

Despised or Honoured Worship?

Malachi 1:6-14

May 26th, 2013

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Being politically correct is a big deal in Canada. In fact some have said it is the cardinal virtue of being Canadian. Whatever else we might do we won't offend you in the process.

Now I agree that racism is an evil that needs to be purged from our society, but as Christians we run into trouble when it comes to being politically correct because we believe in truth. And that means that we believe that not all views on every topic are equally right. We believe in things like sin and repentance. And we believe in a God who said "I Am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me."¹

When it comes to being politically incorrect Jesus takes the cake, but not far behind Him are the Old Testament Prophets. These men spoke in offensive, politically incorrect ways 3000 years ago and so you can imagine how they sound today!

But because the words they spoke were God's words they not only touched the hearts of the people they were originally addressed to, but they even transcend time and customs to speak directly into North American culture and even our church today.

So please turn with me to Malachi chapter one, page 675 if you are using a pew Bible, and let's pray that God will open our hearts to receive His word in spite of His insensitivity to our Canadian virtues.

[Pray]

Today our text starts in verse 6 but we need to set the context by returning to verse 2.

God has some difficult things to say to His children. He has some words of correction for things Israel need and we need to leave behind, as well as some words of command for things they and we need to start doing. But all of the words God speaks come out of the context of verse 2 where the first thing He affirms to His people is "I have loved you."

These are the first words God always speaks to His children. God has always loved and accepted us before He has required anything from us. We don't earn His love, He gives it. This is grace, and it is the way God operates in the New Testament and it is the way God has always operated.

¹ John 14:6

Now grace is a concept that we have a hard time getting our minds around because nothing in the world we live in works like this. We earn respect, we earn trust, we earn wages; basically we earn everything we get. And as a result God's words of unconditional love don't make sense to us and so we unintentionally take His words of command out of their context of unconditional love and make them ways for us to attempt to earn His favor.

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Last week I used the copy of the 10 Commandments that we have had hanging in our secretaries office to prove this point. The words of the poster were quoting God's words in Exodus 20, but the poster started in verse 3 instead of properly putting them in the context of God's unconditional love we get in verse 2. And by removing that verse from the poster the message it was conveying was "follow these rules to live a life pleasing to God." That sounds familiar doesn't it? But that is NOT what the 10 Commandments are about.

Put back into their context we realize that God loved us before we did anything pleasing. And this means that none of us can live lives that please God by following any set of rules, even the 10 Commandments! In fact Paul tells us in Romans 3:

Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin. (Romans 3:20)

The whole point of the Law is to show us that we are sinners and need God's love, not to give us a list of things to do so that we can live in a way that pleases God.

And that is why I tore that list of 10 Commandments in half – because taken out of the context of God's undeserved love in verse 2 the 10 Commandments aren't God's word to His children.

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If you still have questions about what I think of the Old Testament or the Law come and talk to me and I would love to explain it further.

But that is going to serve as the context for everything we are going to hear from Malachi over the next several weeks – we will need that to sustain us through God's sharp word.

And the word God has for His children today is that He needs to be honoured as Father. Look with me now at Malachi 1 verse 6.

[Read Malachi 1:6 a-b]

In our text today God seeks to remind us who He is so we will treat Him the way He deserves.

And the thesis that I want to prove from our text today is as follows: **Our loving Father is God Almighty, therefore we must worship carefully.**

And I want to look at this in two parts today. So let's start with the first part; **"Our loving Father is God Almighty..."**

Notice the metaphors that God uses in verse 6. He refers to Himself as Father and Master. And these are parallel pictures because they are tied together with the words honor and respect. So I ask you, "What does it mean to view God as Father?"

Certainly the picture is a powerful one. It is a picture of adoption as God calls us to Himself, and then through a blood transfusion in which Jesus' righteousness becomes our own, He makes us part of His family, even giving us His Holy Spirit which Paul says makes us His children:

The Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by Him we cry, "Abba, Father." (Romans 8:15)

That is an incredible picture... but because of the world we live in it is a picture that causes many people pain. Perhaps your father was never there for you, or worse perhaps instead of being your protector he was your abuser. If this is your story I am incredibly sorry. And I urge you to look past your pain to a God who is nothing like your father.

But even those of us with good fathers may have a hard time viewing God as Father. And that is because while good fathers have many characteristics, the ideal for fatherhood today is not a godly man whose leadership and authority and wisdom and grace wins the respect and submission of his children.²

In fact today words like "authority", "submission" and "honour" are curse words due to the authoritarianism and abuse that has occurred over the last several decades. And the result is that the positive biblical aspects of these words have been completely lost.

But this is the way the Bible describes the relationship between children and fathers. And in the Bible it is not only healthy for children to honour their parents, but it is the explicit command of God. The 5th commandment says:

"honour your father and mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

The implication being "of course fathers (and mothers) must treat their children in a way that makes them worthy of honor."

But notice that in verse 6 as in the 5th commandment the responsibility for action is directed to children rather than fathers. This isn't a verse on being a good father; this is a verse on being good children.

² Concept adapted from John Piper's sermon "Honor Thy Majestic Father"
<http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/sermons/honor-thy-majestic-father>

And God says “because I am your Father you need to honour me as Father.”

And then He gives three reasons for why He is worthy of our honour.

The LORD Almighty

First, seven times in our short passage God refers to Himself as “the LORD Almighty”

The first one is here in verse 6 where He says “Where is the honour due Me?... Where is the respect due Me? Says the LORD Almighty.”

Then we get the same thing in verse 8 “Says the LORD Almighty.” And then again in verse 9 and 10 and 11 and 13 and 14 “says the LORD Almighty.”

And then these same words appear 17 more times in the rest of this short book! This is an obvious theme!

And you will notice that the word “LORD” is all capitalized – so this is YHWH Almighty!: The God who holds the universe in the tips of His fingers; the One who brought light from darkness, and holds back the chaos of the sea with a single word from His mouth. This is the God who has numbered the hairs of our heads as well as the days of our lives. He is the One who grants every breath that we take and sustains everything that grows.

And it is this High and Exalted God who comes to us and loves us and adopts us to be part of His family and lets us call Him Father before we have done anything to deserve it. Brothers and sisters can you see how worthy of honour our Father is because He is the LORD Almighty? Amen?

That’s the first reason.

The second reason God is worthy of being honoured as Father comes in verse 10 where God says He is self-sufficient having no need for the offerings we bring. Look there with me now.

[Read Malachi 1:10]

Here Our Father is pictured as not having any desire for our half-hearted sacrifices, and the reason He can reject half-hearted sacrifices is because He has no need of any of our sacrifices. God isn’t like the employee who is mistreated at work and goes to confront his boss but chickens out because he needs the job. Even the greatest gifts we give God don’t benefit Him at all.

Bringing up this same point the Psalmist writes:

I have no need of a bull from your stall
 or of goats from your pens,
 for every animal of the forest is mine,
 and the cattle on a thousand hills.
 I know every bird in the mountains,
 and the insects in the fields are mine.
 If I were hungry I would not tell you,
 for the world is mine, and all that is in it. (Psalm 50:9-12)

So if God doesn't need our sacrifices then why do we give them?

As Elliana's father I have everything she needs, while she has nothing that I need – I survived a long time without her. But when she comes up to me and offers me a hug or even some pretend tea from her tea set it blesses me deeply. In the same way while God doesn't need anything we offer Him, it blesses Him when we want to bless Him and so give sacrificially.

But He doesn't need anything we offer and He would rather have nothing than our pity. God is worthy of honour because He does not need anything.

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The third reason God is worthy of being honoured as Father is because one day every knee will bow before Him. And this comes from verse 11 where it says:

[Read Malachi 1:11]

God isn't majestic and awesome and powerful only where He is honoured as such, He is great everywhere, and indeed one day He will be honoured as such everywhere.

And so God is worthy of being honoured as Father today because He is Father whether we acknowledge Him or not.

And so our Loving Father is God Almighty and He is worthy of being honoured as such.

But there was a problem in Israel, and there is a problem in the North American church today. And that problem is that we worship carelessly. Here is where we get to the second part of our thesis: **Our loving Father is God Almighty, therefore we must worship carefully.**

Look at how the people, led by the priests of all things, were worshipping in Israel.

And look at what they were doing. Verse 8

[Read Malachi 1:8-9]

Then look down at verse 12

[Read Malachi 1:12-13a]

No wonder God charges the priests in verse 6 with the words "It is you, o priests, who show contempt for My name."

This is serious! The priests were taking sick and wounded animals and offering them to God, and then viewing their service to God as a wearisome burden. And they didn't think what they were doing was wrong!

How did worship in Israel get to this point? And could it possibly be true that we are doing the same things today?

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In the time that remains lets look quickly at how this careless worship started, what it is at its core, and finally what correct worship looks like in contrast.

So first, how did this careless worship get started?

The story is told of a book lover who met an acquaintance that had just thrown away a Bible stored in the attic of his ancestral home for generations. "I couldn't read it," the friend explained. "Somebody named Guten-something printed it." "Gutenberg!" the book lover exclaimed in horror. "That Bible was one of the first books ever printed. Why, a copy just sold for over two million dollars!" His friend was unimpressed. "Mine wouldn't have brought a dollar. Some fellow named Luther scribbled all over it."³

When we don't know what something is we don't treat it for what it is worth. And careless worship originates when people forget that God is the LORD Almighty.

Last week we saw how Malachi's central purpose in writing was to show us a picture of a God whose goodness and love caused them to tremble.

Yes God is a God of love, but love is more than just warm, tender fuzzies. And in verse 2 God defines His love by saying "Was not Esau Jacob's brother? Yet I have loved Jacob, but Esau I hated."

Now Malachi isn't a Calvinist, but here he describes God's love as having an unconditional electing component to it. It is something awesome and mysterious and beyond our comprehension and out of our control.

And likewise in our passage today, while God is Father, it is not the warm, approachable side of Fatherhood that He emphasizes (though that is true as

³ Adapted from "Our Daily Bread", June 7, 1994.

well), but the respect and honour side. God emphasizes this side of His Fatherhood because the people had slipped into viewing Him as less than the awesome Creator and Sustainer of the universe that He is.

Have you ever wondered how your life might be different if God appeared to you in all His glory? Would you watch less TV than you do? Would coming to church be less of a burden? Would you give more of your time or your money to those in need? We worship carelessly because we do not see God for who He is.

[Pray]

Father forgive us. Extend Your mercy to us. And reveal Yourself to us through Your Spirit who You promise will teach us everything we need to know and remind us of everything Jesus was. Father correct our view of You and may it transform the way we live.... Amen

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That's where careless worship comes from. But what is it? What does it look like?

When our God is smaller in our minds than He should be we get bored with Him and excited about the things of the world.

C.S. Lewis said:

We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. ***We are far too easily pleased.***⁴

And as a result the things of this world become more valuable in our minds than God. And this is exactly what was happening with the Priests with the sacrifices they were offering.

They were keeping the valuable animals for themselves and offering the sick ones because the value of cows was more valuable than God. And we do the same thing today when we give God the leftovers of our finances and our time.

And here God says something that might catch you off guard. When we value the things of the world more than Him God says He wishes we would give nothing at all. Look at verse 10.

[Read Malachi 1:10]

It turns out that not everything offered to God as worship is acceptable to God as worship.

⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses*

When people have the attitude “well I give something, isn’t that better than nothing?” God actually wishes that someone would have the boldness to lock the doors of the church so that the offerings would stop!

God says receiving leftovers from us, or courtesy gifts, like when we flip a beggar a dollar on the street to make him be quiet, are the same as lighting useless fires on His altar.

Friends you need to know that I have no feelings of judgment towards any of you as I preach this. I don’t know what you give and God’s word hits me just as hard as it hits you. But I preach with the hope that we as a body will see God for who He is thereby being released in worship in a way we have never been before.... Do you want that? Do you want to see God more clearly and then worship in a way you have never done before?

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This word “useless” in verse 10 is a word that means “costs nothing.” It is the same word that David used when he needed to find a place to make an offering to the LORD and found himself at Araunah’s threshing floor. And Araunah offered the land to David for free. But David responded:

“No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” (2 Samuel 24:24)

And this is what careless worship is – it is worship that costs us nothing to give.

What does the worship you offer to God cost you? Are you generous with God when it comes to your finances and time? Or have you cut back on what you can offer because you have other priorities – vacations you need to take, toys you need to buy, TV shows you need to watch?

Does that seem harsh? Come on God, we are busy people, and living expenses are high. And status is important in the world we live in. Surely you understand that we need to take care of ourselves first.

God responds “Try offering your sacrifices to your governor – to the tax man – would he be pleased with you?”

God will be God in our lives or He will have nothing to do with us at all.

Briefly, how much do we need to give then? How much does God expect? O how I wish in my humanity there was a clear answer to this in the Bible because then I could give it and know that I had done everything God wanted, and then I could sit back and relax. But friends there isn’t an easy answer, and God is intentional about not giving one. So here is my answer today:

Give as much as you can. God wants us to worship in a way that demonstrates we know how much He is worth. Because at its core careless worship is something that costs us nothing to give.

As a caveat, on June 23rd Malachi is going to talk about tithing, so book your vacation for that Sunday – I recommend not coming. Because friends, a 10th is not the sacrifice God requires.

Careless worship is worship that costs us nothing to give.

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Finally, what is the opposite of careless worship? What is worship that honours God?

Worship by definition is the act of ascribing worth to God. That means telling God with our words and our actions that He is the most valuable thing in the universe: telling Him how awesome, how holy, how high and exalted, how infinite and amazing He is. That is what worship is.

And as such worship is the primary activity of a Christian. Christians are people who love to ascribe infinite worth to God. And this is the most important thing we do Sunday mornings.

In fact worship is more important than preaching. I preach so that our hearts will be stirred up to worship. We do not sing so that the message will be more impactful for us. I preach so that our worship will be more impactful for God!⁵ Everything that happens at church should be about God, not about us.

Somebody once asked a pastor “who is the target audience for your church” to which he replied “The Trinity: Father, Son and Spirit. If we can get Him to show up here I bet He will bring His friends.”

And that is really what worship is all about. It is about God and being a church that He wants to attend.

So brothers and sisters we must worship in a way that invites our Father to church. And **Our loving Father is God Almighty, therefore we must worship carefully.**

⁵ Adapted from James MacDonald “Vertical Church” (pg 170)