

# Malachi Who cares what God thinks!

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[ 0 : 00 ] Keep your Bibles open at Malachi, and it's great to be here on this day with Sam and Sal and Bailey. Let me say it's great to have him on team.

For those of you who are part of his family and friends, I'm Steve. I'm on the ministry team. I work with Sam and work with Sal there for a while, and very sad to get Sal's resignation, but certainly joyful in the arrival of Bailey.

It's a good reason to resign, I think, here. So keep your Bibles open. We are in the middle, for those who are new here tonight, we're in the middle of a commitment series, or second weekend, in fact, of the commitment series going through Malachi.

So that's the context of what we're looking at. We do it every year as a church, and so we're up to number two. So I want to pray, and then I'm going to look at that passage. Father God, help us. We pray to look at this passage, which has got so many difficult bits in it, and even grates against our hearts in it.

You are the sovereign ruler of this universe. And so help us now, we pray, so that our heart and our treasures might align with yours. And we ask it for your sake. Amen.

[ 1 : 06 ] Am I on the air? I am. Fantastic. Okay. Last we discovered, as we entered into Malachi, first five verses, the glorious foundation of this relationship between God and his people Israel.

It's right there in verse two of chapter one, in four words, I have loved you. And we unpack the implications of that little statement. God's love is an electing love because he chose Israel over Esau.

His love for them is an unconditional love because he chose them to be his. He chose to love them before they'd done anything good or evil, before they'd met any conditions, before they were even born.

His love for them is a sovereign love because he was under no constraint whatsoever. He didn't have a gun held to his head in order to love his people. He was not forced to do it. He wasn't tricked. He wasn't manipulated in any way.

And his love for them is free because it is the abundant overflow of his immeasurable grace that can never be bought. It can't be repaid or earned in any way.

[ 2 : 11 ] And so my first challenge for us last week was for us to make a commitment to know this God. Don't conform God to the size of our finite minds, but to actually know the God, the infinite God has revealed himself so that we can understand something about him.

So go deeper than just the size of your head in understanding God. And why do that? Well, because you cannot worship, adore, love what you don't know.

You cannot treasure Jesus if in fact you don't know the Jesus who has revealed himself. We also know from the very same verse in verse 2 of chapter 1 that Israel failed to see and feel the greatness of God's love.

But that's not the only thing that they failed to see and feel. We actually see here in verse 6, beginning of today's text, that they failed to see and feel the greatness of God's majesty.

So have a look at it there. A son honors his father and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? And if I'm a master, where is the respect due me, says the Lord Almighty?

[ 3 : 26 ] And so there are two aspects there of the fatherhood of God. It means that he loves me, that he will care for me, that he will guide me and forgive me and take me home to be with him forever someday.

And those things are all wonderfully true. Don't want to dismiss those in any sense. But the fatherhood of God in this text also implies that God is to be honored and revered and venerated.

The majestic fatherhood of God implies that his children should honor him and respect him and pay him reverential esteem. And that is Israel's failing in this text.

That's their problem. And so what Malachi does for us, he helps us to see and to feel the majesty of the heavenly father by using a special name for God here.

Eight times in the verses from verse 6 to verse 14, God is called, he refers himself as the Lord Almighty.

[ 4 : 24 ] Or in old language, you'd call it the Lord of hosts. So what Malachi wants us to see and feel is that our father in heaven has infinite authority in the universe.

He can wield any and all armies on the earth to accomplish his purpose among the nations, whether they like it or not, whether they know it or not. He has a myriads of unstoppable angels who do his bidding fallously, who never fail on a single errand that he sends them on.

He has appointed every star in the universe in its position. He holds them in place, all trillion upon trillions of them by the power of his very word, and he calls them by name.

That is the greatness, if you like, of God, the sheer majesty of God that the Bible reveals. And that is what's missing here for these people of Israel.

It's the majesty, the greatness of God that's kind of slipped by them. It's sort of like this. You've got a dog, like Rin Tin Tin and Lassie and Benji or one of those dogs, and the dog saved you a hundred times, and you might feel deep affection for that poor wretched animal, and you may even cry when the animal dies, but you're never tempted to bow down and actually worship the dog.

[ 5 : 42 ] Or it's the same of a true friend. The closest bond of friendship might develop, but you never think, even if you're closest friend, that I need to bow down and worship them.

Even though you might love them, you don't actually bow down and worship them. Why? Because one indispensable element in worship is greatness.

It's majesty. It's splendor. It's the greatness of God that is missing here for God's people in this text. And it's so evident in two areas as we're going to go through.

The greatness of God is missing for them, and it's evident in their worship, and it's evident in their relationships with each other. That's what we're going to look at. So what happens when you don't see or feel the majestic greatness of God?

Apathy, carelessness, fickleness, half-hearted devotion. They are the results when you don't see God's greatness. And it's there in verse 8 for us.

[ 6 : 43 ] Have a look at it if you've got your Bibles there. When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong?

Try offering them to your governor. Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you, says the Lord Almighty? Now, Israel knew that the book of Leviticus condemned dodgy sacrifices like that. And the priests, it also condemned the priests who offered those dodgy sacrifices. So why was it so important to God to bring the best animals for sacrifice? The perfect one, the unblemished animals for sacrifice.

The primary reason is that God was interested in teaching his people that a sacrifice for sin must be perfect for it to be effective.

These sacrifices, in the end, way back then, centuries earlier, were meant to all point forward to the sacrifice of sin that was to come in Jesus Christ, the one who was called the perfect Lamb of God.

[ 7 : 48 ] Hebrews 9 says this about Jesus, that he appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people.

And Hebrews is at pains to point out the greatness and the majesty and the perfection of Jesus. And so these sacrifices that these people were doing were meant to look forward to Jesus and his once for all perfect sacrifice.

And so if you offer a dodgy sacrifice, by implication, you were saying that my sin isn't that great. It doesn't matter that much.

And it doesn't need anyone or anything perfect to die as a substitute for sin. And so the horror of what these priests were doing here in offering these blemish sacrifices is that God says explicitly that he's turning away.

You come to the altar, you bring your blemished animal, your mangy broken legs, you blind sheep and you put them on the altar and God says, I will not accept that.

[ 8 : 59 ] And so what he does is he turns his back to it. And when he turns his back to it, he ignores you, the person who brings the sacrifice. And when you are bringing a sacrifice as a sin offering, what happens if it's rejected?

You are still in your sin. And that's the horror. All this religious activity that's happening in the people in Israel is of naught value to God.

They arrogantly assumed that they could approach God on their own terms rather than on God's terms. And you only do that when God is small in your mind and you are big in your mind.

And so why offer these substandard sacrifices? The origin of this careless worship is seen in verse 11 and 14. So cast your eyes there in chapter 1.

Both verses give the reason God rejects this careless worship from his people. Let's just look at verse 11. It's connected, verse 10. Logically, I know, but it's connected to verse 10.

[ 10 : 14 ] It says, I am not pleased with you, says the Lord Almighty, and I will accept no offering from your hands. For, I want to inject a word in there.

For, my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty. In other words, careless worship is unacceptable because it utterly fails to come to terms with the greatness of God.

And then God, what he does here is he quotes their attitude to worship in verses 12 and 13. You profane it by saying the Lord's table is defiled and its food is contemptible.

In verse 13. And you say, what a burden. And you sniff at it contemptuously, says the Lord Almighty. What's their basic attitude to worship?

It's a burden. Or quite literally, it's wearisome. It's boring. And so they sniff at it with contempt.

[ 11 : 25 ] When you become so blind that the maker of galaxies, the ruler of nations, the knower of all mysteries, the lover of all souls, becomes boring, then there's only one thing that's left.

And that is the love of the things that he's created. Love of the world. When you give away the very best treasure, you will always pick up a lesser treasure.

Because our hearts are restless and they must treasure something. And if it's not in heaven, if it's not God, then it will be here in this world.

If you cannot see the greatness of the sun, you'll be impressed by a streetlight. If you've never felt the roar of thunder and seen the brilliance of lightning, you'll take photos of fireworks.

If you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God, you'll fall in love with the world of shadows and short-lived pleasures.

[ 12 : 36 ] And so when it's time to bring your sheep from the flock to sacrifice, what do you bring? You bring the blind one with broken legs and the mange.

Or better still, you jump the fence and flog your neighbor's one. Because the good sheep sell better and you love your money more than God.

And so this, I think, is what is happening here amongst these people. Careless worship in this text is religious activity that illustrates how little I value God.

That's the sense of it there, I think, in verse 10. Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors so that you would not light useless fires on my altar.

There's a little word behind the phrase useless fires. And it's probably better translated vain fires.

The same word is used in 2 Samuel 24-24 in a very similar way to this passage here.

[ 13 : 47 ] So back to 2 Samuel 24. King David is trying to avert a plague. And to do so, he needs to build an altar in order to make sacrifice on the altar. And the owner of the threshing floor where he wants to build the altar says to him, take it for free and I'll give you some animals to sacrifice on it for free as well when you build your altar.

And this is King David's response. No. But I will buy it from you at a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing.

I will not offer to the Lord my God sacrifices in vain.

And that is the essence of careless worship. What David is saying there in 2 Samuel 24 is, I value God so much.

The sovereign freedom, unconditional love and the majesty of his fatherhood are so satisfying to my soul that I cannot bring myself to worship in a way that looks as if I value money than I value him.

[ 15 : 01 ] I won't do it. It must cost me something. It must say that he, the holder of galaxies, is my greatest treasure.

And so the essence here of careless worship is empty religious activity. It doesn't express the worth of God. It doesn't cost anything.

In fact, what it does is it expresses that our treasure is on earth and that in actual fact I really love this world that he's made rather than him. And so if we worship God when it is convenient or it's the eighth most important thing on the list without bothering to repent of any sin, then we are in the end revealing our view of God.

And friends, as I said this morning, I've got to say it here again. I'm concerned because it is so easy for careless worship just to filter in amongst the people of God.

And I've seen it filtering here. A carelessness that worships when it's convenient. A carelessness that isn't on time. A carelessness that only sings the songs that I want to sing.

[16:12] A carelessness that fits the worship of the majestic God of this universe around sport and travel and entertainment and family gatherings and school and TV and work and my own sleep patterns and around anything.

A carelessness that reveals that some of us are more impressed with the street light than we are with the sun. A carelessness that doesn't treasure the sacrificial, electing, sovereign, free love of this majestic, great Lord Jesus Christ.

That he's not in fact the greatest treasure. True worship comes from a heart where the Lord Jesus is treasured above all human property and praise and it aims to inspire the same Christ-centered passion in the hearts of those that are gathered.

Now I'm not talking about a particular form of worship here. Don't get me wrong. I'm not batting for Anglicanism or anything nutty like that when I talk about true worship.

What I have in mind is worship that really comes from feeling and seeing the greatness of God. It seeks humbly to express and to inspire that same intensity for Jesus without the distractions of theological lightness or errors or superficiality or carelessness or flippancy or pride.

[17:42] So my friends, we need Jesus to open our eyes to his greatness so that we never offer him in the pew or in the pulpit or in the singing or in the prayers or whatever it is, the leftover of our lives.

That's the first evidence that they haven't seen the greatness of God. The second evidence they haven't seen the greatness of God is in the way they treated one another.

The failure to treat each other correctly was another sign that in actual fact their worship was empty. I'm just going to be really brief. Have a look at chapter 2, verse 10. I'm not going to pick all this apart, but there's a few things I want to show you.

Do we not have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another? Judah has been unfaithful.

A detestable thing has been committed in Israel in Jerusalem. Judah has desecrated the sanctuary of the Lord, the Lord loves by marrying women who worship a foreign God.

[18:52] As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the Lord remove him from the tents of Jacob, even though he brings an offering to the Lord Almighty. Another thing you do, you flood the Lord's altar with tears, you weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings, accept them with pleasure from your hands.

You ask why? It is because the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.

Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth.

The man who hates and divorces his wife, says the Lord, the God of Israel does violence to the one he should protect. says the Lord Almighty.

So be on your guard and do not be unfaithful. The will of God in those verses is really plain. He wills that we be faithful to each other.

[19:58] And the word unfaithful there is used three times in the three different sections. So in verse 10, why do you profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another?

That's referring to a general untrustworthiness in relationships. Verse 11, Judah has been unfaithful by marrying women who worship a foreign God.

That's reference to the marrying of unbelievers who don't trust Jesus. In verse 14, the Lord is the witness between you and the wife of your youth.

You have been unfaithful to her is in reference to what I would call careless divorce. The sin that runs through each of these areas of life is the failure to keep a commitment.

It's the breaking of an agreement or a covenant or a contract or a promise. It's that they're not true to their words, is what he's saying. And so what Malachi does with this key word is to show that community life of the church is supposed to be ordered by the faithful promise of fulfillment of promises and contracts and oaths and covenants and commitments.

[ 21 : 08 ] We had one of them up here just a moment ago. I promise to bring Bailey up in the life of the church. To know, to love and to serve the Lord Jesus. That's a covenant.

That's an oath that was declared here and promises were made in full view of us all and God. But this order has been given way to the disorder that comes when people give in to the power of self-centered emotional impulses.

See, what happens? Remember it? What happens when you fail to see and feel the greatness of God's love and the majesty of the Fatherhood of God? You live for disappearing shadows and short-lived pleasures for self-centered emotional impulses.

And Malachi reveals two alternative ways here for people to live in a community. One way is what you might call covenantal order. All relationships are made peaceful and pure by the fulfillment of covenants and promises and oaths and contracts and commitments.

Children to parents, parents to children, husbands to wives, wives to husbands, employer to employee, employee to employer, state citizen, citizen state. probably other ones as well.

[ 22 : 27 ] The peace and prosperity and joy of the community is held together by the deep, strong spirit of covenant keeping that pervades the community.

We are true to each other. The very fabric of the community is the trustworthiness of its people. that they do what they say not just because of the person they're eyeballing but because Jesus is true to them.

They want to honor him and obey him. And so we follow through with our commitments to each other. And the big one here that he mentions a couple of times is marriage.

we follow through with commitments such as I Steve in the presence of God in the presence of God take you Natalie to be my wife to have and to hold from this day forward for better or for worse for richer for poorer in sickness and in health to love and to cherish as long as we both shall live this is my solemn vow and promise to you Natalie but my solemn vow and promise to God and I stick to that promise.

The other way for people to live together in community is the opposite of covenantal order is what you might call the disorder of self-indulgence and in this community the spirit of commitment making and commitment keeping has been replaced by the spirit of emotional and physical impulse and so when my wife doesn't please me anymore I abuse her or I just replace her and that's what the carelessness is what Malachi is speaking about here.

[ 24 : 23 ] He's not talking about a genuine divorce he's talking about careless divorce and the moral fabric of faithfulness to covenants and promise keeping and contracts is unraveled and what's left are individual strands of private gratification.

I think friends that Malachi's message to us today could hardly be more relevant. He warns against the pseudo freedom of individualistic self-indulgence our worship our worship of God is not a deeply private matter it is intimately linked with our relationships with other people our horizontal relationships with one another testify either for or against the reality of our vertical relationship with God God and that is why our core value here as a church treasuring Jesus together is so essential this is what it says having been led individually by the spirit of God to receive Jesus Christ as the Lord Saviour and supreme treasure of our lives we now most solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as the one body in Christ in an age of individualism we value vigilance and accountability in treasuring

Jesus together and then after that that's the introductory statement there's a few things that come in after that in terms of what it might look like in practice and here's one of the points we are committed to making corporate worship a weekly priority now that's not just because of our relationship with God that's because of our relationship with one another it's treasuring Jesus together as John 4 20 says if anyone says I love God and yet hates his brother he's a liar for anyone who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen the love of God must show itself in the interaction with one another if we are so self-righteous that we don't allow other Christians to speak into our lives and to correct our injustices we cannot be a church together so reality check

God is the one who holds the galaxies in its place that's him perfect all-knowing sovereign you on the other hand are sinners and I am a sinner and it would be really good if we took ownership of that very basic fact and in humility admit our own sin before God and approach one another in brokenness rather than in self-centeredness rather than in self-righteousness this is the kind of worship that is acceptable to God it's the kind of worship that treasures Jesus by offering him our best and our all and it is faithful to one another where we also offer ourselves to one another our worship of God involves how we treat God and how we treat others if we think that we worship God because we attend church tonight we've sung some hints and we've read the Bible and we've done some praying and stuff like that and yet our lives move out from here and the rest of the week self-indulgent impulse is what I live for then the only person who's being fooled is you the majestic Jesus requires that his treasured possessions treasure him above all else Amen