

How have we despised God? (Evening Service)

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[0 : 01] Let me add my welcome to Tad's. It really is wonderful to have you here. My name is Aaron and I'm the minister that looks after the service. So we are week two into a short series and we're looking at Malachi, which is the last book of the Old Testament.

And let me remind you what's going to happen in here. So the people of God, they're back in Jerusalem after being in exile with the Babylonians.

So they're back in Jerusalem, but it's all a bit lame, to be honest. They've rebuilt the temple, but it's not very good. And I mean, from the outside, they just look like this fairly insignificant ethnic group in a really small territory, surrounded by a whole lot of people that hate them.

And last week, the book started with God saying to them, I love you. I love you. And they respond with, how have you loved us?

So they were looking around at their life going, this doesn't look like love. Where are the promises of God, they thought. Where's the showers of blessing? Where's the promised Messiah? Where's our King?

[1 : 13] So they mistook waiting for abandonment and they became a very cynical bunch. This week, Malachi moves to specific ways in which their cynicism presents itself in their life.

And there's lots of different ways. And each week we'll look at one way it presents itself. This week, their cynicism looks like a failure to honor God. Their cynicism looks like a failure to honor God.

Now, before we talk about the flow of the argument in these sort of nine verses we have, when you heard it read, you heard, it talks a lot about sacrificing things.

And to our modern minds, that might sound a bit wacky. Like, you might think, why would God ask his people to kill animals? What has that got to do with the relationship with God?

So I thought it might be helpful just to talk about that for a few minutes. So here we go. So in the Old Testament, God's people atoned for their sins through a system of sacrifices. And this system was formalized with Moses, but it was hinted to way, way back in Genesis 3.

[2 : 28] So you'll have to excuse me, I'm a bit sick. So way back in Genesis 3, so you remember this, right? Adam and Eve sinned, and they hid from God because they were ashamed. And they were naked, and they realized it.

And they were ashamed of their sin, and they hid from God. But rather than giving up on them, what God did is he covered their nakedness with animal skins. God did something to address their shame.

Now, think about this. Think about this. Where do those animal skins come from? In order for that to happen, what God did, he had to shed the blood of an innocent animal.

And that event, that assumption, was the start of a major theme through the whole Bible. And here's the summary of that major theme.

Here it is. Atonement involves an innocent party taking the punishment due a guilty party. So I'll say it again. Atonement, or substitutionary atonement, involves an innocent party taking the punishment due a guilty party.

[3 : 33] So that whole animal skin thing, that was the first hint at a system that God would set up later to deal with sin in a temporary way in the Old Testament. And as it developed, it wasn't God sacrificing animals.

It was priests. And there was this whole system of elaborate rules and systems and special places and special days. But the idea that sort of undergirded the whole thing wasn't, you know, as long as you did this mechanical kind of like, you know, there we go, and eat it up now.

Like, it wasn't like, as long as you did the things, you're like, you're like, two thumbs up with God, you look cool with God. No, it wasn't that. It wasn't just a mechanical thing, this system of worship.

You couldn't just go through the motions and be fine. The account of Abraham's offering of Isaac actually is quite helpful here. So Genesis 22. So God tested Abraham by asking him to sacrifice his only son, Isaac.

And at the last minute, an angel of the Lord told him to stop and said this, For now I know that you fear the Lord, the angel said. For now I know you fear the Lord. And Abraham then looked up, he saw a ram, and offered that up instead of Isaac.

[4 : 47] So what does the story show us? Sacrifice. It's not just this mechanical thing to make God happy. You actually have to have your heart right with God.

You have to have your heart right with God when you do it. So this is made more clear in the laws prescribing exactly what you did for these sacrifices in the Old Testament.

So one feature of the sacrifices for one of them was this. So the worshiper would place his hand on the animal's head before the sacrifice. And it was meant to show that the person recognized that the animal was taking their place.

It meant the worshiper recognized, okay, I recognize that this animal is dying instead of me. So there was form, how you did things.

Bip, bip, bip, bip, bip, bip, bip. And then there was the heart aspect of it. And both of them had to be right. You had to have the form right, and you had to have the heart aspect right.

[5 : 52] So like I said, the whole system became pretty formalized at some point. That's what the book of Leviticus is all about. And there was this order of events, and they each held everything. There was a ton of meaning behind it all, for example.

It taught God's people through this system that God was merciful, that he would take a substitution instead of them. It taught God's people that sin was a serious thing, that they couldn't just mess around with it.

And it taught them that God was holy and pure. Now, you still might think God demanding sacrifices is just a bit unfair. Except that one of the main things the sacrificial system did was it pointed forward to what Christ would do on the cross.

So it's true. God initiated the sacrificial system. He required sacrifices. He dictated the format of the sacrifices. And later in Christ, he became the sacrifice.

He became the substitution. So there you go. That's background. Let's jump into the passage. So you have this highly formalized system of worship and sacrifice with all that meaning, and that's a good thing.

[7 : 09] So how were the people of God doing with this whole thing in Malachi's time? Well, it would seem pretty terribly. They were doing terribly. And like if you have these two aspects, right?

This form, how you're supposed to do it, and the heart aspect, they were messing them both up. So let's see how God lays out his accusations here. So verse 6. God begins with like a truism, something that everyone can agree on.

Here we go. Verse 6. A son honors a father. I am your father. Where is my honor? And how do the people respond? What are you talking about? What are you talking about? So God says in verse 7, I'm talking about your worship practices.

I'm talking about the fact that you bring these animals to the altar that are polluted. And the people respond, What do you mean? What are you talking about? They're just completely clueless. They can't own up to this major heart problem that they have, this major form problem they have.

Imagine if you came up for communion, and as you waited for the bread and wine, you sort of stood there playing on your phone. Right? Playing on your phone. And I came up, and I gave you the bread and stuff, but you kind of just put your hand out, took the bread, kept playing on your phone.

[8 : 23] Imagine if I said to you, Listen, we need to talk about this. And I took you aside afterwards, and I said, What are you doing? Like that's so disrespectful to God.

And you're like, But this is Pokemon Go. This is Pokemon Go. It's kind of like, that's the feel of the passage. Like they are just clueless.

So God gets really specific. So in the book of Leviticus, which lays out, you know, how things are supposed to be done, it says that the animals for sacrifice had to be perfect. But God says here in verse 8, that they were bringing these animals that were blind and lame and sick.

And then in verse 13, he talks about animals that were taken by violence. So, you know, these guys are going to the temple, and they're picking up these animals they find on the side of the road that have been, you know, hit by a chariot or something, or like, killed by a lion or something.

I don't know. Like these mauled animals. So they're bringing these mangy things, and the priests are like, Yeah, that's totally fine. That is totally, that's fine.

[9 : 31] That's cool. Let's just do this thing. And verse 8, God says, Why do you think this is okay? Why do you think it's okay to do this?

And he uses the analogy. He says, It's like saying this.

You invite, you know, the governor general to your house, and you serve up roadkill to them. How is that going to go down? Now, God is clearly pretty angry about this whole thing.

In fact, he says in verse 10, he says this. You can see it there in the passage. He goes, I wish you guys would just shut the door. Just shut the doors. Like, if you, if you're just going to keep doing it like this, just close up shop.

That would be better. Don't bother if you're going to be so casual about the way I've prescribed worship. So here's the question. Why were they so careless about worship?

[10 : 36] What was going on? And you know, it is a heart thing. Primarily, they had lost sight of who God was, which is why who God is, is very important in the book of Malachi.

And there's, there's a couple of great examples in this particular passage. I'll give you one. We see a very special name for God that's used eight times just in our passage. And that special name for God is the Lord of hosts.

Lord of hosts. So hosts, hosts can be like a number of, like this huge number of something. So it's most likely talking about stars or armies or angels. So Malachi wants them to see that the God we worship has infinite authority, that he wields armies, he has, you know, myriads of unstoppable angels, he plays trillions and trillions of stars in the universe, and the Bible says he calls each one by name.

And yet God's people are turning up to worship with like, you know, like a one-eyed, one-eyed goat and half a cupcake and like going, yeah, this is fine. It's found on the side of the road. Don't worry about it.

Look at verse 11 then. 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 in a pure offering.

[11 : 51] For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. This is clearly not somebody you mess around with, is it? And yet they were messing around with God.

After verse 12, when God again reminds them that their sacrifices are very subpar, are very disrespectful, are not honoring of him, God's people say, ah, what a weariness.

And then they snort. I don't know what that means, but like some disrespectful kind of nasal thing, I guess. Like they're just, they're just like, ah, this is so boring.

This is so boring. We have to talk about this. That's what they think of serving God. They're bored. Bored of the whole thing. What happens when you're bored of God?

Where does your heart go when you're bored of God? What happens when you become so blind that the maker of the galaxies, the ruler of nations, the knower of all mysteries, the lover of your souls is boring?

[12 : 54] What happens to your heart when you start to love the world? Because our hearts were made to worship something, and if it's not God, they'll treasure something else. And if you're bored with God, you get very excited about the world.

If you don't see the greatness of God, then all the things that money can buy can become very exciting. One scholar put it like this. He said, if you can't see the sun, you'll be impressed with a streetlight.

If you've never felt thunder and lightning, you'll be impressed with fireworks. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God, you'll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures.

See, these worshipers, they're bringing their mangy animals and road cool because they didn't want to give up their nice animals or pay for nice ones without blemish because they love their money more than God. Right, let's talk about application here.

Because Christ fulfilled the sacrificial system, as I said, this whole sacrificial system, the big thing is it points to what Christ is doing on the cross. Now, because Christ has fulfilled the sacrificial system, he was the perfect sacrifice, he took our place.

[14 : 06] Because of that, we don't have a sacrificial system anymore. But, the New Testament does still use the language of sacrifices. Let me read three short texts to you.

Hebrews 13, through him, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. We could talk for a long time about singing praises to God here. We won't. 1 Peter 2, you yourselves are living stones and being built up as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Romans 12, this is the one I'll talk about for a couple of minutes. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern that the will of God, what is good, acceptable, and perfect. So, offer up your bodies as a living sacrifice.

[15:16] This is the big point there. Now, this Romans passage is the most famous and what it does is Paul takes the language of Old Testament worship and sacrifice and he says, here's what it means for us now.

It says, present your bodies. Present your bodies as an acceptable sacrifice to God. So, what does that mean? Well, it's not talking about presenting a really ripped body to God.

It's not talking about a body type. It can be big. Your body can be big or small or pale or tanned or young or disabled or diseased or healthy. The issue is not, you know, what your body looks like.

The issue is what our body does. And God wants, God wants lived out bodily evidence that our lives are built on His forgiveness and His greatness and our understanding of His majesty.

He wants bodily evidence of that. God asks for bodily evidence of that. God asks, asked for the best from His people and worship in the Old Testament.

[16:24] I want perfect animals. So, people to worship God and honor God back in the days had to give up their best sheep or go to a bull to the altar. They had to give up some earthly treasure because it said something about the greatness of God.

and God asks His people in Malachi's time to be prepared to give up their best for Him. And God asks us the same.

He asks us the same thing. Will you give up the best of your attention during our time together? Or will you text during the service?

Will you show the goodness of God by being as welcoming as possible to new people? Will you sacrifice your time in this way? Will you stay in the comfortable space of people you know? Those are two really little examples all bound up in this little thing that we do on Sunday.

Now, I want the Holy Spirit to speak to you about what it means for you. But Paul calls us here, he says, to make sure that every act of our bodies is an act of worship that demonstrates that God is our treasure above everything else.

[17:37] That Christ is more precious than anything else. That's why we give our best to him. See, the sin of the people of Malachi's time is they wouldn't give God their best.

They wouldn't give God their best. And the challenge of our passage for us today is, will you? Will you give your best to God? That's the question.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.