

Honouring God in Worship and Words

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[0 : 00] Well, if you'd like to turn with me in your Bibles to the prophet Malachi, we're going to read together from Malachi chapter 1 into chapter 2. You have one of the church blue Bibles and it's page, what page is it? It's up on the screen, page 801.

If you haven't, then find Matthew's Gospel, turn back a page and you will find yourself in Malachi. Now we're going to read from chapter 1 verse 6 down to chapter 2 verse 9, this second section of Malachi's words.

So here's the Lord speaking to his people. A son honors his father and a servant his master. If then I am a father, where is my honor?

And if I am a master, where is my fear? Says the Lord of hosts to you, O priests, who despise my name. But you say, how have we despised your name?

By offering polluted food on my altar. But you say, how have we polluted you? By saying that the Lord's table may be despised.

[1 : 19] When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor.

Will he accept you or show you favor? Says the Lord of hosts. 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. 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. For from the rising of the sun to its setting, my name will be great among the nations.

And in every place, incense will be offered to my name and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts. But you profane it when you say that the Lord's table is polluted.

[2 : 27] And its fruit, that is, its food, may be despised. But you say, what a weariness this is. And you snort at it, says the Lord of hosts.

You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or sick. And this you bring as your offering. Do I accept that from your hand, says the Lord?

Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock and vows it. And yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts.

And my name will be feared among the nations. And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send a curse upon you.

And I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them because you do not lay it to heart. Behold, I will rebuke your offspring and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings.

[3 : 37] And you shall be taken away with it. So you shall know that I have sent this command to you and that my covenant with Levi may stand, says the Lord of hosts.

My covenant with him was one of life and peace. And I gave them to him. It was a covenant of fear and he feared me. He stood in awe of my name.

True instruction was found in his mouth and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness. And he turned many from iniquity.

For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge. And people should seek instruction from his mouth. For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. But you have turned aside from the way.

You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. You have corrupted the covenant of Levi, says the Lord of hosts. And so I make you despised and obeys before all the people.

[4 : 46] And as much as you do not keep my ways, but show partiality in your instruction. Amen. May God bless to us.

This is word. This is word.

Honor to God. To show fear to him is to show him reverence and awe. In other words, it's to treat God with the deepest respect.

To recognize who he is and all his majesty and holiness and sovereignty. And to respond to him appropriately with all of our lives. Lives of sacrificial worship.

That is one of the great emphasis through the New Testament, isn't it? That emphasis of all of scripture. God is God. He has shown wonderful mercy. Steadfast love to his people.

[6 : 05] And he demands reverence and awe from his people. And he demands reverence and awe from his people. Demonstrated in our lives and with our lips. Listen to the apostle Paul in Romans chapter 12.

I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Listen to the author of the Hebrews.

Listen to the author of the people. To treat him with the honor that he's due. That's the issue. It is their failure and complete blindness to that failure that Malachi exposes in these words.

He opens with the devastating exposure of their attitude towards him. The Lord says, A son honors his father and a servant his master.

[7 : 27] If then I am a father, where is my honor? If I'm a master, where is my fear? But perhaps most shockingly of all, it's the spiritual leaders of the nation that are especially in view here.

Look at the second half of verse 6. He says this, And the Lord, through the prophet Malachi, goes on to expose the failure of the priests to honor him.

And it's in two particular areas. And it's the two areas that were central to the very purpose of the priestly role. The role that the Levites had.

First, in the remainder of chapter 1, it's their failure. It's their attitude in regard to the sacrifices. And then second, in chapter 2, it's in relation to their instruction.

And we'll think about these in turn in a moment. But before we do that, a word about the priests.

Now perhaps you've mentally laid out the deck chair and are preparing to let all that follows pass you by.

[8 : 38] This is aimed at the priests, isn't it? Not the people. You think to yourself, I'm off the hook. Well, not so quick. Who were the priests? Well, they were the group that God had set aside for the particular task, the function of mediating between God and the people.

And between the people and God and bringing them together. And specifically, it was the tribe of Levi that had been set apart for the task. And theirs was a two-fold task.

They were to offer sacrifices for the nation's sin. And they were to instruct the people by teaching and applying the law to them.

Moses, in the latter chapter 2, he blesses each one of the twelve tribes before he dies. And to Levi, Moses says this.

They, that is, they, that is Levi, shall teach Jacob your rules and Israel your law. They shall put incense before you and hold burnt offerings on your altar.

[9 : 45] Two key things in relation to the sacrifices and instruction. Now, the particular role of the priests no longer exists among God's people today.

The Lord Jesus Christ fulfills perfectly both the sacrificial function and the teaching function. But, aspects of both of these roles are seen and carried out by the church today.

By individual Christians. And in particular, by church leaders. So, yes, Malachi, what we read here, is fulfilled in Christ.

But there are implications for you and I. And we haven't completed the task of applying Malachi until we've seen how it is fulfilled in Christ. Yes, absolutely. But also, how it's further fulfilled and applied in the church.

And to individual Christians. Now, we'll see in a bit more detail as we look at this section together. But if you mentally checked out earlier, please check back in.

[10 : 50] This is applicable to you. In 2 Timothy 3, the Apostle Paul reminds us that all scripture is breathed out by God. I'm profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.

That the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. And that is true of Malachi 1, verse 6 to 2, verse 9. So, let's look at these two sections.

Firstly, in chapter 1, verses 6 to 14, we see honoring God. In our sacrifices. Honoring God in our sacrifices.

We see here that God's people, and the leaders of God's people in particular, are to honor, not despise God, in our attitude to Jesus' sacrifice for sin, and in our sacrificial service for him. The Lord makes that devastating assessment of the priests there in verse 6. You despise my name. [11 : 56] And the priests respond out of utter self-deception and blindness. How? How have we despised your name? And the answer, by offering polluted food upon my altar.

Now, as we've seen, one of the key tasks of the priests was to, on behalf of all the people, oversee and make sacrificial offerings.

In particular, the priests would offer the sacrifices on the great bronze temple. They also are sacrificed in the outer courtyard of the temple. Now, some of these sacrifices were made for the forgiveness of the people's sin, for their cleansing from sin.

Others were offered signifying self-offering or consecration to the Lord. That was their task. They were to offer sacrifices on behalf of the people.

And according to Leviticus chapter 22, verse 22, animals that were blind or disabled or mutilated were not to be offered to the Lord as a food offering on the altar.

[13 : 02] It was prohibited. But that is exactly what is going on in Malachi's day. And that is why the prophet here is so utterly uncompromising.

Look at what he says. When you offer, verse 8, when you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil?

When you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor. Will he accept it? The Lord had clearly stipulated, hasn't he, that he would not accept second-rate offerings.

And yet, that is exactly what the people are bringing. It's what the priests are accepting. And the Lord would rather they bring nothing at all, verse 10.

He would rather the temple doors be shut. If his people couldn't be bothered to honor him with the sacrifices he deserved, then he would rather they didn't bother at all.

[14 : 03] It's pretty shocking, isn't it? But you see, the Lord is not dependent on them at all. It's not as if he needs their worship so much that he'll take whatever they can give him.

And that's the implication of verse 11. The Lord's name will be great among the nations. One day he will be perfectly worshipped by people of every nation.

That is the end goal of the Bible, isn't it? That's where history is going. And so he doesn't need to settle for second best. He doesn't need second-rate devotion from these people.

He doesn't need to put up with their dismissive attitude, verse 13. An attitude that finds all this sacrificing wearisome. In fact, all who come with such an attitude will, verse 14, be cursed.

The message to the priests in Malachi's day was clear. Do not dare bring second-rate sacrifices before me. You wouldn't entertain the idea for a second of bringing such offerings to your governor.

[15 : 12] How dare you think it's okay for me? I am the great king. My name will be feared among the nations. Don't despise me in terms of your attitude to the sacrifices.

Because to despise these sacrifices was to despise the heart of God's gracious provision for atonement, for forgiveness and cleansing of sin.

To despise those sacrifices was to despise the once and final sacrifices that all these sacrifices looked forward to, that they all anticipated.

It was to despise the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. To despise these sacrifices was to despise the ultimate sacrifice.

So how are we to apply this today? In many ways, this all seems a little foreign, doesn't it?

[16 : 11] All this talk of animals and sacrifices is very alien for us. We're quite distant from it. But there are two key implications which are put in the form of two questions.

And they are sobering questions for us to reflect upon. Because this is a sobering passage of scripture. So first implication for this section. Do we, do you, despise the Lord in your attitude to Christ once for all sacrifice for sin?

Do you despise the Lord in your attitude to Christ once for all sacrifice for sin? Now the theme of priests offering sacrifice for sin is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ.

He is the perfect priest. The one who offered himself as the perfect sacrificial lamb and a once for all sacrifice. As the writer to Hebrews says, Christ has entered into heaven itself now to appear in the presence of God himself on our behalf.

He has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. So the Old Testament sacrifice we read about here, that we read about in Malachi, they prefigured, they looked forward to the once for all sacrifice of Christ.

[17 : 35] So the despised sacrifices back then, in reality, was to despise Christ's sacrifice. That is why the people of God today don't make sacrifices.

Jesus is the final sacrifice for sin. No other sacrifice required. And so part of the warning for us today from Malachi is that we wouldn't despise Christ's sacrifice for sin.

Now the primary way in which you might despise Christ's sacrifice for sin is to refuse to refuse to trust in him for the forgiveness of your sin.

Now that may be you here tonight. There is no salvation apart from Christ and his sacrifice for sin. You despise Christ's sacrifice if you fail to recognize that you are a sinner in need of salvation, in need of an atoning sacrifice.

You honor God. You honor him if you are truly humbled, realizing your true state before him as a sinner deserving of judgment, and flinging yourself upon him for grace, trusting in Christ's sacrifice for sin.

[18 : 54] He will not turn you away. That is how you honor Christ's sacrifice for sin. But maybe you're a Christian here tonight, and the vast majority will be.

Are there ways in which you despise Christ's sacrifice for sin? Perhaps there's an attitude of presumption toward Christ's sacrifice.

I can just behave as I like. I can pursue this woman who's not my wife. The Lord will forgive me. I can do whatever I want to satisfy my deepest cravings.

I can get away with it because I know God will forgive me. That's his job. Well, that, friends, is an attitude that despises Christ's sacrifice for sin. But perhaps there's an attitude which fails to take real confidence in Christ's sacrifice on our behalf, and which unintentionally puts trust in our own efforts.

And so we only feel good about our Christian life when we've topped up Christ's sacrifice for sin. Maybe you feel you can confidently pray because you've done your quiet times this week, or whatever it might be.

[20 : 15] But that is to totally fail to see the sufficiency of Christ's death for sin. We can boldly but reverently approach the Lord because of what Christ has done for us.

God sent Jesus into this world so that through all his work, his death, his resurrection, we might receive all that is rightly his, and all the privileges that are rightly his.

And so we approach our Father with real intimacy and no fear of being turned away. We can't top up Christ's sacrifice.

We can't add to it. To despise Christ's sacrifice is to fail to have the attitudes of those words, penned by Charles Wesley.

The only way we can enter the presence of God is through Christ. What he has done is sufficient. Nothing more required. So there's the first implication where there's a reflection.

[21 : 42] Do you despise the Lord in your attitude to his once for all sacrifice for sin? Either through rejecting it or through presumption.

Or perhaps through thinking it's not quite sufficient. I need to do something else. That's the first implication. Second implication. Do we despise the Lord in our attitude to God through our sacrificial lives?

So yes, Jesus fulfills the Old Testament sacrifice in terms of dealing with sin. But the New Testament is clear that God's people today do, in a sense, continue to offer sacrifices to him.

Again, the writer of the Hebrews makes this plain. Through Jesus, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God. That is the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have for such sacrifices are pleasing to the Lord. It's not just Hebrews.

[22 : 51] The Apostle Paul, we've already mentioned, in Romans, speaks similarly. I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Our very lives, what we say and do, are to be sacrifices to God. All of our lives are to be worthy worship of the Lord.

And so we must reflect, as a church, as individual Christians, are there ways in which we despise the Lord in terms of our sacrificial lives?

Are we giving him second best? Are we giving God second best in terms of our time, talents, and money? Now, the Tron is a generous church.

Think of recent building projects. Think of recent offerings. Think of gospel partners we support around the globe. Think of the costless involved in doing that sort of thing, time and money.

[24 : 02] Willie, recently in India. Richard, about to go to visit the Far East, to visit Imran and Nagina. That's costly. And many, many people in the congregation give sacrificially to enable all that.

Think of all the folk we've sent out through Corn Hill, through the Apprenticeship Scheme, all those people we've sent out. It's costly. But are you pulling your weight?

I'm looking particularly at my own generation and younger. Have good intentions materialized into solid, sacrificial giving? We have many solid gospel partnerships around the world.

We've been generous in terms of people, haven't we? Think about Rupert in Edinburgh North, Ewan Dodds, Holyrood, many others. But it's been a decade since we sent missionaries abroad.

Are there folk in this room for whom much is being asked? Are we giving God second best in terms of our time, our talents, our money?

[25 : 20] Are we despising God in terms of our attitude to corporate worship? Are we habitually late for church? Or will we never be late for work?

Are we arriving expecting, my felt needs to be met? Rather than coming, seeking to serve others and to praise the name of the Lord. Now there is a danger that as we reflect on our lives and attitudes that we become unduly depressed.

Malachi is not a call to perfection or to unreasonably high standards, no. But it is a warning against the sort of thinking that gives God second best, that goes through the motions, that does things for the sake of appearance, and an unwillingness to count the cost of real service of God.

And one of the key weapons against such half-hearted worship is to remember the greatness of the Lord. Four times in chapter 1 you have this repeated phrase about the greatness of the Lord over the whole earth.

Verse 5, great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel. Twice in verse 11, my name will be great among the nations. For my name will be great among the nations.

[26 : 40] Verse 14, for I am the great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations. What Malachi was looking forward to here has now in part been realized.

You and I are gathered here this evening. We're an example of the fulfillment of these words. Four times in this chapter the nations are in view.

And with the coming of Christ, the subsequent spread of the gospel, we now see the extension of his name being praised and feared among the nations. Think on the extraordinary grace of the Lord.

Think on his fulfillment of these words. He is a gracious God worthy of all our lives, all that we have. So do not despise him.

See how great he is. The Lord of all the nations. And he calls you, not for second best, but for all.

[27 : 47] God's people are to honor, not despise God. God's people are to honor, not for second best. In our attitude to Jesus' sacrifice for sin and in our sacrificial service for him.

And how much more so we than those in Malachi's day. We who look back on Christ's sacrifice. We who live in the day of promise, kept and fulfilled, not just made.

And how much more for those in leadership. Malachi, at this point in the book, is aimed squarely at the spiritual leaders of the day.

And so if you're a leader here this evening in the church, then the responsibilities are greater. It's not just the ordained ministers. It's not just the elders.

It's not the staff. It's all those involved in leadership. Think about the small groups. The Farsi ministry. The Release the Word leaders. The Ladies' Fellowship. The local ministry teams. All those folk exercising leadership.

[28 : 51] Teaching Sunday school. All those in leadership. So are you, am I, setting an example in honoring the Lord with a life of sacrifice and service?

That's the first thing we see in this passage. Secondly, now, more briefly, looking at chapter 2. And we see here particularly honoring God in our speech.

So we see here that God's people are to honor God, not despise him in their words about him. The priests, as we've seen, they were responsible for the sacrifices in Israel, but also for instruction. And on both fronts, the priests in Malachi's day were falling spectacularly short. Graphic curses for their disobedience were set out at the start here in the chapter.

Behold, I'll rebuke your offspring and spread dung on your faces, the dung of your offerings, and you shall be taken away with them. Tough words.

[30 : 05] And then, Malachi reminds the priests of his covenant with them. Look at verses 4 to 7. The covenant with Levi. You can read about that in Numbers 25 and Jeremiah 33.

And it is a beautiful description of the role of the priest, isn't it? Verse 7. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and people should see construction from his mouth.

For he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts. Three key marks of the ideal priest are mentioned. One, true instruction.

The Levites were Israel's teachers. And we read something of what they did in Nehemiah chapter 8. The whole people are gathered. And the priests read from the book, from the law of God, clearly. And they gave the sense so that the people understood the reading. The priests were to teach true instruction. Number two, upright living.

[31 : 13] They were to do what they taught. Not just talk about it. They were to live it. Upright living. And three, there was to be a beneficial effect on others.

Turning many from iniquity. So three key things. True instruction. Upright living. And a beneficial effect on others.

Turning others from iniquity. But the priests of Malachi's day. Well, they failed on every front. Look at the Lord's assessment there in verse 8.

But you have turned aside from the way. You have caused many to stumble by your instruction. Faulty instruction.

Turned aside from upright living. Caused others to stumble. And the result is that rather than enjoy the blessings of the covenant, they will experience curses.

[32 : 13] Now this is here. To shake the priests from their destructive paths. Destructive way for themselves and for the people they're meant to serve. Given the great responsibility for mediating the word of God to his people, they fail.

And the consequences are severe. It was a jolting and sobering message for then and so it is for us today. The ministry of the word is so central in the purpose of God for his world and for his church. And it remains so today as it was then. And yes, the Lord Jesus fulfills this aspect of the Levite role. He was the perfect teacher who taught God's word faithfully.

He perfectly lived what he taught. He turned many away from iniquity. But the New Testament also applies part of the function of the priest to all believers.

Now you and I are not part of the Levitical order. But we all are part of a new priesthood. Peter in his first letter says to the New Testament people of God, You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

[33 : 39] And so each of us has a duty, a responsibility to speak the truth as revealed in God's word to one another, to the world around us.

And as you and I do that, as we speak the truth, as we continually seek to proclaim the whole counsel of God, as Paul urged the Ephesian church to do in Acts 20-20, as we do that, we faithfully honor God.

As we do this, as we speak God's word to one another, we must also be careful that we heed it ourselves. That was part of the problem in Malachi's day, wasn't it?

They turned aside from the way. It can be easy, can't it, to turn the searchlight of God's word onto other people's hearts, onto their lives, but fail to shine it into the cracks and crevices of our own hearts and lives.

Malachi warns of hypocrisy, the warnings are stark. How much more for those who have particular responsibility for teaching the church today, those who preach and teach in whatever capacity, have responsibility to teach the full revelation of the Lord from his word, and in his ultimate word, the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[35 : 09] There's responsibility to speak all of it, not just part, but to proclaim the whole counsel of God. But not only to teach it, but to demonstrate the truth in their lives.

That's the Apostle Paul's emphatic emphasis in his letter to Titus, where he instructs Titus to appoint elders, men who are above reproach in terms of private and public life, and also men who will hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction and sound doctrine, and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

To hold such a position in God's household today is quite a responsibility. Indeed, James in his letter says that not many of you should become teachers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.

To teach God's truth to others is a great privilege, but it's also a sober responsibility. And so for all of us gathered here this evening, pray diligently for your leaders.

One pastor warns us that a people will live as truly and highly as their spiritual mentors and leaders allow them to.

[36 : 40] Pray for your leaders in whatever capacity, whether it's a senior pastor, the Sunday school teacher, the small group leader. Pray for them, that they would proclaim what is true and demonstrate it in their lives.

God's people, and especially those in spiritual leadership, are to honor God, not despise him, in their words about him.

Now there may be some here tonight for whom the words we've considered tonight cut deep.

Perhaps the Lord has exposed your own self-deception in various ways.

He's revealed the reality of your own heart. Well, if so, the Lord is driving you to repent. That is the great purpose of the book of Malachi, to drive people to repentance.

Listen to the tender words from the Lord in chapter 3. He says to his people, return to me. Return to me, and I will return to you. These verses are a call to fear the Lord, to honor him in our sacrificial lives and lips.

[37 : 59] And if the Lord has placed his finger on one area for you tonight, return to him. Return to him, and he will return to you.

But there will be many here tonight for whom great sacrifices have been made. Many who have spoken God's truth with boldness and great integrity.

And these words are not here to condemn you, but to encourage you. Take courage. Your fear of the Lord is not in vain, because his name is great among the nations.

And one day, everyone will know it. And one day, you will see that your sacrifice is made. Not your second best, but your best. They will not be in vain, because he is the great Lord of all the nations.

And one day, everyone will see it. He is the great God. Do not despise him in your sacrifices, or with your words.

[39 : 11] Let us pray. Our Father God in heaven, you are worthy of our honor.

You are worthy of our fear. And so help us, in light of your word, to give of ourselves, to give our best, because you are a good and generous and merciful God.

you are the great God of the nations. And we know that not one moment of sacrifice, not one word uttered to your glory will be wasted.

So help us, Father, to respond in repentance and in worship, for we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.