

Altared, A Biblical History

Message Seven

The Curse of Careless Worship

Malachi 1: 6-10 “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?’

7 By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised.

8 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.

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.

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.

11 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.

12 But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.

13 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! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

14 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.

Let's focus for a few minutes on this;

The Key Problem; The Careless Worship of the Priests of Israel

You recall that the priests were despising the name of God by the way they handled the sacrifices in the temple.

Take note a few examples.

Verse 8: 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.

Verses 13–14: 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! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.

14 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.

The priests are offering stolen animals and animals that are lame and sick; and the Lord says this is unacceptable (**v. 13**).

It is in fact a curse according to **verse 14**. "Cursed be the cheat who . . . sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished!"

So, can you see clearly why it is that in this service, we must deal with the curse of careless worship.

In the time we have let's ponder, the **origin of careless worship**, **the essence of careless worship**, and **the opposite of careless worship**.

1. The Origin of Careless Worship

Malachi leaves us in no doubt about the origin of careless worship.

It is the failure to see and feel the greatness of God.

He makes this clear in at least two ways.

Failing to See the Greatness of God's Sovereign Love

First, by focusing our attention on the greatness of his sovereign love and the greatness of his majestic fatherhood.

The very first thing God says in this book in **verse 2 is, "I have loved you, says the Lord."**

They respond in their careless offhanded way, **"How hast thou loved us?"**

And what does God say?

He does not say, "I forgave you. I cared for you. I've been patient with you. I've provided for you."

That's all true.

But what does God call attention to for this careless people?

He speaks these ominous words, "Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the Lord. Yet I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau."

And we saw a few weeks ago what that meant: it meant that God's love for Israel (=Jacob) is an electing love.

God chose Jacob not Esau—Israel and not Edom.

And his electing love is free and unconditional: "Is not Esau Jacob's brother?" In other words, "Didn't Esau have as much natural claim on my love as Jacob did? Yet I chose you."

In other words, in dealing with the problem of careless worship, God unfolds the nature of his love not first as something warm and gentle and kind and tender, but as something awesome and strange and fearful in its electing freedom.



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There is in God's love a great and awesome sovereignty.

And that's what God draws attention to first.

Then he does the same thing with his fatherhood, as we see in **verse 6. "If then I am a father, where is my honor?"**

God could again draw attention to the gentle and tender examples of his fatherhood, but he does here just what he did in the case of his love: he focuses attention on the majesty of his fatherhood, and asks not, "**Where is your affection?**" But, "**Where is my honor?**"

That is the first way that God shows the origin of careless worship.

It comes from the failure to feel the greatness of God's sovereign love and the greatness of his majestic fatherhood.

It is greatness in particular, that is crucial when worship is at stake.

You might have a horse like Flicka, or Fury, or Black Beauty, or a dog like Rin Tin Tin, or Lassie, or Benji that saves your life a hundred times.

You might have a deep affection for the animal and weep when it dies.

But you are never tempted to bow down and worship it.

The same is true of a human friend.

The closest bond of friendship and love and unity might develop, but you never think of worshiping your friend.

Why?

Because one indispensable element in worship is GREATNESS, or majesty, or grandeur.

So, when careless worship is the issue, God focuses attention not first on the gentleness of his love or the tenderness of his fatherhood, but on the sovereign freedom of his love and the majesty of his fatherhood.

Failing to recognize the greatness of God.

Verses 10-14 are given as the reason God rejects careless worship.

Notice how **verse 11** is connected to **verse 10: *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.***

Exactly the same logic turns up in the connection between **verses 13 and 14: *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.***

In other words, careless worship is unacceptable because it utterly fails to come to terms with God's greatness.

So, the origin of careless worship is a failure to see and feel the greatness of God.

But how does this cause careless worship?

Malachi's answer: It makes a person bored with God and excited about the world.

If you don't see the greatness of God, then all the things that money can buy become very exciting.

If you can't see the sun, you will be impressed with a street light.

If you've never felt thunder and lightning, you'll be impressed with fireworks.

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

I get this from **verse 13: 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! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.**

They are bored with God.

Their basic attitude toward worship: "What a weariness this is!"

And when you become so blind that the maker of galaxies and ruler of nations and knower of all mysteries and lover of our souls becomes boring, then only one thing is left—the love of the world.

For the heart is always restless.

It must have its treasure: if not in heaven, then on the earth.

And so, when it is time to bring sheep from the flock to sacrifice, what do you bring?

You bring the sheep with disease and broken legs.

Or you steal a sheep to bring.

Why?

It's obvious.

The good sheep sell better and they loved money more than God.

So, there it is: the origin of careless worship is a failure to see and feel the greatness of God.

And so, God becomes boring and the world becomes exciting, and worship . . . well, there may be some social usefulness in keeping up a front of religion, but O how the heart beats fast for the world.

Now we turn to the question: What is the essence of careless worship?

2. The Essence of Careless Worship

Worthless religious activity.

Or to be more precise: it's religious activity that illustrates how little a person values God.

That is the sense of **verse 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 is a little Hebrew word behind that phrase "**in vain**" that carries a lot of freight.

The word is *hinam*.

It is used, for example, in **2 Samuel 24: 24** in a way very similar to this verse, but the translation is much fuller.

David was trying to avert a plague.

To do so he needed a place to build an altar to offer sacrifices to the Lord.

The threshing floor of Araunah was in the right place and Araunah offers the threshing floor and animals to David for nothing.

But David responds, **"No, but I will buy it of you for a price; I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God hinam—which cost me nothing."**

In other words, I value God so much—the sovereign freedom of his 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 love money more than I love him.

It must cost me something.

It must say that he and not the world is my treasure.

So, the essence of careless worship is empty religious activity: it doesn't express the worth of God.

In fact, it expresses that our treasure is on the earth, and that what we really love is the world.

Finally, we ask, what is the opposite of careless worship?

3. The Opposite of Careless Worship

And this raises the whole question of excellence in worship.

For surely one good answer to the question is that excellence is the opposite of carelessness in worship.

But what is excellence?

I don't think it's helpful to talk about excellence in the abstract.

First you have to define what the nature of true worship is, and then define excellence in worship as those thoughts and attitudes and words and feelings and forms which most successfully bring us to true worship.

What is the nature of true worship?

I would put it like this.

The nature of true worship is worship that does two things:

It expresses the feeling of God's value and greatness

It seeks to sustain that same spiritual sense of God's immense worth and beauty.

Or to put it another way, true worship

Comes from a heart where God is treasured above all human property and praise

It aims to inspire the same God-centered passion in the hearts of the congregation.

The path that has the greatest promise for reaching true worship is the street of conscientious spirituality.

I don't have in mind here any particular form of worship.

What I have in mind is worship that really comes from a feeling of the greatness of God, and that seeks humbly to express and inspire that same intensity for God without the distractions of the world.

May the Lord teach us how to truly worship Him?

May the Lord open our eyes to his greatness?

And may he forbid that we offer him in the pew or in the pulpit or at the instruments the leftovers of our lives?

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