

I Will Not Accept An Offering From Your Hand

Malachi 1:6-14

April 21, 2024

Rev. Dave Dorst

CenterPoint Church

Read Malachi 1:6-14

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.” (2 Timothy 3:16)

Introduction

Many years ago, there were three young men who wandered around Paris enjoying everything the city had to offer, both reputable and disreputable. At the end of one night of carousing through the city, they stumbled drunkenly onto the steps of a cathedral. As the sun rose, they talked and laughed, recounting everything they had been experiencing. Then one of the men had a bright idea: “Why don’t we go inside and find a confession booth? We’ll ask the priest to forgive us of all the sins that we just committed, and then we can go sleep before we head out again.” One of the men volunteered to go first, so he headed into the chapel and found a priest who would hear his confession. He listed his sins one after another in lurid detail and ended his confession defiantly saying, “I know all that You did for me, and I do not care.”

The priest receiving the confession did not immediately grant him absolution, but said to him: “Young man, I’ve heard enough. You don’t need to confess anything else to me. If you would like to be forgiven of your sins, you only need to do one thing. Outside of the confessional are steps leading up to an altar. On the altar is a statue of Jesus on the cross. Simply go to the statue, kneel on the steps, look at Christ on the cross, and say the words that you just said to me: ‘I know all that You did for me, and I do not care.’” The young man stumbled out of the confession booth feeling much more sober than when he went in. In full view of his friends, he walked towards the steps, knelt before the statue of Jesus, and said, “I know all that You’ve done for me. Would You forgive me of my sins?”

It was the Archbishop of Paris who told that story. He said that he had firsthand knowledge that that story was true. But it’s not because he had been the priest in the confession booth, but because he had been that drunken young man who stumbled into the church with blasphemy on his lips whose heart was transformed as he was confronted with what Jesus had done for him. Put aside our Protestant objections to the practice of confessing to priests and to statues of Jesus, because the point is this: As long as he treated God with contempt, then he saw no value in true repentance or obedience. But when he was forced to take a serious look at Jesus, it changed his life, and he responded in true worship.¹

Today’s passage takes us further into the book of Malachi, where the prophet rebuked the people and the priests for how they despised God. Their outward actions of worship were insulting to God because they clearly revealed their rotten inner attitudes towards Him. Where God should have delighted in receiving pure sacrificial offerings from His people, instead He labelled their actions evil and their sacrifices polluted. Let’s explore God’s charges against His people and look for how we may be in danger of similar attitudes and actions today. The first three verses contain serious charges that God levels at His people:

¹ Micah Fries, Stephen Rummage, and Robby Gallaty, *Exalting Jesus in Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Nashville: Holman, 2015), pp. 218-19.

I. You Despise My Name and My Table (vv. 6-8)

⁶ “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.

In these verses, God draws attention to how His people treat those in earthly stations over them: A son gives his father honor, a servant gives his master honor, a citizen gives his governor honor. Those were the accepted norms of society, anyone who failed to show respect to those positions would have to answer for their insolence, and it could be costly. There is the implied idea that a servant would fear to disrespect his master, that a person would be embarrassed to give his governor an unworthy gift that would be rejected. So, how is it that the heavenly Father, the heavenly Master, the heavenly King was so easily dishonored, disrespected, and even despised by them? If it was not good enough for the lowly ruler, how would it be OK for the Most High King?

Leviticus 22:20 explains the requirements for the sacrifices given in worship: “*You shall not offer anything that has a blemish, for it will not be acceptable for you.*” God’s requirement of the highest quality sacrifice, whether it was animals or a grain/food offering, was to remind His people to bring their best to worship their king. So “these blind, crippled, and diseased sacrifices revealed much about the worshippers who offered them, and even more about the priests who accepted them.”² At some point the standard had gone from ‘Only the best will do for God,’ down to ‘Give God whatever is laying around.’” God asked them twice, “Is that not evil?” a rhetorical question answered, “Yes!”

There are a lot of ways that the Israelites could have dishonored God and shown how they despised Him, but we see here why this was so insulting. The priests were the ones who were to go between the people and the Lord, the ones chosen to perform the sacred duties and to respect the purity of the law and the temple, which were both reflections of God’s character. So, when the priests brought polluted food and damaged animals for their offerings before God, it was the ultimate show of disrespect to Him. God was most present to the Israelites in their temple worship, and so to make a mockery of His worship standards was to insult Him to His face.

The next three verses make abundantly clear that God would not accept their worship, saying:

II. Your Offerings are Made in Vain (vv. 9-11)

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.*

God says that it would be better to have the doors of the temple closed than to have these worthless, insulting offerings made. Stop and think about that: God was saying that no worship is better than insincere, contemptuous worship. “If you’re not going to worship the way I’ve told you, don’t bother coming at all.” For the Lord to say, “*I have no pleasure in you*” and “*I will not accept an offering from your hand*” meant that they had strayed far from His instructions and intentions. Now, in my mind, I’m

² Peter Adam, *The Message of Malachi* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2013), p. 53.

thinking, “but they weren’t worshipping Baal, they weren’t offering sacrifices to Molech, the false gods of the time.” That’s true, and that would have received harsh punishment from the Lord. But that doesn’t mean that God was pleased by how they approached Him. The poor quality of what they offered Him was a reflection of what they thought of Him. The hearts of the people had little esteem for their Lord, and their offerings gave that away.

Verse 11 tell us that the other nations would make Israel look bad: *“In every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations.”* This is not, as some commentators have said, God saying that He will accept worship that is offered for any other god as acceptable to Himself. How can God say *“My name will be great among the nations”* if He’s accepting worship meant for Allah or Buddha? That’s contradicted all over Scripture. This reference to the other nations means that Israel was never going to remain the only ones who were God’s chosen people. Not only were there Gentiles included in the old covenant, but the new covenant would bring the good news of God’s kingdom to every tribe and tongue. Malachi made that point in the last passage; it’s going to be a theme of this last book of the Old Testament preparing and propelling us forward into the New Testament and the time of Jesus and the expansion of God’s kingdom.

The final three verses emphasize the point once more that:

III. Your Offerings are Blemished and Unacceptable (vv. 12-14)

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.

We hear the Lord bring four charges against the priests and people in these verses:

- 1) They spoke negatively of the Lord’s table, the altar (v. 12)
- 2) They half-heartedly and begrudgingly performed their priestly duties, complaining how wearying it was (v. 13)
- 3) They allowed offerings that were imperfect, even stolen (v. 13)
- 4) They vowed to offer one animal, but substituted a lesser one in its place (v. 14)

Stephen Miller observes that “They seemed to be complaining about the defiled altar and the contemptible sacrifices when they were the very ones responsible for this outrage. Perhaps the priests were even hinting that the sacrificial system itself was the problem.”³ They were bored with their jobs and resentful of everything they had to do. So they brought forth any animal as an offering no matter the condition, whether it had been stolen, was missing a limb, or was filled with disease. They were essentially offering roadkill for their sacrifices! As long as something got up on that altar, they had fulfilled their official duties.

Verse 14 says that they sometimes vowed the best animal in their flock, but then substituted a vastly inferior one instead, which reminds me of the story in Acts 5. A husband and wife named Ananias and Sapphira were part of the early church. They sold a piece of property and brought the proceeds from the sale to the apostles, pretending that they were bringing everything. Yet they had secretly agreed to keep part of it back for themselves.

“³ But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? ⁴ While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own?”

³ Stephen Miller, *Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (Nashville: Holman, 2004), pp. 320-21.

And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.”⁵ When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last.”

The exact same thing happened to Sapphira when she walked in three hours later. It seems so harsh that God would strike these two people dead for their deception, but that was a stern warning to the early church that this was not a game they were playing. This was not a social club they were joining. The message was: your vows to the King of the Universe matter and He will hold you to them. Don't come promising grand things that you have no intention of keeping hoping that God will bless you and men will esteem you.

Conclusion

I want you to put yourself in the shoes of an Israelite living in Jerusalem 2,500 years ago: would you have brought worthy offerings and followed the law when it came time for the community's worship? Would you have made sure that the animals used in the sacrifices were unblemished animals, the best of the flock, because God required that? Or would you have been tempted to save the time and money of finding the right animal and lowered the standard, bringing the one in the worst condition? We all want to believe that we would be morally upright and honest before God. But then we have to ask ourselves: do we offer our best to God now?

We no longer sacrifice animals to God, but Scripture still uses the language of sacrifice for the New Testament church:

Romans 12:1 – *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies **as a living sacrifice**, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”*

Hebrews 13:15-16 – *“Through him then 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 God.”*

1 Peter 2:5 – *“you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to **offer spiritual sacrifices** acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”*

We are living sacrifices, continually offering up our lives to God for His service.

Imagine that you were going to be taking part in a royal coronation. Imagine that King Charles dies and Prince William is going to be crowned, and they asked you to be a part of the service. Would you devote much time and care to your part of the service? If you were playing an instrument, would you practice or just show up hoping it goes well? If you were praying in the service, would you wing it? I suspect that each one of us would work hard to be sure that we were ready. If our earthly kings deserve that kind of thoughtful attention, does not our heavenly King's worship deserve our energy and work?

Now, I'm the easiest target for this passage, the modern-day equivalent of the Jewish priest who labored in the temple. But next week's passage is going to be focused on the priests, so I'll save that discussion. Every Christian who attends church should ask if they are really honoring God in their approach, not just those who lead. Just committing to a local church is an essential step for a committed believer, so be encouraged that your presence and attention here means that you are taking seriously the Bible's commands to meet together and be part of the Body of Christ. I've met way too many "Lone Ranger Christians" in my life who think that church is optional, and they can do just fine living life "just me and Jesus." Having said that, here are several areas that are challenges for those who go to church:

-First, what is your approach to the worship service? Is it something along the lines of: "Wow, I hope church isn't too long, I've got a lot to do today. I hope we sing songs that I like and that Dave's

not too boring.” Or is your mindset: “I’m ready to bring my all to our corporate gathering, and I’m ready to hear from God.”

-Do you find worship wearying? Perhaps it’s because you treat it as a spectator sport - you think of it as something you watch and maybe take notes, but other people are doing the work. But the reality is that God is the audience and we are all performing worship.

-If you know the text of the sermon to be preached (which is always in my Saturday email), do you read through it ahead of time to begin thinking about what it means so that the sermon can add to your understanding of it? Or is the only time you open your Bible and pray on Sundays? The Holy Spirit uses your private prayer and study to sanctify and mature you.

-Have you committed to using your gifts here so that the whole body can benefit from you being part of the community? When you volunteer for something, do you actually follow through and do it? Is it more about the credit you receive or about a thankful heart serving God?

-Have you arranged your weekend so that you get enough sleep to be alert in worship?

-Have you finished your work so that your Sabbath can be free of the distractions of unfinished tasks? Or is your mind weighed down by the test you put off studying for or the work proposal you still need to finish before Monday?

-Have you thoughtfully planned how much money you will give to the Lord’s work?

I hope that you’ll have some time later to internalize those things, spend some time thinking about how you can improve an area or two. If it’s all overwhelming, maybe just start with one verse:

Matthew 15:8 – *“This people honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.”*

And then remember that none of us worships or obeys the Lord perfectly. We’re all distracted and full of mixed motives. And the bottom line is that the lives that we offer God as living sacrifices are broken, sick, and impure. If it was our lives that were being offered to God to atone for our sins, He would have no choice but to reject them. In other words, you cannot hope to stand before God and say, “I am good enough to make it into heaven. I can atone for my own sins and stand on my own merits.” God will look at you and say, “No, you are thoroughly sinful; impure, blind, sick, and lame. I cannot accept your life as an atonement for your sins.” Thankfully, we have the perfect sacrifice, the spotless Lamb who died in our place and that is our once-for-all sacrifice. Hebrews 9:12-15:

“¹² he (Jesus) entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³ For if the blood of goats and bulls... sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴ how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. ¹⁵ Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance.”

We have an incredible advantage over the people of Malachi’s day, the Jews of the old covenant: our sacrificial offering to God has already been found pleasing in His sight. He has accepted Jesus’ perfect life of obedience to stand in place of our record of sin. Why was God so insistent on having animals with no defects and no blemishes in the old covenant? Because it pointed ahead to the sinless Son of God, who would take the place of, and fulfill, the sacrificial system. He died in your place and in my place. God will only want to shut the doors of this church the day that we stop preaching that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation, the perfect Lamb of God accepted by the Father in our place to atone for our sins.

Benediction - Jude 24-25 – *“Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”*