

Themes in Malachi - Lesson 4

DOES OUR WORSHIP INSULT GOD?

Introduction

- A. Text: **Mal. 1:7-11**.
- B. From the beginning of time, *God has required worship of man*.
 - 1. He has done so because *worship is inherent in the Creator-creature relationship*, not because He needs anything we are capable of giving Him - **Ac. 17:25**.
 - 2. We can't survive *spiritually* without worship to fill our hearts any more than we can survive *physically* without air to fill our lungs.
- C. But man has not always remembered the *purpose* of worship — nor has he always obeyed God in the *practice* of worship.
- D. It is an interesting fact that we can show *irreverence* and *disrespect* to God in the way we worship!
- E. Malachi's people had greatly *perverted* the worship of God — and his book deals with the *disrespect* they were showing at the altar where they should have been *honoring* Him.

I. THE EMPTINESS OF WORSHIP THAT DOES NOT COME FROM THE HEART

- A. It is disheartening to think that, within 100 years of the return of the first Jews from Babylon, their worship had already become vain, but that was the case.
- B. And what God had to say about it is typical of everything else the Scriptures say about vain worship.
 - 1. The thing they were calling worship was *worse than no worship at all*.
 - 2. *The rebuke was blistering: "Who is there even among you who would shut the doors, so that you would not kindle fire on My altar in vain? I have no pleasure in you," says the Lord of hosts, "nor will I accept an offering from your hands"* (**Mal. 1:10,11**).
- C. God evidently did not judge the crisis to be a minor one.
 - 1. The vain worship of Israel was not merely a futile exercise — it was *offensive* to God, an actual *abomination* to Him. Cf. **Prov. 28:9**.
 - 2. Whatever else their sacrifices and ceremonies might have been good for, they weren't any good for *pleasing the Lord* — He did not accept them.
- D. And what was the problem? It was that Israel had settled down to a *mechanical* concept of worship — they imagined that *performance of the bare act itself* was sufficient to produce the desired result.
- E. Malachi's people seem to have had *little sincerity or genuineness* about their worship.
 - 1. Even when doing what had been commanded, their *heart* was not involved - **Mal. 1:6**.
 - 2. Isaiah's words (written long before and quoted by the Lord in **Mt. 15:8,9**) were: "These people draw near to Me with their mouths and honor Me with their lips, but have removed their hearts far from Me, and their fear toward Me is taught by the commandment of men" (**Isa. 29:13**).
- F. Malachi was simply the last in a long line of prophets God had sent to admonish Israel for *the meaningless, useless way it worshiped*.

II. THE CONNECTION BETWEEN WORSHIP AND CHARACTER

- A. There was widespread *social corruption and injustice* among Malachi's people: "I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness against sorcerers, against adulterers, against perjurers, against those who exploit wage earners and widows and the fatherless, and against those who turn away an alien — because they do not fear Me" (**Mal. 3:5**).
- B. They seem not to have considered how offensive to God these *social sins* rendered their *worship*.
1. They were indifferent to the *vital connection between acceptable worship and godly character*.
 2. Failing to understand that God was looking for obedience, purity of life, and holiness in the inner man, they evidently assumed God would be pleased with their rituals *regardless of what they were doing outside the temple*. Cf. **Mt. 23:23-28**.
- C. But Samuel had asked Saul centuries before: "Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams" (**1 Sam. 15:22**). Cf. **Deut. 10:12**; **Psa. 51:16,17**; **Mic. 6:6-8**.
- D. In the NT, we learn that "to love [God] with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices" (**Mk. 12:33**).
1. Jesus rebuked those of His day for their confusion about *what God desires from man*.
 2. On more than one occasion, in exhorting the ritualistic and self-righteous Pharisees, He quoted **Hos. 6:6**, where God had said, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings." Cf. **Mt. 9:13**; **12:7**.
- E. Today, we urgently need to understand the link between *worship* and *the way we live*.
1. The NT is clear — our worship is rendered *vain* if we do things like these and refuse to repent:
 - a. Speak with an unbridled tongue - **Jas. 1:26**.
 - b. Turn a deaf ear to the pleas of the disadvantaged - **Jas. 1:27**.
 - c. Indulge in secret immorality - **1 Tim. 2:8**.
 - d. Live lives of bitterness, hostility, and enmity - **Mt. 5:23,24**.
 - e. Mistreat our wives - **1 Pt. 3:7**.
 2. One of the Proverbs says simply, "One who turns away his ear from hearing the law, even his prayer shall be an abomination" (**Prov. 28:9**). Cf. **21:27**.
 3. And God said, "I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting" (**Isa. 1:13**). Cf. **Isa. 1:10-15**.
 4. God's remedy for inconsistency between our way of life and our worship is found in **Isa. 1:16,17**.
- F. To *live unrighteously* and then *go through the motions of righteous worship* is to make a mockery of all that worship is intended to be — it is to treat God Himself with an offhanded contempt *worse even than blasphemy*.
- G. God has always been more patient with *hatred in His foes* than *hypocrisy in His friends*.

III. THE SIN OF OFFERING THE LORD OUR LEFTOVERS

- A. In Malachi's day, however, the worship of Israel had one other fault: it was a worship of *mere convenience*, rather than of *true sacrifice*.
- B. God said, "Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings" (**Mal. 3:8**).
- C. Those to whom Malachi preached were offering animals that were blind, lame, sick, and possibly even stolen - **Mal. 1:8,13,14**.

1. Each sacrifice was to be without blemish — it was to be the best the offerer had - **Lev. 22:17-25; Deut. 17:1**; etc.
 2. Malachi's people were doing less by God than by their civil rulers: "Offer it then to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably?" (**Mal. 1:8**).
 3. In effect, this was an effort to *swindle the Lord*: "But cursed be the deceiver who has in his flock a male, and makes a vow, but sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished" (**Mal. 1:14**).
- D. David had exemplified the right attitude about offerings to the Lord. When Araunah offered to give David the materials for a sacrifice, David replied, "No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing" (**2 Sam. 24:24**).
- E. It represents no great love for the Lord to "sacrifice" to Him whatever one can easily get along without. Jesus said of the poor widow who dropped two mites into the temple treasury, "[She] has put in more than all those who have given to the treasury; for they all put in out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty put in all that she had, her whole livelihood" (**Mk. 12:43,44**).
- F. Though today the Lord does not require tithes and animal sacrifices, *we still need Malachi's admonition*.
1. We are the Gentiles among whom the Lord said, "My name shall be great" (**Mal. 1:11**).
 2. Our offering to Him must be "a pure offering" (**Mal. 1:11**).
 3. Whether it is time, money, or ourselves we are contributing to the Lord's cause, it will have to be *more than the surplus we skim off of our abundance*.
- G. The Hebrew writer urged, "Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire" (**Hb. 12:28,29**).
- H. God will not be mocked with our leftovers!

Conclusion

- A. The worship which Malachi condemned was one which *trifled with the greatness of God* — it was of the sort described by Solomon as "the sacrifice of fools" (**Eccl. 5:1**).
- B. But the people had grown tired of playing even this game — they were slouching through worship sneering, "Oh, what a weariness!" (**Mal. 1:13**).
- C. Malachi warned in no uncertain terms that Israel was wasting what time they spent in this way.
- D. Until the day when their worship could be an expression of loving reverence for the Lord of hosts, the doors of the temple should remain shut - **Mal. 1:10**.
- E. Today, when we worship, we need to recover *the reverence with which God ought to be worshiped*.
- F. When we worship reverently, genuinely, and sacrificially great blessings are in store for us — nowhere is the principle of sowing and reaping more true than in our worship. Cf. **2 Cor. 9:6-8**.