

WORSHIP HAS A PURPOSE!..... Malachi 1:7-2:9..TFBC/2/23/09

I don't know about you, but I have heard my share of negative preaching. A little bit goes a long way! Nevertheless, I still have folks who reflect that they don't feel like they have been to church if they haven't had their toes stepped on! Their shoes need to be good and scuffed before they feel like they can go home for Sunday dinner! But maybe there is a kernel of truth in that corny word.

We do know that the Bible message concurs with our hearts when it says that, "*All have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*" In Malachi's preaching, some of the keenest most troubling areas of our spiritual lives and our relationship with God are hit right between the eyes. 3 questions are raised for the unsuspecting listener and worshiper. Here they are:

1. What do your offerings say about your value of God?
2. What does your worship say about your priorities?
3. And finally, Have you kept your promises to God?

Now here is a relief for you....all of these questions are directed at the priests of God! Those whom God has called to set an example to the flock! As James says, "*Not many of you should be teachers, my dear brothers, for you know that those who teach will be judged more strictly!*" (3:1)

There is, however, the remainder of the message of Malachi aimed at all God's people who have missed the mark of the purpose of real WORSHIP. Here is an important word for any of us who wants to be true to God, true to the Scriptures and true to ourselves. WORTHY WORSHIP IS THAT WHICH HONORS GOD. The voice of The Lord in the text may sound like an angry word,

or you may hear the same plaintive cry of the Waiting Father in the parable of the prodigal son. *"Where is the honor due me? Where is the respect due our family name? Why have you defiled some of our most trusted places where love and sincere hearts have felt secure for all of our days together? Where is the love?"* The words hang in the air between us like so many unanswered questions to a brokenhearted lover who has just discovered the unheard of, the unfaithfulness of their lover.

Let's hear the word of the Lord as we learn about true worship.

1. First, the true purpose of our gathering is multifaceted. The practice is called for throughout the Old Testament such as the **Psalmist** calls for a wonderful and exciting event of "bringing GLORY to his name." **The Ten** Commandments ordain a day of rest and observance of a time where God eagerly "refreshes our inner hearts" just as the **23rd Psalms** sings joyfully and reassuringly about worship, saying.....

. *"He makes me to lie down in green pastures,*
. *He leads me beside still waters,*
. *He restores my soul!"*

When all is said & done, the prime purpose is **TO HONOR GOD!** And the falsifying of that purpose is deadly, *"If you do not set your heart to HONOR me...God warns....I will send a curse!"* A new feature enters my heart's understanding at this point. This is the motive to bring others to church with me! I cannot bear to think that any should experience the anger of God when there is so much blessing God holds in store.

Psalm 95 literally bursts forth with HONOR..... *"Come, Let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods.....Come let us bow down in worship, let us*

kneel before the Lord our maker; for he is our God and we are the people of his pasture, the flock under his care... Today if you hear his voice, don't harden your hearts as you did in the past."

In **The Revelation** of John we peer into John's vision of Heaven as he sings out..... *"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."*(4: 11) The whole Bible agrees and assumes that as we see Go's true greatness, we will sing and shout for our deepest questions, doubts and fears are answered! And we learn one of the first great lessons of spiritual truth...that it is not all about us, our comforts, our opinions about what is going on....it is all about the **GREATNESS OF GOD!**

When we get that perspective correction, we get right in ourselves, we raise healthy families, we learn to care about others, we partner with God in reconciling the world unto himself, and we start to really worship Him!

The Old Testament word is...*shachah*... meaning to reverence and cherish deep within your heart..... The New Testament word most used is*proskuneo*... meaning to bow before in awed amazement, to kiss the hand of someone in HONOR. When Aaron and Moses gathered the leaders of the Hebrew children enslaved in Egypt and told them all the Lord had said, they all bowed in worship, weeping as they heard God had seen and cared about their misery! (Ex. 4:31)

John's vision in Rev. 11: 15 was full of trumpets blaring, lampstands burning, countless worshipers, fire and rain, an attacking beast, voices from heaven, earthquakes and terror, and the 7th angel stands, blows his trumpet, and announces.....
"The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever."

There was a very popular professor of Physics at Princeton who was quite a phenomenon because he was deaf. On a Sunday morning he could be seen by many students walking through the town on his way to attend worship. Several of the boys decided to ask him in class, "Dr. Watson, Why do you bother to go to church considering that you cannot hear?" His answer was quick, "I want everybody to know whose side I am on!"

Now people come to a WORSHIP SERVICE for many reasons.... To hear a certain preacher, to watch their children perform, to visit with their friends, to fulfill an obligation, to open up business opportunities or strengthen existing ones, or to see what everybody else is wearing. But there is only one reason that actually fills the purpose of ACTUAL WORSHIP, that is to give honor and praise to God.

Worship is our attempt to focus on him. If we can leave church saying: *"Great is the Lord and greatly to be praised!"* then we have truly worshipped.

This points to the 2nd major aspect of real worship, that we who come to worship are **helped**. Malachi implies that we come to entreat God to be gracious to us. We do not just come to help ourselves; it is an appointment with the one who can help us. We come to seek god's best for us. It excites us just to rest in the promise, that "where 2 or more are gathered in my name, there I will be also. Think of the joy of singing out knowing it is to him we are singing. Think of our seasonal festivities and the eager expectations we bring as we come certain that Jesus will be there and that it is Jesus you will meet. How the lost sense of wonder comes stealing back upon us!

Soren Keirkegard taught us to reclaim that wonder when he taught his students of a different way of seeing worship. All of us

are the performers,; the ministers are the prompters, and the Lord is the audience!

This can help us grasp the 3rd **and final** ingredient of real worship, **genuine sacrifice**. Every sincere worshiper experiences some demand of a response. The widow whom Jesus and the disciples watched in the temple, the one who gave out of her poverty, far outshone the wealthy whose gifts were large but whose bank accounts were far larger. I have been moved to give my last dollar in church before, only to find that there was far more that God would provide than I could have ever imagined. It is a fact of worship that God calls and we respond with only as much as we are willing to trust him.

Once I was working with a growing young Christian man who was learning how seriously and how literally to take God's challenge to giving sacrificially. He asked me whether he should be tithing on his net or his gross amount of income. The answer was easy for me after years of finding God faithful at every turn in the road to challenge. I said, *"Well! Do you want God to bless you on your net or on your gross?!"*

Peter said that the congregation of believers is to *"offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."* (1 Peter 2:5) Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 12, that we are to *"offer ourselves as living sacrifices."* These are the spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God. (Rom. 12:1-2)

- If you have been in church and not been compelled to give sacrificially, then you have not worshiped.
- If you have attended a service but try to pawn off on God the leftovers and the castoffs of your life, then you have not worshiped.

- If you have been in services but never once felt a compelling urge to say with Isaiah, "*Here am I, Lord, send me,*" then you have not truly worshiped.

Real worship is an experience centered on meeting and honoring God. One in which meeting him in word, or prayer, or praise, or just in the silence that he fills...we find our deepest needs fulfilled.....One where we respond in some way with great and glad sacrifice to honor the one true God whom we have found in our experience to be the heart and center of life....one whom to know is better than life itself.

Years ago, the President of Duke University, Dr. Ernest Few, was seen walking across campus with his umbrella hoisted high against a driving rain. Friendly students saw him and stopped their car offering him a ride. He gladly got in, and as they drove toward the church, one of the students asked him why he decided to go to the church in such a driving rain this morning.

"I didn't decide this morning," came his reply! *"I decided 65 years ago, and I haven't asked myself that question since!"*

What have you decided about worship? Does it qualify as the real thing? Do you meet him there? Does God meet your needs? How do you respond?

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