

(un)Worthy Worship

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Preacher: Ben Traynor

- [0 : 00] Heavenly Father, I pray that the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts would be acceptable in your sight.
- And we ask it in and through the powerful name of the Lord Jesus. Amen. This evening, I would like to start with a very short quiz.
- First, I'll ask you a statement. I'll give you a statement. And I want you to try and have a little think and answer. What do you think is the worldview of the person who says it?
- Do you think they're a Christian, someone who knows and loves God? Or do you think they're not a Christian, like likely an atheist or something like that?
- So statement number one, in your own minds, what do you think the worldview is of this person who says, God is a delusion, Christian or atheist? Atheist, right?
- [1 : 03] Some of you may know that the famous atheist, Richard Dawkins, wrote a book, The God Delusion. What about this statement? God is not great.
- God is not great. What sort of worldview would have that kind of statement? Christian or not Christian? Someone who loves God or God's enemy?
- Not Christian. Someone who's God's enemy? Surely, yes. Some of you, again, may know the title of a book, God is Not Great, by Christopher Hitchens, also a famous journalist and very famous atheist.
- What about this statement? What about this statement? Who said it? We despise God's name and are wearied by him.
- What kind of worldview do you think you would have the person who says that? We despise God's name and we are wearied by him. Christian? God's people?
- [2 : 10] Or one of God's enemies? Dear friends, as we come this evening to Malachi chapter 1 verse 6 to 14, we just read those words. Those words were spoken by God's people.
- In this case, it's God's people. It's shocking, right? We might expect those words from a Dawkins or from a Hitchens. But God's own people?
- We despise God's name and are wearied by him. That is the attitude of God's people as we arrive here in Malachi tonight.
- And actually, more specifically, it actually gets even worse. Because it's the attitude of the ministers. Just glance down with me. Halfway through verse 6, God says, What?
- O priests, who what? Who despise my name? And look over to verse 13. They say, What weariness is this?
- [3 : 13] Now, keep your eyes down there. It isn't only the priests, because verse 14 has the bringers of sacrifices in view too. But if you like it, it's the ministers. It's the priests that are kind of leading the way here.
- Right here at the end of the Old Testament, in Malachi, God's people, God's priests are living like God is not great.

And especially what we see in these verses, they're worshipping like God is not great. In our passage this evening, we're coming to kind of a gathered worship service.

A time where the people would bring sacrifices and the priests would offer them to God. So we can think about it as gathered worship service. And in this day, it's a time where churches and pulpits and people standing behind lecterns like this, the men that are doing that are infected in their minds and in their hearts with a worldview that says God is not great.

That God is small and that people are big. This worship service we come to here and the people that are in it, it's full of people offering kind of a praiseless praise, heartless worship, prayerless prayer, lip service religion, and unworthy worship.

[4 : 37] Now friends, we are not these people. We are not living 400 years before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not these people.

And dear friends, these issues this evening, they're not our issues. I do not think that there are issues. If I had to tell you that standing, sitting there and standing and hearing everyone sing, I had to pull it together because I was so moved by hearing the worship and the praise of God's people.

So I do not think these issues are our issues this evening. We do not draw a straight line there at all. This is not what we're facing as Bon Accord church family this evening.

So what we have this evening, I think, for most of us, and to the very large extent, is a kind of object lesson. A kind of object lesson or a kind of inoculation.

It's kind of preventative rather than cure. And as we do that, just as we come to this passage now, that certainly doesn't bring with us an attitude of, oh, look how much better we are.

[5 : 47] No, certainly not. It is but for the grace of God go I. It is but for the grace of God go I. So as we come and as we are kind of, if you like, spectators and sit in and watch this worship service take part, we do so with great humility.

And it should drive us to Christ, back to Christ. That our song and our anthem would always be, all glory be to him who brings a people, a worshipping people to himself.

So four questions this evening. Four questions of this gathered church, if you like, who are offering lip service religion, unworthy worship. Firstly, what's the root?

What's the root? Well, they've forgotten who God is and maybe even worse than that, they've turned from God. Look down at verse 6 with me. 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?

[6 : 53] So for God's people here in Israel, God is their father. Israel is spoken about in kind of familial terms in Exodus as God's son.

God is their master. God is a gracious and good Lord who right back to Adam, Abraham, Moses, and the Exodus, he brought a people to serve them.

And God has loved them. And just scan your eyes back up there to verse 2. We didn't read it, but God has loved them. He's loved them and he's chosen them. He's chosen Jacob.

They are Israel, God's covenant people. He's called them and chosen them and set his love upon them. And they have spurned it. They've spurned it.

They've forgotten who God is. And in forgetting who God is, they've forgotten who they are before him. And because of that, they've come to despise God's name.

[7 : 51] They've come to despise God's name. Last week, last Sunday evening, we had YF in the evening and we shared something of the Reformation. And I forgot to share this last Sunday with them.

So I have an opportunity now to mention something I forgot. That this past week, we kind of celebrated Reformation Day. Reformation Day. And Reformation Day, October the 31st, that kind of marks the day where Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg.

I did see, I will say no names, but I saw a wonderful photo of one of the children of our staff dressed up as Martin Luther, all ready to go. It was beautiful. It was a wonderful thing. You can ask around the staff afterwards and find out who it was.

But one of the things we touched on last Sunday evening with the YF, and one of the things you may know of the Reformation, is that part of it was a kind of rediscovery of the glory of God.

Remembering, rediscovering the glory of God as we remember who we are before him. That God is our father, that God is our master, that God has loved us and chosen us and sent the Lord Jesus to justify us.

[9 : 09] At the time of the Reformation in the Catholic Church, God's glory, if you like, had been kind of put in a box and stored away in the garage off to the side. And that's because the gospel had kind of been packed up and pushed off to the side.

The church had largely forgotten the gospel and forgotten who God was, forgotten their loved and chosen sons and servants of God by God's grace and mercy.

It was a time largely of kind of lip service religion. And forgetting God is not neutral. It's not neutral. But at the time of the Reformation, by God's glory and God's grace, for God's glory and by God's grace, the gospel was rediscovered.

And people remembered and saw once again in their hearts turn to worship, remembering who God is and who we are before them. So let me try and make this really specific. I want to give you a prayer point for Joe and Donald this evening.

A prayer point for Joe and Donald, for your pastors. A prayer point for your elders. A prayer point for the ministers around this city and across this country and across the world. That they would always behold the great glory of God.

[10 : 20] That they would always remember who God is. The fatherhood of God. The lordship of God. They would behold the love of God. That they would always remember that in their own hearts and minds as they seek to lead you in worship and gather and teach you from God's word.

That they would make much of God's glory and his name and always behold him before their hearts and minds and eyes. So what's the root?

They've forgotten God, his love, who they are before him. And they've turned from it. They've turned from it. So if that's the root, if that's kind of what's going on in their hearts, they're heartless. What are the symptoms of this lip service religion?

What are the symptoms? Well, firstly, we see in actions. We see in actions. They're scorning sacrifice. They're scorning sacrifice. They're bringing in sacrifice what they shouldn't. Just look halfway through verse 6 with me.

God is speaking and he's putting, sort of summing up what they're saying. But you say, how have we despised your name? By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, how have we polluted you?

[11 : 27] By saying that the lord's table may be despised when you offer blind animals in sacrifice. Is that not evil? And the answer is yes. And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil?

Yes. Present that to your governor. Will he accept you or show you favor? The answer, no, says the Lord of hosts. You see, God has given his people a way he is to be worshipped.

Earlier on in the Bible books, towards the end of Exodus. Leviticus, that we thought about a few Sundays ago if you were here. Parts of Numbers and Deuteronomy.

God has taught his people how he's to be worshipped. And they are to bring sacrifices to him. And they are to be spotless sacrifices. Perfect, unblemished, the very best.

They're to bring the best of what they have to offer it to God. But these people are disobeying God. And they're bringing the least, the very worst of what they have.

[12 : 27] And God calls it evil. Imagine this evening. On your way to church, you went into the kitchen. And you emptied your kitchen.

Where all the trash, where all the rubbish goes. Your kitchen rubbish. You tied up the black bag. Then you went to the bathroom, into the bedroom. Wherever else you have bins in your house. You take all the trash, all the recycling.

And you put it in your car. And on the way to church, you see a couple of other bins that are kind of overflowing. The seagulls have been at them. It's kind of the common thing, isn't it? And you just scrape it all up and push it into your car.

You get parked up for church. And as you get out, someone else passes you and says, Oh, are you off to the dump or the trash site after this? If you've had a party, you've got too much. You've got to take it to the recycling at Sainsbury's.

Or the dump or whatever. And you say, Oh, no, no, no. No, no. All this stuff that the seagulls have been at that isn't fit for my table.

[13 : 26] I'm actually bringing it to church to give it to the deacons. So that the deacons can take it to the bank as part of my offering for God. Would we think to do that?

That's what these people are doing. God knows and says, God says to them, He knows that they would never take it to their rulers in Persia. Remember Judah here, there's no king on the throne.

They have kind of overlords, if you like, in Persia. Would they do that? This week, those of you who are working, you have a meeting with your boss, would you take your trash from home and say, just before this meeting starts, I'd like to slide all my food waste across the table just to have it present here in the meeting.

Would we think to do that? Would we offer our bosses our worst work, our most sluggish attempts at things? No. But that's what's happening here.

So again, let's get specific. How do I think this can play out today? I think two ways this can play out today. One is kind of vertically and one is horizontally. Vertically, but by scorning Christ's sacrifice.

[14 : 31] By scorning Christ's sacrifice. Remember, we're in a different and way more, infinitely more privileged place than these people. They're waiting on the Messiah to come. They're waiting on Jesus.

That's 400 years to go, but it's been 2,000 years since for us. And we're more privileged because we can't offer blind sacrifices or lame sacrifices.

For Jesus is the perfect, spotless sacrifice for sin, who went to the cross for us. We have a perfect sacrifice for sin.

One who atones everything for us, all our sin. So then how is it that we can scorn it? We can scorn it by downplaying the fact that we actually need it.

But by kind of brushing it off and saying, well, we sort of need Jesus, but maybe not really all that much. That's how we can do it.

[15 : 28] You see, if these people are bringing sacrifices that are lame or blind and bringing their worst, they're saying our sin isn't all that serious. That's what they're saying.

And so we can do what they're doing where we scorn or push aside or downplay the utter necessity and sufficiency of the Lord Jesus.

Dear friends, any kind of message, any kind of message which teaches and downplays the utter necessity or sufficiency of Christ crucified shows contempt and scorn for all that he's done.

So dear friends, here's another prayer point for your pastors, for ministers here across the city and around. And I'm saying this specifically because this is the priests that are doing this. This is the priests who should know most of all.

Dear friends, pray for your pastors that they would always preach Christ crucified. That they would preach and know in their hearts and in their minds that utter necessity and sufficiency, sufficiency of Christ's work on the cross.

[16 : 36] That the theme and anthem of your pastors here and of ministers across the city and across the world would be all glory be to Christ our King.

May what we just sung before this be our song and our anthem. In our seminaries, in our pulpits, and in our churches across this city and world. But we can also scorn it horizontally.

We can scorn it vertically if we downplay the necessity of Christ, but we can do it horizontally where we scorn the sacrificial shape of the Christian life. Where we downplay the kind of sacrificial shape of the Christian life.

The Lord Jesus tells us, doesn't he, that we are to take up our cross and follow him. And later in the New Testament, we get verses in Romans 12 or Hebrews 13, which are calls to live our lives as a living sacrifice to God.

And so we scorn sacrifice. We have lip service religion when we say, no cross carrying, no cross bearing, no sacrificial life.

[17 : 42] I once heard someone use this illustration. If you hired a private detective to follow you around for a day or a week or a month, it would be a little weird, I guess, to do that.

And it's a little strange thought. But if you hired a private detective to follow you around for a day, a week, a month, a year, or maybe more realistically, if someone just came in and sort of stayed with you for a while, would they see something different?

Would they see someone who carries their cross and lives a life that is utterly shaped by the gospel? And so here, dear friends, here's the thing of this application.

Let's try and be as specific as we can. I don't think that the application of this is, I need to set my alarm 15 minutes earlier in the morning to read my Bible. Now, maybe you do, and that's maybe a good thing, but it's not the application of this.

It's not get up 15 minutes earlier to read my Bible or to stay up 15 minutes later or increase my giving by 15 pounds or whatever it is. That's not the application here.

[18 : 49] Why? Because God wants their hearts. God wants their hearts. We're gonna come to God's response on all this, but he wants their love. Verse two really sets the tone for this.

I have loved you, says the Lord, and he wants them to respond with hallelujah. Praise God, and they just say, how have I loved you? It's lip service religion. He wants their hearts.

Their religious activity here is offensive to God. So more of it's just gonna kind of heap that up. It's like bringing in more trash with you. Or God wants cross-shaped lives that overflow with good works and giving of time and talent and money, but in response to God's love.

God, we love you. Lord Jesus, thank you for all that you've done for me. Yes, we will take up our cross and follow you. It is about giving and living in response to the cross of Christ.

Now, dear friends, dear friends, we've been here about, I think we've been here eight weeks or something, that I've been amongst you. And I really want to encourage you this evening. I really want to encourage you.

[20 : 01] Because I see and have met and watched and heard about so many people in this church family who give so sacrificially to the work of the Lord, who live lives where they are taking up their cross and following the Lord Jesus.

So many people I've seen do that. So many, to name, I see people in Sunday school, in youth, in the well, in Little Lambs, and why in so many other ways, so many people who are living, who are living lives of living sacrifices to God.

So, dear friends, be encouraged. Let me encourage you, as someone who's new amongst you this evening, be encouraged that we see those lives being lived here. But Scripture does, and we can't totally move past these verses without holding up something of a mirror to our own hearts and checking our hearts.

Is there any part of my life I am holding back from God? Is there any part of my life, think about it often in these ways, of my time and of the gifts I've been given, my talents or my money, is there something I am holding back?

Am I not listening to God's prompting and call to mission work because I'm concerned of financial implications? Am I not listening to or pursuing a call to pastoral ministry because of what that may look like?

[21 : 21] What am I holding back from God? Dear friends, Christ gave his all for us, so may we continue to respond in love and give our all to him.

So we see it in our actions, and secondly, their symptoms in their attitude. They're wearied by God. They're wearied by worship. Look down at verse 12 with me. Halfway through verse 12, God says, but you profane it when you say the Lord's table is polluted and its fruit, that is its food may be despised.

But you say, what 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 is your offering.

Shall I accept that from your hands, says the Lord? And of course, as we've just seen, the answer is no, you won't. Church for them is drivel, bottom of the pile.

It is a chore worse than taking the bins out, or it is a chore worse than driving around Aberdeen at the moment with all of the road closures and roadworks and bus gates and all these things.

[22 : 25] They just, it's weariness. It's weariness. They kind of shrug their shoulders and say, what is the point? So friends, third question, what's God's response to all this?

We've looked at the root, they've forgotten God. We've seen the symptoms and their actions and attitude, their scorning sacrifice, their weary in worship. How does God respond? Look at verse eight.

God responds by saying, close the churches. 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.

This is a striking thing that this worship service, God said it'd be better if it wasn't happening. Shut it down. Close the doors.

I have no pleasure in you. It is no small thing, it is no small thing to scorn the living God, to despise his name, to say what a weariness it is to follow him.

[23 : 38] It's no small thing. It's better not to be in church, God is saying, than to offer what is blasphemous in his name. And God says to go up, pack up, and go home.

Friends, perhaps this is, for me, I think is part of the most sobering part of all this. We lived in America for four years and we got back last summer. We lived in a city called Charlotte in North Carolina.

And when we would drive around Charlotte, as it was, it's kind of in the south, it's on the edge of the Bible Belt, as it is, probably most of the church buildings there that look like church buildings are still churches.

So we would drive around and the kids would say, what church is this? And what church is this? And in the past, I think Charlotte even kind of had the nickname, the city of churches, right? There's loads of churches out there.

When we got back to Scotland last year, our kids would ask as we drive around, Dad, what church is this? What church is that? And most of the time, it's, oh, that's now not a church.

[24 : 48] It's an office, it's a restaurant, it's whatever else it is. And particularly at that time of transition for us, coming back last year, it just cut me right through. Closed churches all across.

The other day, from working in the office here, I just took a walk out there and stood on Union Terrace and looked across. And from Union Terrace, I think I counted six spires kind of looking east, whichever way that is, east, I think.

None of them today still churches. Friends, of course, there are times where churches close due to administrative reshuffle. Of course there are. There are times where things get reset and all these kind of things.

But we must never think that churches close purely and always to those things. Dear friends, in some ways, as we drive around our city and as we look around our nation, it is a reminder that God will not be mocked.

So we have this object lesson, this unworthy worship. Three questions. What's the root? They've forgotten who God is. What are the symptoms, their actions and their attitude?

[25 : 55] God's response is very, very strong. And so how should we respond to what we've seen? How should they respond? And what's the invitation? And how should we respond? Well, firstly, the first one there in verse nine is repent and now entreat the favor of God that he may be gracious to us.

Heartless worship, praiseless praise, prayerless prayer. So bad, God would say, close the church. So bad, God would say in verse 14, cursed be the person who brings worship like this.

He calls it out as evil, but there is a way back. But there is a way back. There's grace, always grace.

God says, come back and treat the favor of God that he may be gracious. If you just flick over the page to Malachi chapter three, you'll see the great invitation, the great invitation of the book of Malachi.

What do we see in that great invitation? Just halfway through verse seven, halfway through verse seven, God says this, return to me and I will return to you.

[27 : 08] Says the Lord of hosts. Return to me and I will return to you. There is a way back. Think of the father in Luke 15. Remember the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15?

The son spent everything. He's blown in his inheritance. He's lost it all. He's scorned his father's name. He thought, what a weariness it is to be with my father. He left.

And what do we find as he comes back? The father standing, waiting, arms wide open, waiting him back. Dear friends, if any of us in our own hearts this evening are convicted of our half-heartedness towards the Lord, entreat the favor of God, return to him and he will be gracious and merciful to us.

Would he be any other way? No, no. But actually, part of our inoculation, if you like, part of our inoculation to this is living lives of repentance.

Part of the prevention of you, if you like, of going this way is living lives of repentance. Going back to Martin Luther again in his 95 Theses, the first one says this, when our Lord and Master, the Lord Jesus, said repent, he willed the entire life of the believers to be one of repentance.

[28 : 23] It is a life of repentance that keeps us magnifying Christ and glorying in the gospel. part of living our lives for worship is living as repentant people.

So living as repentant people. Secondly, remember, remember, remember God's name will be great. Remember God's name will be great. Verse 11 and verse 14.

God says, 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, said the Lord of hosts. And then go to the end of verse 14. For I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.

But part of what will keep us from, if you like, the slumber of unworthy worship and lip service religion is remembering that God's name will be great across all the earth. That a pure offering, pure worship will be made.

[29 : 26] From the rising of the sun to its setting, a time is coming where God's name will be feared and worshipped in all the nations of the earth. That's part of what we saw in John 4, isn't it?

It is part of what we saw in John 4, that invitation to the Samaritan to come and worship, to come and worship. Jesus has started this, that the Father is seeking worshippers, those who worship in spirit and truth.

Christ is bringing this and one day he will accomplish it. Part of it is remembering God's name will be great. We are part of something that is spreading and will last on the earth forever.

Last week, on Saturday evening, we were at Petaudry watching Aberdeen and the place was bouncing and kind of full. I think it was a sellout and the team is going well.

People feel part of something. But of course, the question is, well, how long can it last? Will they win the league? Will they win the cup? Is this going to be the year, the winning side?

[30 : 31] Well, yesterday kind of gave part of the answer that, didn't it? As they lost 6-0. the worship of God may have seasons on earth where it's more or less seen, but we are on the winning side.

We are part of something that will last forever. It may not always look like it now. It may not always feel like it, but one day all the earth will be filled with the praise of God.

Christ has started it and he will, he will accomplish it. remembering that God is a great king and all the world will praise him ought to keep us from being kind of fair weather fans or lip service religion.

We belong to the king who reigns. And finally, our final point as we close, we respond in worship. Respond in worship. It is to respond to praise God for Jesus, our perfect priest and sacrifice.

You see, the question is, how can God accept me? How can God accept us? How is our worship made worthy? In Jesus. In Jesus. Only in Jesus.

[31 : 41] You see, the Lord Jesus, he is our perfect high priest. He didn't despise God's name, but he fully honoured it. He's a perfect high priest who didn't lead us away from God, but leads us into the very heart and throne room and the presence of God.

And not only is the Lord Jesus a perfect high priest, he's our perfect sacrifice. no blemish, not impure, rather he is pure and all sufficient sacrifice for our sin.

And he is perfect high priest and sacrificed. He is the perfect worshiper who has come to lead his people through his spirit in praise and glory of the Father.

and so it's when we belong to him, trust him, love him, and rely on him depending on his spirit for everything, including our worship. We're kept from lip service religion for Christ will lead us in spirit and in truth to worship the Father.

So dear friends, the invitation of this, of this unworthy worship, the invitation becomes true worship in Christ, to behold Christ, to come to Christ, to stay near to Christ, and to know that in Christ, by his spirit, we will worship and sing the praises of our Father, both this evening and all the nations until the very ends of the earth as Christ returns and evermore thereafter.

[33 : 11] Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you that you are our perfect high priest, the one who has brought us to the Father, the one who has made perfect sacrifice for sin, and whoever lives to intercede for us.

And so we come this evening in great hope and confidence because of all that you've done for us. You have given your perfect righteousness to us and have dealt with our sin, and so we worship by your spirit and spirit and truth to exalt and to make high your name and the name of your Father.

We thank you, almighty God, that you're a great king, that you're a great king and your name will be known and feared in all the earth, and so we humble ourselves to you with gladness and joy to worship you and know how we long for the day, we long for the day when all the earth will sing your praises.

Come, Lord Jesus, speed the day we ask, but until that day, keep our hearts whole in Christ, keep us from divided hearts and help us to walk in grace humbly before you always, and we ask it in Christ's name.

Amen. We close our service