

# Worship that Honors God

## Malachi 1:6-14

**Series:** Joel and Malachi (Fall 2020)

**Preaching Date:** October 18, 2020

**Topic:** Walking Faithfully with a Faithful God

**Worship:** Honoring and Fearing the Great King

**Key Sentence:** We honor and fear God by what we offer him.

**Outline:**

I. Worship that honors God cannot despise him (Malachi 1:6-8)

II. Worship that honors God is authentic (Malachi 1:9-11)

III. Worship that honors God is energized by reverence (Malachi 1:12-14)

**Malachi 1:6-14** “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?’ <sup>7</sup>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. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>For 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.

<sup>12</sup>But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. <sup>13</sup>But 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. <sup>14</sup>Cursed 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.

## Worship that Honors God

### Malachi 1:6-14

As I mentioned in children's corner, *The King at the Door* is one of my favorite children's books. It's not really a children's book at all. It has an adult lesson, or at least a lesson all believers should learn as they mature: there is no way Jesus deserves your second best. The innkeeper despised the one who claimed to be king, and gave him not just his second best, but his worst. Little Baggit gave the best he had. We'd all like to be like Little Baggit, but the history of Israel and the church show there is a sad tendency to be like the innkeeper: skeptical, critical, maybe even disbelieving, unwilling to set ourselves and our desires aside for the sake of serving our real king.

The words of the prophet Malachi, which are the focus of our current study, speak strongly to those who are half-hearted about serving God, and give him second best of their time, energy, worship, possessions or talents. Our text for this week, Malachi 1:6-14, calls us to honesty and enthusiasm in the relationship with God we say we have, devotion to the service and worship we say we give. Malachi teaches that we honor and fear God by what we offer him. He deserves more than our second best. As our creator God deserves all our energy, all our enthusiasm. As our redeemer, the one who has given himself to us in Jesus, for salvation, he deserves all that we are and all that we have.

The first few verses of our section show that God recognizes our hypocrisies even when others can't and when we ourselves won't. Worship which honors God cannot at the same time hypocritically despise him. Malachi 1:6–8 *“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?’<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup> 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.*

Malachi begins with what was almost certainly a proverb in his own day, a statement of ‘the way it ought to be’: ‘A son honors his father and a servant his master’. God had chosen Israel as his son and his servant, and he expected her leaders and her people to treat him the way a son and a servant should. Unfortunately, they were not living up to this expectation. God says “If I am the father, where is the honor due me? If I am the master, where is the respect due me?”

The word “honor” is a Hebrew word often translated “glory”, from a root that means “heavy” or “weighty.” In this context to honor God, is to give him his due weight in our lives. A sentence like “In my decision I’ll weigh Joe’s opinion heavily” shows the kind of honor we ought to give; God should be a weighty factor in our lives. The other word, respect, has a similar idea, but comes from the root for “fear”, so that submission to God grows not just out of recognizing his glory - his weight - but also out of awe and fear.

These priests, and by implication many of the people of Israel, were far from this attitude. They may have been giving lip-service to worshiping God, but their lives did not support their words. It’s hypocrisy, pure and simple, for those who claim to be believers to affirm that God is their Lord and Father, and then to fail to live as if he mattered. The people of God have been embarrassed time after time by this kind of hypocrisy. Malachi says that when God’s people do this it is the same as despising God’s name or having contempt for God. Now I know those are strong words. They are strong in Hebrew too. But isn’t that what this is? To say you are his, to say you serve him, and then to live all or even part of your life as if he didn’t exist is to despise of the one who made you and who rescued you.

But Malachi’s audience isn’t buying it. They say “How have we despised your name?” When I was in seminary Dr. Walter Kaiser told us a funny story related to this verse. It seems that during his first teaching job at a Christian college he and his wife made ends meet by being house parents to 13 freshman guys. Late one night a ruckus broke out upstairs and Kaiser burst in at the end of a huge water balloon fight. But when he asked “who did this?”, instead of confessing the freshman chimed in, saying “Yes, who did this?” “Did you?” To avoid lying they took up the question and pretended to be indignant, as if the mess resulted from an event quite apart from themselves.

This is the same way Malachi’s audience responds when asked to own up to their deeds. “How have we despised your name?” God gives a clear answer: “You’ve been giving me second best? You’ve placed polluted food on my altar.” The pollution was literal and figurative. Literally we’ll find they were offering deformed animals as “best from their flocks.” Figuratively, Scripture teaches that right sacrifices require right motives. You can’t offer a pure sacrifice to God while rejecting his word and failing to glorify him.

There’s an old proverb that addresses this, saying: “Put yourself in the offering basket first, and then deposit your money.” It’s a little hard on the baskets, but the priority is correct: God doesn’t want money or any kind of offering given from an impure heart, impure motives or in an attempt to manipulate him.

As King David said in Psalm 51, the sacrifice God desires is “a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise.” By way of contrast, think about the Pharisee in Jesus’ parable. He did all the right things, “I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get”, but his heart was proud. Who did God justify? The tax collector who humbled himself. So there are two underlying principles at work here. First, that God deserves our best, and second, that he wants us to give ourselves first, and then our offering, to give our best out of hearts that are submitted to him.

But the priests and the people of Israel violated both these principles. This time they ask “How have we polluted you?” “By saying that the Lord’s table may be despised.” “The Lord’s table” is mentioned twice in this passage. In the Old Testament context this refers to the table in the temple where bread was daily offered to God, or possibly to one of the other tables used in worship. For us, though, the image of the Lord’s table reminds us of the Lord’s supper. Paul calls our remembrance of Jesus’ death “the Lord’s table” in 1st Corinthians 10, and in the next chapter he warns that participating in communion must be done in a worthy manner, that is by offering him our best from a submissive heart, not coming to communion half-heartedly or hypocritically or with malice toward our brothers and sisters, but with confident faith and whole-hearted devotion and a real commitment to live what we believe.

In the case of these priests, their contempt and disbelief were shown by the quality of what they were willing to offer: “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.” God had commanded that the animals offered in sacrifice be perfect animals. Deuteronomy 15:21 “But if it has any blemish, if it is lame or blind or has any serious blemish whatever, you shall not sacrifice it to the LORD your God.” With biting irony, Malachi suggests that the people try giving an offering like this to their governor or ruler. Not many would take the chance of insulting their leader that way, yet they are willing to insult God and disobey him that way. The difference is that if they had offered this to their governor they knew there would be repercussions in their own lives. But their basic belief in God was so low they thought they could get away with offering deformed sacrifice. They didn’t believe there would be repercussions.

The root attitude behind giving God second best and also behind hypocrisy is really disbelief. If we believe with heart, soul, mind and strength that God is who he said he is and has done what he said he would do through Jesus, we could never be this indifferent to his will nor put him to the test by blatant sin. Yet, like the people of Israel, we do.

We give him second best of our time by putting other things first: good things like family and work; neutral things like leisure and entertainment; sinful things like lust and anger. We put these things first and we're content to give only a portion of our time to God, who owns it all. In the same way we put material things first: our investments, our savings, our homes our cars, our trips, our toys, our stuff, though Jesus said "you cannot serve both God and money." We put these first and give to God and to his work second. We give him second best or second priority. Could it be because we don't really believe his redemption and rescue are the main thing in our lives?

And what of our hearts? I'm afraid there are times when we give our hearts to no one. We do not care for God's people to the point of inconvenience. We do not care for the lost or fear for our neighbors. We do care for our spouses, our families, but sometimes only for our own convenience. When we can we ignore them as well, closing in our ourselves in a little box of activities and distractions until we make real heart contact with no one, including God. But when you offer only second best of your time, second best of your resources and second best of your heart, is he pleased? Not according to Malachi.

Malachi's second point in this section is that God desires our authentic worship. God wants us to offer our hearts to him in devotion, purity and authentic worship. Verses 9-11: *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. <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>For 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.*

In verse 9 Malachi relates that the same priests who had so violated God's commands and taught others to do so are often asked to "entreat God's favor" or "implore God to be gracious to us." We've seen over and over that God is gracious and promises rescue to those who call on him. But have they sincerely called? Apparently not. In contrast to the situation in Joel, the continued neglect of authentic worship in Malachi's day appears to have continued. So outrageous had the situation become that Malachi makes an unexpected suggestion: lock the doors of the temple court and block access to the altar of God! Surely, no worship at all would be preferable to their worthless worship. His second suggestion is similar: do not light the fire on the altar, for it is "in vain". The Hebrew word "in vain" means "for no reason, without a cause."

Thus, while the altar fires and sacrifices should symbolize open fellowship between God and man, in reality they were meaningless. Their gifts and services, based on empty ritual, were futile and destined only to lull them into a state of false security. But their lack of integrity could not stop God's purpose. We may fail in our practice of faith, but God is not going to fail in his purpose

Thus verse 11 explodes with good news: "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." This is one of hundreds of places where God promises universal scope to salvation, and thus to worship. The Psalms use this phrase "from the rising of the sun to the place where it sets" often to describe God's victory. Israel should have remembered that she had been called to be "a kingdom of priests" and a "light to the nations." She had been told that in her seed all the nations of the earth would be blessed. By now, at the end of the Old Testament, Israel should not have been shocked by this, but given Israel's poor record at being a light to the nations, they probably were. In their hard-heartedness, they probably couldn't imagine glorious and pure worship or service coming from the Gentiles. They couldn't conceive of us, today, recognizing and honoring the greatness of God's name.

So we've said God doesn't want our second best, he doesn't reward hypocrisy, he doesn't sanction contempt for his name, but he desires authentic worship. This is probably the key positive thought I can offer you this morning. Malachi is warning his readers, and I have an obligation from this text to raise a warning for us that God is not pleased with hypocritical or half-hearted followers who give him second best. But as we tell ourselves not to be like that, we have to have some positive goal to hold up as an alternative, and the goal this passage offers us is to please God by being authentic worshippers in an all-of-life-is-God's way. We've already mentioned some aspects of authentic worship, but I want to give you a short checklist for self examination.

- (1) Authentic worshippers focus on God's awesome greatness. It's sad that God has to say to these worshippers "From the rising of the sun even to its setting, My name will be great among the nations", and "I am a great King," and "My name will be feared." Those are the kinds of things worshippers ought to say to God. Psalm 145 is one of many models: "I will extol you, my God and King, and bless your name forever and ever. <sup>2</sup>Every day I will bless you and praise your name forever and ever. <sup>3</sup>Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable. <sup>4</sup>One generation shall commend your works to another, and shall declare your mighty acts." When we focus on God's greatness, his perfections and attributes, that's authentic worship.

(2) Authentic worshipers humble themselves before God. The tax collector in Jesus' story, who beat his breast and said "have mercy on me, a sinner" was the authentic worshiper. David, who recognized that the sacrifices God desired were broken and contrite hearts, was the authentic worshiper. In Isaiah 66:2 God says "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word." "God is God and we are not" but those who are half-hearted and self-centered put themselves in God's place. Humble worship takes God's word seriously, and is willing to obey. Humble worship is ready to confess its faults and seek God's forgiveness and the Spirit's help.

In the New Testament Jesus says it this way (3) authentic worshipers worship in spirit and in truth. You remember he was talking with the woman at the well when he said this, and she was trying to make a distinction between worship in Jerusalem and worship in Samaria. But like Malachi, Jesus says that a time is coming when worship will be universal, a matter of the heart not the place. John 4:23 "Yet a time is coming and has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." This is the positive alternative to half-worship that is half-hearted and hard-headed. If your worship involves no thinking it is not worship in truth. Yet if your worship involves no feeling, it is not worship in the Spirit. It's head and heart, feelings and thoughts, mind and emotions.

But it's not just those things. Authentic worship (4) is all of life. Romans 12:1-2 "I 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. <sup>2</sup>Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." Authentic worship rejects the pressure of culture, the spirit of the age and renews its mind in God's word so that we can dedicate ourselves, our bodies to God's will as living sacrifices. This is asking ourselves in every circumstance not, 'what do I need to do to get the most from this?' but 'what do I need to do to give the most in this?'

Finally, (5) authentic worship means to depend on God with faith and trust. We saw in Malachi that by bringing deformed animals in disobedience to the law, the priests were essentially declaring their unbelief, thumbing their noses at God. In contrast, true worship must come from trust, dependence, belief, faith. The book of Hebrews teaches us that "without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him." In the Psalms the word "trust" is used over and over to describe our dependence on God, and often as in Psalm 84, this dependence is expressed in the context of worship.

The Psalmist begins by saying “better is one day in your courts than thousands elsewhere” and ends with “O Lord Almighty, blessed is the man who trusts in you.” Isaiah affirms this combination of worship and trust in Isaiah 12:2 “Surely God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord, is my strength and my song; he also has become my salvation.” Authentic worship grows out of dependence on God as God and trust in God as Savior.

So, God recognizes our contempt or half-heartedness, he desires our authentic worship, and third, Malachi teaches that authentic worship is energized by reverence or fear of God. Verses 12 to 14: *But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised. <sup>13</sup>But 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. <sup>14</sup>Cursed 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.*

Malachi contrasts his marvelous vision of God's triumph over the nations and their pure worship of His name by reminding his readers that they have profaned God’s name. The reality of worship, was that it was impure, given reluctantly following many excuses. “People don't go for sacrifices and that type of thing anymore,” Malachi hears the people whine. “We find the altar and its rituals unsatisfying in these changing times,” they complain. Finally they admit what could not be true of real believers: “this is a weariness; this is boring.”

Boredom is a key sign of the people's hypocritical ministry and service of God. They came to view these things as tedious and empty, to begrudge the very time they spent. “Oh, what a weariness!” Worshiping and serving the living God had become a drudgery and a burden, a bore and a nuisance. So they sneer at the sacrifices and sniff contemptuously at the Lord’s table. That word “sniff” caught my attention. It appears that the Hebrews, like us, expressed pride and haughtiness through the breath. These people literally snorted at God, or perhaps sighed deeply, in weariness of ordinary, repetitive worship. I wonder if we, sometimes, do the same thing, growing tired of the worship experience we have, not engaging with the content given, choosing to sigh at what is and looking for something else that will, eventually, become equally mundane.

In *The King at the Door*, it’s the innkeeper who is full of these same sighs, full of haughty melodrama. Like the priests in Malachi he offered his worst rather than his best, because he didn’t believe that the king was really at the door. He could afford to be contemptuous toward an old beggar.

In the same way these priests did not believe at a heart level in the one true God, the great King over heaven and earth, because no one who believed would show their contempt to one so great and powerful. No one who believed would offer sacrifices that were stolen, lame or sick. The people of Israel and their leaders were guilty of not honoring the Lord or his table. We need to ask ourselves directly if we are honoring God as we come to his table: do we take it seriously enough to show that we believe what it displays? Communion ought to be a solemn celebration. The death of Jesus on the cross, his body broken, his blood shed, isn't something to be taken lightly. It is not something to be remembered half-heartedly or routinely. Communion ought to be a shot of adrenalin to our spiritual lives, a time of renewal and re-commitment and solid rejoicing.

Of course, the mere fact that somebody died on a cross for somebody else's sins won't communicate these things unless I recognize that I was the sinner, I was the one doomed to die, I was the one who needed rescue, so that I was the one Jesus came for, I was one he suffered for, I was the one his body was broken for, I was the one his blood was spilled for, I was the one he died to rescue, I was the one he rose to bless. If I don't believe these things I won't come to communion with a pure heart or participate with a whole heart. But if I believe, this ceremony, and all of worship, is no longer wearisome, but is the vital celebration of the miracle gift at the core of my life. If it's that I will not be half-hearted. I will be sold out. If it's that I will not be hypocritical. I will live with integrity. If it's that I will not give God second best of my time, my resources or my heart: instead I will worship his greatness in humility, and utterly depend on him because he has given it all for me.

Little Baggit ought to be our model. He gave his best, all that he had, meager though it was at times. And he believed. He did not sneer at the King, but served. Like Little Baggit, we honor and fear God by what we offer him.