

Text: Malachi 1:6-2:2

Title: “Return to Me ... With Your Worship”

Think about what has happened in the last half-hour. When you walked into this room did you consciously think, “I’m (we’re) meeting God here.” Were you thinking about what you were singing or just mouthing the words? Did you allow your heart to be warmed by the truths we sang? Did you sing out because your heart was really rejoicing in God? What about when we prayed? Were you in tune with what we were praying together, or was your mind somewhere else? As we prayed were your thoughts pure and loving thoughts, or were they mixed with bitterness or impurity? When the offering plate came by were you grateful for the opportunity to give to God? Maybe you gave online or last week because that’s when you got paid, but your giving was an expression of the value you place on God, not like a little tip for His good service.

As you wrestled with those questions maybe you came to the conclusion that really over the last half-hour of worship your heart wasn’t really in it. It was half-hearted worship. Maybe it’s not just the last half-hour ... it’s been your life for however long. Well God found His people in this very same condition ... offering Him half-hearted worship ... in the days of an OT prophet named Malachi.

Open your Bibles to the book of Malachi, the last book of the OT. I said last week that Malachi was God’s messenger to His people at a very dangerous time, spiritually speaking. It had been 100 years since the Jews had returned from their captivity in Babylon. Under the leadership of men like Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai and Zechariah a great revival occurred, as recorded in those books in our Bibles. The Temple had been rebuilt, the wall of the city had been repaired and, most importantly, their faith had been restored. You may ask, “How is this such a dangerous time spiritually?” It’s dangerous because all those exciting people, accomplishments and challenges were in the past. It’s very easy to come to seasons like this in life and just put our spiritual lives on cruise control. People had grown complacent and apathetic about their worship and their service to God. They were just going through the motions of a hollow religion. But again, God loves us too much to leave us like this. So He sent Malachi with a simple, but powerful message: “Return to Me, and I will return to you.”

Read Malachi 1:6. Again, the Jews are having an argument with God. Six times in the book God issues a challenge against His people. The first one came back in v.2 when the Lord said to Israel, “I have loved you.” And the people argued, “Oh yeah? How have you loved us?” Here it is again in v.6. God says, “You show contempt for My name.” And they argue, “Oh yeah? How have we shown contempt for Your name?” **Read Malachi 1:7-10; 2:1-2.**

Perhaps you’re reading along with me here and thinking, “What in the world does this ancient prophecy written 2500 years ago to a bunch of Jewish priests have to do with me? I’m struggling to pay my bills. I dread my job. My family fights all the time. I’m confused by all the politics of this election. I just got a bad diagnosis from the doctor. So what?” Here’s the “so

what?” Who you worship and how you worship is at the core of who you are as a person. Everything flows from that. And this is about who and how we worship.

Look again at v.6. Notice that this is addressed to the priests. In OT times the people of God were dependent upon the priests in their relationship with God. No one had the privilege of approaching God directly except the priests. They were the religious middle-men. They represented the people before God, by offering sacrifices for their sins. And they represented God before the people by teaching them the Law of the Lord. But the priests in their apathy and complacency were guilty of despising God.

Now don't tune out here, thinking that this doesn't apply to the normal believer. It applies to all us. For if we read OT passages like this through the lens of the NT then we come to understand that *all* believers are priests before God ... all of us. Jesus is our High Priest. He's the One who offered Himself as the sacrifice that covers our sin allowing us all to come into the presence of God. So we as believers are all priests before God.

1 Peter 2:9 - But you (believers) are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

So as NT believers reading the message of God to OT priests, we need to listen up. Our prayer, our worship and our service to the Lord are spiritual sacrifices. There are important truths here about how we approach God and how to confront the spiritual apathy that can creep into our worship.

1. LET'S CHECK OUR ATTITUDE IN WORSHIP.

This is all about honoring the Lord ... something that happens in our heads and in our hearts. In v.6 there are two relationships that everyone could relate to.

“A son honors his father...” Today the focus is more on what a father does for his children. But the Bible doesn't start there. It starts with what children do for their father. Remember the Ten Commandments? You shall honor your father and your mother. To honor is to glorify ... to magnify the father's position. And the Lord is our heavenly Father and deserves to be glorified. So our first question is not “God, what will you do for me?” Instead it should be, “How must I honor and glorify You?”

Then it says, “A servant (honors) his master.” Everyone in OT times understood the relationship of a servant to his master. No servant can get away with disrespecting his master. How can we think it's alright for us to disrespect the Lord? He is our Master. And He asks, “If I am a Master, where is the respect due to Me?”

Because of who God is He deserves our honor and respect, but these worshippers are showing contempt for God.

ILLUSTRATION - What does contempt mean? If you appear in court as a witness in a trial, and you refuse to obey the orders of the judge you can be charged with what is called “contempt of court.” That is the offense of being disobedient to or disrespectful of a court of law and its officers.

And these OT worshippers were guilty of contempt of the highest authority in the universe. They are so calloused and have moved so far from God that it doesn't even occur to them that they are dishonoring the Lord. From a distance everything looks fine. They're going to the Temple. They are offering sacrifices. They are praying. But upon closer examination they are just going through the motions of meaningless worship.

OUTLINE - Meaningless worship is the failure to see and feel the greatness of God.

You see, the Lord's name is hugely important to Him. Note that the Lord refers to Himself as “the Lord Almighty,” or “the Lord of Hosts.” God is the infinite authority of the universe. He commands the all the hosts (forces) of heaven. Everything and everyone is at His disposal. On down in v.11 He says...

Malachi 1:11 - 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.

God is so glorious and majestic, and one day his glory and majesty will be recognized and honored among every people group (nation) on the face of the earth. Malachi says to these people, “The Father and Master that you give your half-hearted worship to will one day be held in the highest worship among all the nations of the earth.” At the place of worship for this infinitely powerful and glorious God these worshippers are leaving their trash ... worship that is meaningless because they don't see and feel the greatness of God. And that leads to the next thing we need to check. If we are to reverse our half-hearted worship we check our attitude but next...

2. LET'S CHECK OUR ACTIVITY IN WORSHIP.

The attitude of our minds and hearts will be reflected in the activity of our worship. So in answer to their question, “How have we shown contempt for your name?” the Lord says...

Malachi 1:7 - “You place defiled food on my altar. “But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ “By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible.

Now this talk about putting food on God's table may be a little confusing. I don't have time to drill down into this today, but let me just say that while ancient pagan religions had gods who needed to be fed, the God of the Bible is not a food-needing God. That's not the point of bringing animals to God's altar to be sacrificed. The best explanation for this idea of food at

God's table is to show that the offering of sacrifices to the Lord was a means of communing with Him, like people connect with one another over a meal. There's nothing about this that should cause us to think that God needs to be "fed." He doesn't *need* anything from us. But He *deserves* from us fitting worship, not despicable worship ... worship that despises Him.

Despicable worship is ... POLLUTED WORSHIP.

Malachi 1:7 - "You place defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible.

"Defiled" means polluted or contaminated. When you pollute something you mix it with something else that makes it toxic. Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount that the pure in heart will see God. Polluted worship is worship that mixed with sinful attitudes or thoughts. The Bible says that if I regard iniquity in my heart he will not hear me. When there's ritual without a right relationship worship is polluted. So part of my worship should be regular confession.

Despicable worship is... BLEMISHED WORSHIP.

Malachi 1:8a - When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong?

For their offerings to God they were bringing blind, crippled and diseased animals when God had clearly commanded them in the Law of Moses to bring that which was unblemished. So some guy thinks, "I have this lamb here that is about to die anyway, so I'll just give it to God. I'll keep the best one for me because I can sell it for more."

ILLUSTRATION – Back 1500 years ago there was a group of people who lived in what is today France and Germany ... the Franks. Their king, a man named Clovis, led his army into battle against some people they were trying to conquer. He had heard about Jesus Christ and decided he could use some help. So King Clovis prayed to Jesus that if he would give him victory Clovis would commit his life to Christ. Well Clovis won and thinking that Christ had intervened in this he had his whole army baptized. But Clovis wasn't quite ready to give up his barbaric ways. So as his soldiers were baptized they didn't let the hand with which they held their sword to go down into the water. So they could still be brutal in combat.

And the Lord says in v.8. "Okay, try that with your governor. Do you think he would accept those kinds of animals in payment of your taxes? I don't think so. And while our offerings of worship are not a "tax" we pay to God, because of who He is He deserves more than our leftovers. He deserves the best we can bring to Him.

ILLUSTRATION – We were in Washington DC this past week and it was a big week there. The Prime Minister of Italy was visiting the White House and President Obama hosted his last official state dinner. State dinners are huge affairs. It is our opportunity to express our nation's appreciation for important allies and, yes, to impress them. So what if the Obama's put on this

dinner and brought in leftovers from pizza the night before? It would be scandalous because it would show contempt for their guests.

Despicable worship is... WORTHLESS WORSHIP.

Malachi 1:10 - “Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands.

EXAMPLE – That word “useless” is used in a story in II Samuel 24 where David wanted to build an altar to offer sacrifices to the Lord. He needed an appropriate place to build this altar. He found a place owned by a man named Araunah and decided it would be just right. Araunah offered to give David this place along with the animals needed for the sacrifices. But David declined the offer. He said, “I must buy it from you. I will not offer offerings to the Lord that *cost me nothing*.” “Cost me nothing” is the same word used here in v.10 for “useless.” David is saying, “I treasure God so much that I will not worship him in a way that costs me nothing ... in a way that would lead others to think that I love money more than I love God. My offering must say God is my true treasure.”

The Lord said through Malachi, “It would be better if someone would just go lock the door of the Temple so this kind of worthless, useless worship wouldn’t happen there.”

Malachi 1:13 - And you say, ‘What a burden!’ and you sniff at it contemptuously,” says the LORD Almighty.

So here’s the next thing about despicable worship:

Despicable worship is... BORING WORSHIP.

Because it was half-hearted it had become a burden to them. Let’s just get this over with. They sniff at it contemptuously, sighing and rolling their eyes. It was an irksome duty and not a glorious delight.

QUOTE: John Piper says of this: “They are bored with God. Their basic attitude toward worship: ‘What a weariness this is!’ And when you become so blind that the maker of galaxies and ruler of nations and knower of all mysteries and lover of our souls becomes boring, then only one thing is left—the love of the world. For the heart is always restless. It must have its treasure: if not in heaven, then on the earth.”

Your best affections, your best energies, your best treasures, your best time will always be reserved for what you value most. So let’s give attention to the attitude of our worship and the activity of our worship. And finally the Lord challenges us:

3. LET’S RESTORE EXCELLENCE IN OUR WORSHIP.

Malachi 2:1-2a - “And now this admonition is for you, O priests. If you do not listen, and if you do not set your heart to honor my name,” says the LORD Almighty, “I will send a curse upon you, and I will curse your blessings.

How do we reverse the spiritual apathy in our worship? Set your heart to honor the Lord ... take it to heart. Take responsibility for the condition of your heart. Repent of the hardness of your heart toward the Lord. Return to Him with all of your heart.

The people and the priests were offering imperfect sacrifices, but thank God He offered one perfect sacrifice for us ... the sacrifice of His One and Only Son. Our sacrifices cannot save us. Only the offering of Christ on the Cross for us can satisfy God’s wrath against our sin. Forgiveness is applied to us when we place our trust in Christ to save us. So stop trying and start trusting. Call on Christ to save you today. But then once we have received this gracious, free gift of eternal life we live out this salvation:

Romans 12:1 - Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.