

“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

August 5, 2012, 6:00PM

Sermon Texts: Malachi 1:6-14

Introduction.

You will recall when we studied Haggai and Zechariah that God had sent those two prophets to rebuke His people for neglecting to build God’s temple. Now years later God sent Malachi to rebuke the people for neglecting the sacrifices and worship of God once the temple was built.

We are witnessing here the re-paganization of worship and as the worship goes so goes the culture. Remember I said one of the reasons I decided to stop and preach through Malachi was because it was so modern, so contemporary. This is us. We are living in a time of the re-paganization of our worship and our culture. The terms used to describe our times are post-modern and post-Christian.

When a person or a nation loses the fear of God, before long anything and everything goes. There is no shame, no guilt, no taboos. As goes our worship, so goes our lives and our culture. We worship what we fear and love and if that isn’t God then it’s idolatry and idolatry destroys a person and a nation.

We are living in a time similar to the people in Malachi’s time. Life is routine, nothing particularly spiritually significant is going on. Where’s God and what’s He doing? Is He being faithful to His promises? Does it really matter what we do or don’t do or how we do it? Does it really matter to God? Does He notice or care?

God sends Malachi, whose name means messenger, to confront His people who were being unfaithful in four major areas of life: unfaithful in worship, led by unfaithful clergy, they were being unfaithful in their marriages and they were being unfaithful in their financial giving to God’s work.

Malachi 1:6-7.

God begins by being very clear, direct and up front. He pulls no punches, He says it like it is. God declares that He is being dishonored and His name is being despised. “Where is my honor and where is my fear?”

Right away we see the heart of the people. They doubt and debate and even deny that God’s name is being dishonored and despised. They challenge the message God sent through His servant Malachi.

So God responded by demonstrating in multiple ways exactly how He was being dishonored and despised.

Malachi 9-14.

In a sentence God was being dishonored and despised through careless worship and heartless service. Let’s look at how this was done in more detail. God brings four charges against the priest.

First charge, polluted Sacrifices, 1:8, 13, 14.

God's first charge against the priest was they dishonored Him by bringing defective and deficient sacrifices. They were careless in their gifts. They brought the worst of their animals. The lame, the sick, the defective, the diseased. In verse 13 they accepted stolen animals. And worse yet, in verse 14 they did this even though they had good sacrifices in their own flocks.

The priests were indifferent and therefore the people were indifferent. Their gifts matched the attitude of their hearts. The priests winked with approval to ingratiate themselves to the people.

Why did it matter what kind of gift they brought? Because God had been clear in His law what type of gift to bring.

Leviticus 22:17-33 And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 18 "Speak to Aaron and his sons and all the people of Israel and say to them, When any one of the house of Israel or of the sojourners in Israel presents a burnt offering as his offering, for any of their vows or freewill offerings that they offer to the Lord, 19 if it is to be accepted for you it shall be a male without blemish, of the bulls or the sheep or the goats. 20 You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you. 21 And when anyone offers a sacrifice of peace offerings to the Lord to fulfill a vow or as a freewill offering from the herd or from the flock, to be accepted it must be perfect; there shall be no blemish in it. 22 ***Animals blind or disabled or mutilated or having a discharge or an itch or scabs you shall not offer to the Lord or give them to the Lord as a food offering on the altar.***

Why does God say this in His law? Why does God care about the kind of sacrifices being made? It was just going to be burned up after all? What was the purpose of the sacrifice? It was a sacrifice for the sin of the people, so the sacrifice had to be unblemished. The unblemished for the sinful.

This is a picture of Christ. The only acceptable sacrifice to God for our sins was a pure, unblemished, male lamb, the Lamb of God who carries away the sins of the world.

Why male? Because in God's created order for the sexes the male is the representative head, the federal head. As Adam is the head of our race and Christ is the head of His church and a husband and father is head of his home and family.

Their gifts dishonored God's law and their gifts displayed a complete lack of love for God.

Second charge, unrepentant hearts, 1:9.

1:9 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.

They came to God for favor and asked for grace but they hadn't changed. There was no fruit in their repentance, they still brought the defective offering thinking God would be impressed by the words on their lips.

If you offer a prayer asking for forgiveness but have no desire to change then God will not hear or answer that prayer. God is a God of love and grace but He is also holy and will not be mocked. The attitude of the heart is what He looks at.

Third charge, failed leadership, 1:10.

1:10 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.

There was not one person among them who saw what was going on and stopped it. No one had the integrity or fear of God to shut the doors of the temple.

They allowed the people to bring defective and deficient offerings, they didn't honor the Lord by disciplining the people. God was robbed, His glory and honor were defamed.

God said it would be better to close the temple and stop worship than to offer hypocritical, careless worship. It would be better to close the doors of this church than to offer careless, heartless worship.

Fourth charge, half-hearted service, 1:13.

1:13 But you say, 'What a weariness this is,' and you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts.

They were half-hearted. A "who cares, whatever" attitude. Their service seemed boring and even burdensome. But that's what meaningless things become to us. Their service was mechanical. Their hearts weren't in it. They sniffed their nose at their service. Their up turned noses belittled the Lord's service.

Does it matter how we worship God?

Isn't just showing up enough? Is it OK to play church or to play at worship? Have you ever even considered that the Lord might not accept your offering? Do we honor the Lord with our worship?

Let me suggest three ways we can dishonor God in our worship and three ways we can honor Him in our worship:

Thoughtless Preparation.

Are we casual? Do we make no effort at preparation? Or do we come prepared, thoughtful, engaged, ready to give and receive, actively participating?

Saturday night used to be for preparation for Sunday worship. We still have the custom in this church of printing for you what next week's sermon and text and offering will be. You have opportunity to pray and prepare and come ready to worship.

Half-hearted Participation.

How do we treat God? Are we just going through the motions?

Revelation 3:15-16 "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! 16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth.

All seven churches in Revelation 2 and 3 eventually died.

Their worthless love and worship resulted in losing what they had, their candlestick is removed.

Are we ever bored with worship? If so we have completely lost sight of what we are doing here and who we are worshipping?

We are here in the presence of no less than the Lord of Hosts, the creator of the galaxies, the sustainer of the universe, the redeemer of sinners. We are giving glory to the only one true God who is supreme, majestic, glorious, incomprehensible and unfathomable, but who is our Father and to whom we are His adopted children.

God is not boring. He is anything but boring. He is the most dynamic and dramatic being in the universe. If we're bored we aren't thinking about God. We are thinking about us. Boredom is not one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit.

If we worship God foolishly and without understanding; if we worship God carelessly and without due consideration; if we worship God slothfully and half-heartedly; if we worship God with wandering minds and distractions and selfish or vain thoughts; all of this is an affront to God, a robbing Him of the honor and glory due to Him and it's the same as if we were to bring sickly, diseased, lamb, blind animals for a sacrifice (paraphrased from Matthew Henry's commentary on Malachi).

Poor Motivation.

Why are we here? What was our motivation for coming? Just habit, just to feel good, or to look good to others? So people won't think bad thoughts about us? Or did we come to worship the one true living God who in His mercy has redeemed us from sin and hell and gives us life?

What are we to bring to worship? Three ways to honor God.

Give of your best to the master.

Mary gave the best, her undivided devotion.

Another Mary brought an alabaster jar of expensive perfume.

A widow gave her last two pennies.

You want to see the classic bad example of not bringing our best. Go in the **youth rooms** in churches all across America and look at the couches. What do you see? You see old, worn out, out dated cast offs. Of course, it's just the youth right, and beside they will just tear it up anyway. What are we saying? What does it say to the youth? Maybe the reason they treat it like junk is because it is junk.

The people who brought the worthless animals thought they were just being practical, after all they were just going to be burned up anyway, right?

Give of your first (first fruits) to the master.

II Chronicles 31:5 As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.

This was the acceptable offering of Abel. He brought his first fruits to honor God who gave it to him and to show his trust in God that he would have enough left for him to live on.

One danger is that if we hold back from God and give Him leftovers as though it is firstfruits, we will lose what we keep back. That was the sin of Ananias and Sapphira who said they gave all when they did not.

No left overs of your emotions, of your heart either.

Give something that cost you something, give a sacrifice.

Would you give a broken toaster to a couple as a wedding present? If you gave your wife a new broom for her birthday that would be considered thoughtless. But if you gave her an old, worn out, used up dirty broom now that would be an insult.

King David sets us a good example in this:

I Samuel 24:21-25 And Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?” David said, “To buy the threshing floor from you, in order to build an altar to the Lord, that the plague may be averted from the people.” 22 Then Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take and offer up what seems good to him. Here are the oxen for the burnt offering and the threshing sledges and the yokes of the oxen for the wood. 23 All this, O king, Araunah gives to the king.” And Araunah said to the king, “May the Lord your God accept you.” 24 But the king said to Araunah, “No, but I will buy it from you for a price. I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing.” So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. 25 And David built there an altar to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the Lord responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.

David is saying that God is so great and worthy and he loves God so much that he doesn't want to worship God in any way that might look like he is trying to get by on the cheap, or in any way that he is trying to cut corners, that he cares more about money than God.

“Sacrifice is the giving up of something we genuinely value in order to express our devotion to God” (John Benton).

“Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were a present far too small.”

Our worship needs to match the greatness of the God we are worshiping. See vs. 11 and 14 and God's reminders of His greatness which is also seen in His love vs. 2-5.

If we don't know deeply the greatness and majesty and supremacy of God then our worship will fall short and become casual and careless. God is the living creator, sustainer, master and judge of the universe. What will you dare to bring to Him?

Hebrews 13:15-16 Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name. 16 Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.

Revelation 14:7 And he said with a loud voice, “Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come, and worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water.”