

AUTHENTIC WORSHIP Malachi

INTRODUCTION:

Can you imagine that it would ever be God's will for the church to close? Not just "a" church but "THE" church? Can you imagine that God would ever decide that the church was doing more harm than good for His Kingdom so He would just shut it down?

That is very like what took place at the time of the prophet, Malachi. God decided that temple worship had become so corrupt that religion was doing more harm than good for His people. So God said, "*Oh that one of you would shut the temple doors*" (Malachi 1:10a).

What do you suppose would cause God to want to close His house of worship? According to the book of Malachi, a widespread lack of authenticity and a complete lack of sincerity caused God to decide that Jewish worship in the temple was doing more harm than good and made Him want to shut the doors of the temple.

The temple was the worshiping community of the Old Testament just as the church is the worshiping community of the New Testament and of today. Given what God told Malachi, we must ask, "Is there any danger that God could feel that way about the church?"

Gordon Dahl, in his book *Work, Worship and Play in a Leisure Oriented Society* has said that Americans are people who worship their work, work at their play and play at their worship. I think he may be right. If so, why is it that we just play at worship?

Maybe the problem is that we just don't understand what worship really is. In the minds of too many people and in the halls of too many churches, worship is a show.

- We put on clean clothes, drive to the auditorium, park the car, walk in through the foyer, make a donation to cover the price of the entertainment and we settle back to enjoy the show. We think of worship as a show, we want to be entertained and we want our money's worth.
- Or, turning the tables a little bit, we think of worship as "a show" and so we put on the clean clothes, drive to the building, park the car, walk in to the auditorium and try to make sure that everyone sees that we were there. After all, what's the use of attending church if no one notices: it's a show so people had better see me.
- Or, with another slight turn of the term, many people think worship is a show and that is really their only responsibility: just to show...just to put in an appearance, just to attend.

Maybe the problem is that we do not really understand what is meant by “worship”. The term comes from an Olde English word, *worthschippe*. Literally, it means ascribing, assigning or attributing worth to God. To worship is to tell God, to tell each other and to tell a watching world that The Lord is worthy, awesome and THE most important presence in our lives. You see, in worship, it’s all about Him!

There are many different opinions about how best to express awe, honor, reverence and worth to God. In fact, there may be as many opinions about how best to worship as there are people who worship. Our preferences in worship style and expression will, inevitably, reflect our personality and experience. For instance, if the most moving worship you have ever known was a time of loud, rousing praise, then, for you, that may become the ideal by which you evaluate all other worship experiences. On the other hand, if the most moving and meaningful worship you can recall was something quiet, reverent, intimate and personal, then that is likely to become the yardstick you use to measure other worship services.

Of necessity, our preferences in worship will vary but one thing will never vary: **worship that honors God is meaningful**. It is genuine. It is sincere. It is...AUTHENTIC.

During the time of the prophet, Malachi, the religious ceremonies had become empty, meaningless and hypocritical. God’s evaluation was that their worship did more harm than good. Maybe we ought to take a look at their worship so we can learn from their mistakes.

God told Malachi that the worship the people were offering was unacceptable because of:

I. A Lack of Honor for the Lord’s Name (1:6a)

“A son honors his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?” says the LORD Almighty.

God is to be the focus of worship and it is to bring honor, glory and praise to Him. Unacceptable worship fails to honor God above all.

When our focus is on the people on the platform instead of God on the throne, we fail to honor God. When we are thinking about what we are getting out of the service instead of what God is getting out of it, we fail to honor God. When our hearts and minds are focused on anyone or anything other than the Lord, we fail to honor God.

II. A Lack of Honor for the Lord’s Table (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.*

In the temple worship of Malachi’s time, people were still bringing their sacrificial offerings to the Lord. God had required that the first 10% of the flocks, the herds, the fields and the vineyards belonged to Him. But only if it was unblemished. By the time of Malachi, the people were going through their flocks, herds and crops and picking out the culls and giving that as an offering. They treated God as unworthy by not giving Him their first and their best. They were putting defiled food on the altar and according to Malachi 1:7, in so doing, they were saying that the Lord’s table is contemptible.

We can treat the Lord’s Table as contemptible today. It is not what goes on the table that makes the food acceptable or defiled. It is how we regard it. The apostle Paul said that anyone who participates in the Lord’s Supper without discerning the Body of Christ, eats and drinks condemnation unto himself. The elements of the Lord’s Supper are fine. They are not the problem. The question is, where is your heart and where is your mind when you are participating? If you are not recognizing this as the body and the blood of Jesus, you are eating and drinking spiritual poison and your worship is doing more harm than good.

III. A Lack of Honor for the Lord’s Word (2:1-12)

⁷ *“For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, and from his mouth men should seek instruction—because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty. ⁸ But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi,” says the LORD Almighty.*

In Malachi’s day, God’s people had stopped putting a priority on God’s Word. God reminded the people that when the priesthood was established within the tribe of Levi, the Word of God was highly prized. The priests took great care to insure that God’s Word was clearly and faithfully taught to the people. Referring to Levi, God said, *“True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips.”*

But by the time of Malachi, God’s Word was rare. Those who should have taught the Word did not. Or they corrupted it, spun it, twisted and perverted it to suit their own purposes. And the people put up with it.

Walmart sells Bibles but Walmart does not have the responsibility to spread God’s Word. You can read the Bible on the internet but Bill Gates, Al Gore and Google do not have the responsibility to teach God’s Word. The church is responsible to spread God’s Word, to teach God’s Word

and to model or demonstrate God's Word. And it is the church that will be held accountable if it does not do the job.

Every member should pay careful attention to that which is taught in the church. And every member should insist that God's Word is heard clearly and accurately every time it is taught. You have no right to be entertained but you have a right to be informed. Worship which is unworthy of our God fails to give honor to His Word.

IV. **A Lack of Honor for the Lord's Children (2:13-16)**

¹³ *Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands.* ¹⁴ *You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant.*

¹⁵ *Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth.*

¹⁶ *"I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty.*

So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

One of the tragic weaknesses of the people of Judah during the time of Malachi was that they had stopped honoring the covenant of marriage. Marriages were considered disposable. When marriages are considered disposable, that means that people are considered disposable. Husbands, wives, sons and daughters, grandparents and grandchildren – all of these terms speak of family relationships that derive first from the union of a man and woman as husband and wife. Where marriage is not valued, family is not valued and therefore, people are not valued.

God told the people of Judah that inauthentic, unacceptable and unworthy worship is characterized by a lack of honor for His children. Restoring respect for marriage is a way of honoring God's children.

V. **A Lack of Honor for the Lord's Tithe (2:17-3:12)**

⁸ *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.*

"But you ask, 'How do we rob you?'

"In tithes and offerings. ⁹ *You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me.* ¹⁰ *Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.*

I've already made reference to the tithe. God had decreed that the first 10% of anything that a person earned must be given back to the Lord. This was not only to support God's work among the people, it was also an act of worship. A person's income represents the person. It is earned by the use of his time, his ability, his effort, his opportunity...by using anything and everything that God has given him. In a sense, a wage is a token of ourselves. It is our life in currency.

To give God the first 10% is an act of worship. It is almost like climbing onto the altar and saying, "Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it to you." But our offering plates are not large enough for all of you to fit in them. Instead, we give His tithes and our offerings as a symbol of the giving of ourselves to God. And that is true worship.

When I go to a restaurant, I typically tip 15% of my total bill to the one who served me. That means 15% of the food, the beverage and the tax. A tithe is a mere 10% of what the Lord has given us. But many people do not tithe the first 10%. They pay the bills, buy the groceries, fill the car, put something in savings, rent a movie and all the other things they want to do for themselves and then, if there is anything left, that's what they give to the Lord. When I went to a restaurant, the one who served me got 15%. My dog got the leftovers. God is way more than your servant and He both deserves and demands way more than your leftovers!

CONCLUSION:

This is not an easy message to preach and it is probably not an easy message to hear. But I truly believe it to be the Word of the Lord. So how will you receive God's Word on worship?

When the people heard what Malachi reported that God had said, those who feared the Lord wrote a scroll of remembrance and rededicated themselves to YHWH. The scroll of remembrance was to be a permanent reminder of their commitment to the Lord. That is something of what it means to participate in the Lord's Supper. This is our scroll, our record, our table of remembrance. Our participation in this rite is our act of remembrance and rededication to the Lord.

INVITATION: *#583 – "You Are My All In All"*