

What Is Acceptable Worship Of God 2

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Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 00] I was very struck in the reading of the Old Testament lesson today with the words with which it concluded. But now perhaps I can't find it.

Where they are, it's in chapter 41 of Isaiah, and it talks about the poor and needy seeking water, and there is none.

And then it goes on and talks about their tongue is parched with thirst. The Lord will answer them. I, the Lord of Israel, will not forsake them.

And it was at such a time in the history of the people of God that I want to talk about today. And the place I want to talk to you about it from is the book of Malachi, which is the last book in the Old Testament, found beginning on page 841.

And I think you'll need to follow this in your Bible simply because the content of the chapter is important. But you see how this verse talks about the poor and needy seeking water, and there is none.

[1 : 13] And so often I feel in my situation in this parish that there are so many people with very real needs, and people who have a very real poverty of spirit, as in Matthew chapter 5, verse 1, blessed are the poor in spirit.

People whose poverty is very real, but the answer to their poverty is not very real. They're not finding answers. All they're finding is greater and greater emptiness.

And it was at such a time as that that the book of Malachi was written. It was a time when the great miracle-producing prophets Elijah and Elisha were long dead, still alive in the memory of the people, but dead in history, no longer among the people.

And the things they did, the great feats they performed in the name of the Lord, they were gone. It was now past the time when the great temple had been built, and there the temple stood in the midst of the people in Jerusalem, and the endless cycle of services went on and on and on and on, and the people were waiting with an expectancy, but finding that that expectancy wasn't met.

And there were a people who were looking for something to happen. And so under this process, gradually the worship of God in the temple of Jerusalem began to deteriorate very badly indeed.

[2 : 53] And as the worship deteriorated, the people became more and more disconsolate, more and more downhearted, and the whole thing became a really unhappy ritual that had no joy and no happiness and no enthusiasm, and no sense of the great glory of God.

There was nobody who from his heart would stand among the people and say, O come, let us sing unto the Lord, let us heartily rejoice in the strength of our salvation.

There wasn't that joyous sense of people wanting to worship. There was instead the kind of sullen resentment of people who seemed to have obeyed God all their lives and God had never rewarded them.

People who had been faithful to God all their lives and God had never met them. People who had given much of their time and their talent in the service of God, and God didn't seem to care that they had done all this.

And this sense of pervading pessimism and the cynicism that it bred, and the absence of the sense of being in the presence of the living God, this pervaded everything.

[4 : 08] And so the worship of the temple began to deteriorate. And look what happens as chapter 1 of the book of Malachi opens. People are asking this with chapter 1, verse 2.

I have loved you, says the Lord. Well, they've heard that before. And their answer in verse 2 is, Oh, have you loved us? Give us some evidence of it.

We haven't noticed. And so often I see that preaching to a congregation in the midst of the 20th century and saying, God loved you and God so loved the world, that the cry of our hearts, unspoken

indeed, but nevertheless the deep cry of our hearts is to God, how have you loved us? Where's the evidence of your love? Look at the worship of the temple. Look at all that's going on in our world.

Where is the evidence, God, that you've loved us? Well, that's characteristic of the whole book of Malachi. It's made up almost entirely of this debate between God and his people.

[5 : 21] God says, I have loved you. His people say, how have you loved us? And then the debate goes on. And this is what Malachi brings to their attention. He tells them how he's loved us.

But then in verse 6, you see, God says, I have been a father to you, but you have not honored me as a son. I have been your master, but you haven't feared me as you would an earthly master. And he said, you who are supposed to praise my name, if you look there in verse 6, you priests have despised my name.

You say, how have we despised your name? Well, God goes on to say how they have despised his name. And he says, by offering polluted food upon the altar.

Then he says to them, the thing that I worry about is that you allow this inadequate worship to go on.

[6 : 30] There isn't one among you who will stand up and say, stop! This is not honoring to God. This is not glorifying to his name. You can't go on like this any longer.

None of you will do that, he says to these people. You know that this worship is totally unacceptable to the God who created the heavens and the earth, to the God who made his dwelling among them in the midst of them in the temple.

And none of you will stop this violation of my name. And he goes on and tells them something more. He says, the Lord's table is polluted.

Now, he's not talking about the Lord's table as we have it under the New Covenant. He's talking about the temple worship and the offerings that they bring for the worship in the temple when he says that the Lord's table is polluted.

And he says, the food of the Lord's table is despised. And then he talks to them about their attitude of heart. And he says, you know what you're saying to me about this?

[7 : 44] He says, you treat this whole business of worship and you say among yourselves, what a weariness this is. There's no joy in it.

Just a sense of burden, weariness as people carry on in the worship of the church, in the worship of the temple. He says, what a weariness is this.

He says, then you sniff at me. As one translator puts it, you turn up your noses at me. This isn't worship, God says to his people.

Then he says, you bring for offering, you bring sick and lame animals. You know, when a farmer had a lame calf or a malformed animal, then that was what he brought.

Even though the word had said that it must be perfect and without blemish. But you bring the blind and the lame and you bring the animals that have been savaged by wild beasts and are crippled hopelessly.

[8 : 54] You bring them wobbling into the temple and offer them as sacrifices. And you, in the moment when you are in desperate need and say to me, if you, Lord, will hear my prayer in this situation, then I will bring to you the best of all that I have.

But he says, when you come to pay what you have vowed and what you have offered, you bring the sick animals and make an offering of that. And so the Lord complains bitterly to these people about the way they have treated him.

Well, then he brings out an interesting contrast. And you can see this if you look in verse 11. From the rising of the sun to its setting, my name is great among the nations.

Remember that lovely old verses or word that they used to have about the British Empire that the sun never sets on the British Empire? Well, that perhaps comes from Malachi where the Lord says, the sun never sets on those who worship me.

But he holds this against his feet because you, who I have made myself known to you, you who are called my people, you don't worship me, you don't honor me.

[10 : 19] But he said, among the nations the sun never sets, on those among whom my name is great. And every place, except in the place where it's meant to be, incense is offered to my name and a pure offering.

For my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of Hope. And so you find this strange situation developing where the Lord of Hope is honored among all the foreign nations who have never known me, but despised among the people who do know me.

He is not worshipped there. And so Malachi brings this terrible charge on the church of his day, on the temple worship of his day.

Well, this happens, I think, in times when, when people are waiting for something to happen. When people have an awesome sense that something dreadful is going to happen and that they don't, and that they don't know how to cope with the times.

And most of us, I think, even those of us who have been called to be the soldiers and servants of Jesus Christ, even those of us who have been brought in to this faith, we tend to let our hands hang down and to become burdened with the troubles of the times in which we live.

[11 : 51] And with that comes our failure to worship God who is worthy to be worshipped. And that's why this chapter ends with the Lord saying, I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name is feared among the nations.

And what needs to happen? He said, we need to establish and to reestablish the worship of God as being the central reality in our lives.

The beauty of this passage, I think, is it is a dialogue between God and his people. And God tells them what he sees happen. Now, the difficulty that we often get into is that the dialogue goes between one and another.

And somebody says, well, this is how you should do it, or this is how you should do it, or this is how you should do it, or this is how you should do it. And you have a hundred opinions as to how it should be done.

But what Malachi says is, hear the Lord, and hear what he says about how our worship should be offered. Hear what he says about what is acceptable worship.

[13 : 06] And you see, what the Lord has done here is to send his prophet among his people to say, this is how I understand what you're offering to me.

You're saying, what a weariness. How has God loved us? This will do with an offering to God. And God says this to me.

Well now, we don't know, because you don't cross your lambs and your turtle doves and your pigeons and your calves and your goats. You don't bring them here to be offered in worship.

What do you bring? You and I, we bring to this worship our whole selves. The whole burnt offering, if you want, of our whole lives.

That's what Paul talks about in the great verse on worship, which begins the 12th chapter of Romans. I beseech you, brethren, that you present your body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

[14 : 13] That you offer the whole of your life to God in worship. That's what we who are under the new covenant, that's the center of our worship.

And that's not just the worship of Sunday morning. That's the worship of our whole lives. That's what we are called to do at the center of the whole of our existence.

And you see, what happens is, in that, we acknowledge the great thing who is among us. The God who in his glory has come among us in the person of Jesus Christ.

We are to offer to him acceptable worship. And as the Lord looked and saw their worship, so he looks and sees ours. that he isn't deceived if he wasn't deceived by them.

He knew what their heart's worship was, and he was manifested by sick enemies, by despising the table of the Lord, by saying callously, how have you loved them?

[15 : 25] that's how he measured their worship. And the same God, by the same Holy Spirit, measures our worship and what we offer to him from our lives.

We don't say to one another, that's not acceptable worship, or to another person, that's not acceptable worship, or to another, that's not acceptable worship.

No, that's not the way the dialogue goes. It's God who speaks to our hearts by his Holy Spirit. And we know what is acceptable worship from us.

We know when we need and long to worship God in spirit and in truth. There's a lovely, lovely verse in Psalm 22, which you can only find in Psalm 23.

But it's such a lovely verse. I wish all of you do it by heart. And it says that the Lord dwells in the works of his people.

[16 : 32] That the Lord knew what is the works of his people. That's what he is granted. That's the temple that we create for him in our hearts and in our minds.

Not a temple made with hands. But a temple which is constructed of the worship of the people of God. And God indwells the worship of his people.

So as we live our lives and acknowledge the centrality of the great God who is among us, so we create the temple to which we bring ourselves a living sacrifice.

This is the sacrifice which is wholly acceptable under God. The whole of our lives. Not some token. Not some animal.

Not something apart from ourselves representing us. But we bring the whole of our lives. And we offer it to God. And not the temple that's created for the worst of our lives.

[17 : 44] And we alone know of the love of us. We alone know whether we find the worship of God of weariness. We alone know whether we despise the Lord's table.

We alone know whether our sacrifices are acceptable to get. And you know too. We don't die of one another because we don't know one another.

We look on the other side of one another. That's all the same of us. And my deep concern for us as a congregation of Christ's people is that we should offer to God acceptable worship from our heart. we should thus create a temple for his worship in our men and that people will be aware that God inhabits the praises of his people and that in the very business of our worship of our coming together to worship we acknowledge the presence of the great king the Lord of hosts who is to be feared among the nations we acknowledge his presence in our men.

May God grant that each of us from our heart may offer to God this kind the to know that you you you