped being around. But stopped investing in the relationship. The attention had drifted. What used to feel weighty and significant had become background noise. You were still there. You were still showing up. But somewhere along the way the relationship had quietly hollowed out from the inside.
- **Most of us know that feeling from both sides.** We have been the one who stopped investing. And we have been the one who went unnoticed.
- I want you to hold that feeling for a moment as we open the book of Malachi. Because what we are about to encounter is not primarily a book of religious correction or prophetic rebuke. It is something far more personal than that.
- **It is a book about the heart of God.**
- Specifically, it is a book about what it looks like when the God who has loved His people faithfully across centuries looks at them and realizes they are drifting again.
- This is the grief of a Father whose children have drifted.
  - **And he is calling out to them, “I have loved you.”**

**The Context of Malachi:**

- To understand what is happening in this book, we have to step into the world of fifth-century BC Israel. The heart condition that Malachi is addressing did not appear overnight. It is the slow accumulation of a people who had been through so much, waited a long, and gradually lost their way.
- Go back a century and a half. The Babylonians had come. They burned the temple of Solomon—the house that had stood four hundred years as the sign of

God's presence—and carried the best of Israel into exile. It looked like the end of the story.

- But Persia rose and defeated Babylon, just as the prophet Daniel had promised. Cyrus issued a decree declaring the Jewish exiles were free to return home. They came back full of the prophets' words ringing in their heads. Isaiah had described this as a new exodus. Ezekiel had spoken of dry bones coming back to life.
- **They came home expecting a golden age.**
- What they found instead was hard ground and ruins. Israel was still a province of Persia, still under foreign rule, still waiting for the Davidic king who is to come. The excitement and devotion that had come in the return, rebuilding the walls and temple, had been swallowed up by their reality. And the priests and the people had quietly lowered the standard of their own practice until devotion had become merely functional.
- The dream had gone flat. The love had grown cold. Their worship mechanical and instrumental.
- That is the world Malachi speaks into. His very name means messenger. He is the last of the prophets to speak in the Old Testament canon.
  - After him, four hundred years of prophetic waiting until we get to the voice of John the Baptist crying in the wilderness.
  - And here unlike in other prophets he does not come with thunderous judgment. He comes with a series of intimate dialogues—God speaking, the people responding, God answering.
    - This is not a courtroom scene, it is a good Father addressing his family, with a parental heart.

### **Recap: Malachi 1:1–5**

- The series opened last week in the first five verses, and I want to briefly bring us into that passage before we move forward.
- Malachi opens with God making a declaration: I have loved you, says the LORD. And the people respond with a question that reveals everything: How have you loved us?
- While it can come off sounding a little cynical, I think there is some honesty in their question back. I don't want to be too critical because I can't say I haven't had these thoughts as well over the years.
  - They have been through the exile, done the hard work of rebuilding, and life has not gone the way they expected.

- They cannot trace the love anymore. Because they had associated their expectations of what life was going to be like, and how God was going to do what He had promised. And those unmet expectations were disorienting.
- **God's answer is to point them to history**—to the story of Jacob and Esau, two brothers whose trajectories diverged entirely based on God's sovereign faithfulness. Edom had fallen. But Israel—small, struggling, unglamorous at the moment—was still standing. Still the covenant people of a God who had not let them go.
- The love He is pointing to is not the love of a comfortable life. It is the love of a God who has chosen a people for a particular purpose, and even in their unfaithfulness, he continually calls them back to their calling.
- And then He brings them to the edge of the next question: If I have loved you—if I am your Father, your Lord—where is the evidence of it in the way you relate to Me?

That is the hinge on which we enter our text for this morning:

**Malachi 1:6–10**

**“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?’ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD's table may be despised. When 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. 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. Oh 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.”**

**I. God Wants Your Heart**

- The priests were not absent. The fire was lit. The calendar of sacrifice was being observed. From the outside, the religious machinery of Israel was functioning.
- But God was not impressed. And the reason is stated plainly centuries earlier through the prophet Samuel:

### **1 Samuel 15:22**

**“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.”**

- God has never primarily been in the market for religious performance. He has always been after something far more interior. And Hosea makes the same point even more directly—a verse Jesus would quote twice in the Gospels when confronting the Pharisees about empty religious behavior:

### **Hosea 6:6**

**“I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.”**

- This is the consistent pattern we see throughout Scripture. God has never been satisfied with the external performance of religion when the heart behind it has gone cold. Because the heart is where everything begins. Proverbs puts it this way:

### **Proverbs 4:23**

**“Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”**

- The heart is the headwaters. Everything downstream—the obedience, the offering, the behavior—takes its character from what is happening there. God is after our hearts not for His sake but because He knows that if He has our hearts, everything else follows naturally. When you love someone deeply, honoring them is not a duty you have to remember to perform. It is the overflow of the relationship itself.
- The priests had reversed the order. They were maintaining the behavior of devotion without the heart of it. And what God is telling them—and us—is that He would rather have the honest struggle of a seeking heart than a polished performance with nothing behind it.
- God’s desire is to commune with His people, not be appeased like the pagan gods, that you can manipulate for your own purposes.

## **II. Honor Requires Attention**

- God’s argument in verse six is an appeal to something the people already understood.
  - A son honors his father.
  - A servant honors his master.
- Everyone knows what honor looks like between people. And everyone knows the difference between someone who is genuinely present in a relationship and someone who is merely going through the motions.

**The Shema**—the foundational prayer of Israel, spoken every morning and every evening—begins with these words from Deuteronomy:

**Deuteronomy 6:5–6**

**“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts.”**

- This was not new information for the priests. They had prayed these words their entire lives. The problem wasn't that they prayed it faithfully, it was that they had stopped believing the words.
  - **\*\* We can often make the mistake of looking at the repetition as the problem.** It is a good thing to pray every day. I work through the Lord's prayer every morning, and say the same blessing over my kids every night.
- The problem was not in the repetition or the command to love God with everything, the problem is that it had become rote rather than a way of life.
- **The author of Hebrews addresses the same challenge when he calls his readers to fix their eyes on Jesus**—a phrase that describes not a passive glance but a deliberate, sustained act of attention. And Paul in Colossians puts it this way:

**Colossians 3:1–2**

**“Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.”**

- Set. Fix. These are active, volitional words. **Honor does not drift into existence.** It is chosen. It is the daily decision to keep your eyes on the one you are in relationship with, in a world that is constantly pulling your gaze somewhere else.
- The drift Malachi is describing is not dramatic. It is the slow, almost imperceptible drift of people who stayed—who kept attending, kept observing, kept performing—but whose actual attention had quietly moved on.
  - Their faith had become a cultural accessory.
  - But their hearts and daily lives had drifted far from their Heavenly Father.
- **That is the spiritual danger of our cultural moment as much as theirs.** Not that we will renounce our faith, but that we will keep all its external forms while our hearts are absorbed by everything else.
  - Satan wants to keep you just going through the motions. Looking at God as someone to appease, rather than someone to enjoy.

- **\*\*\*You know when your kids are just saying what they need to say to get you off their back and when they are actually doing it from the right heart.**
  - We can have this same attitude towards others...

### III. What We Bring Tells the Truth About What We Treasure

- The priests were bringing blind animals to the altar. Lame animals. Sick animals. The ones that couldn't be sold at market. The leftovers. And God asks them a devastating question: go present that to your governor. See whether the Persian official receives you with favor.
- The point is that the priests already knew the standard. They applied a far higher standard to every other significant relationship in their lives than they applied to God.
- **We always give our best to what we think matters most.**
- Jesus makes the same diagnostic move in the Sermon on the Mount:

#### **Matthew 6:21**

**“For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

- Our offerings tell the truth about our hearts. Not just our financial offerings—though those apply—but the offerings of time, attention, and energy.
- Most of us do not have a scarcity problem. We have an allocation problem. The antidote Scripture holds out is not guilt but reorientation—giving God the first and the best as a deliberate act of trust:

#### **Proverbs 3:9**

**“Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce.”**

- Firstfruits is not just a financial principle. It is a posture. It is the decision to give God the first portion—of the day, of the week, of the resources He has entrusted to us—before we know what the rest will look like.
  - It is the act of a heart that has decided God is most important before the difficulty of the week has told it otherwise.
- **Jesus illustrates it at the temple treasury:**
  - the rich dropping in their surplus while a widow drops in everything she has. Two offerings, two completely different revelations of the heart. The widow's offering cost her something real, and that cost told the truth about who she trusted.

- **God's statement at the end of verse ten is the most bracing line in the passage:** I would rather you shut the doors. I would rather the altar go cold than receive what you are bringing Me under the name of worship. He is not asking for the impossible. He is asking for the honest.

### **Closing: The Invitation Behind the Confrontation**

Think back to that feeling we started with. The feeling of loving someone faithfully and slowly realizing they have stopped noticing you are there.

Now consider that from God's side of the relationship.

This is not a God coldly administering a covenant and finding the other party in breach.

This is a God who is grieved by the drift. Who would rather have a hard conversation than watch the relationship die quietly of inattention.

And the conversation He opens with is not: You have failed. It is: I have loved you.

**He is asking for the heart.** Because when He has the heart, everything else follows. The obedience. The offering. The honor. They all flow from a life that is genuinely oriented toward God and genuinely alive to His love.

- **The question this passage leaves us with is not:** Am I performing the right religious behaviors?
- **It is:** Where is my heart actually pointed? Have I, somewhere in the noise and chaos of life, stopped noticing what He has done?
- Because He has not stopped noticing us.
- **I have loved you, says the LORD.**
- **The whole book is an invitation to remember God's faithfulness.**
  - **To let it reorder what we bring, where we look, and who we are actually living for.**

**[Closing Benediction]**

## Small Group Discussion

### Question 1: The Feeling Behind the Question

Malachi opens with God making a straightforward declaration: "I have loved you." The people respond with a question that reveals everything: "How have you loved us?" They had been through the exile, done the hard work of rebuilding, and life had not gone the way they expected. Their unmet expectations made it hard to trace God's love — they had associated faithfulness with a certain picture of how life was going to look, and when that picture didn't materialize, the love became invisible to them.

***Discussion: Have you ever been in a season where it was hard to trace God's love? What made it difficult to see, and what helped you reorient?***

### Question 2: God Wants Your Heart

The priests weren't absent — the fire was lit, the sacrifices were offered, the religious calendar was being observed. But God wasn't impressed. As Samuel had said centuries earlier, and as Hosea echoed, God has never been primarily in the market for religious performance. He is after the heart. The priests had reversed the order: maintaining the behavior of devotion without the heart behind it. God tells them He would rather have the honest struggle of a seeking heart than a polished performance with nothing behind it.

***Discussion: What is the difference between going through the motions of faith and actually living from a lively heart toward God? What in your own life helps keep the heart engaged — and what tends to hollow it out?***

### Question 3: Honor Requires Attention

God's argument in verse 6 appeals to something the people already understood — a son honors his father, a servant his master. Everyone knows the difference between someone who is genuinely present in a relationship and someone merely performing. The drift Malachi describes is not dramatic. It is the slow, almost imperceptible drift of people who stayed — who kept attending, kept observing, kept performing — but whose actual attention had quietly moved on. Paul's word "set" in Colossians 3 is deliberate and volitional. Honor does not drift into existence. It is chosen.

***Discussion: Where in your daily life do you find your attention being pulled away from God most consistently? What does it look like for you to actively "set" your attention back toward Him?***

#### **Question 4: What We Bring Tells the Truth**

The priests were bringing the leftovers to the altar — blind, lame, and sick animals that couldn't be sold at market. God's question is devastating: go present that to your governor and see how far it gets you. The point isn't shame; it's diagnostic. We always give our best to what we think matters most. Jesus echoes the same truth in Matthew 6:21 — where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The widow at the temple gave everything she had, and the cost of her offering told the truth about who she trusted.

**Discussion: If someone could see an honest picture of where your time, energy, and attention actually go each week, what would it reveal about what you treasure most? Is there one area where God is calling you to give Him the "first and best" rather than the leftovers?**