



RIGHTEOUS OFFERINGS

Ask the average Christian what 'worship' looks like, and they'll probably have an idea or 2. So let's kick off this morning with a mind-map of the word 'worship.'

Give me some examples ...

Singing to God? Yes.

Praying to God? Yes.

Reading the Bible? Yes.

Going to church? Yes.

Sharing communion? Yes.

Giving an offering? Yes.

All of the above! But is that it? Is that all there is? Or is there something more? As usual, Malachi wants to take us a bit deeper – so let's turn in our Bibles to ...

Malachi 2:17-3:5

God through Malachi gives us 2 portraits of the world: the world as it is, and the world as it will be.

And along the way, we get a fresh vision of what the word 'worship' means – to God.

1) The World: As It Is. The world of Malachi's day, c400 BC, was not a nice place to live. In Malachi 3:5, God lists some of the evils that He could see:

- Sorcery (temple prostitution and child sacrifice).
- Adultery (that can mean any kind of promiscuity).
- Perjury (distorting the truth for our own ends).
- Robbery (defrauding labourers of their wages).
- Oppression (exploiting the widow and the orphan).
- Discrimination (refusing help to the refugee).

What do these things have in common? They are all ways in which vulnerable people can be marginalised, exploited, and sinned against. And the consensus was:

"Who's watching?" "Who sees?" "Who cares?"

Now the modern world is not dissimilar to this. Whether it's the effects of climate change on countries near the equator, workers earning a pittance in sweatshops and factories, the trafficking of people for various immoral purposes, the selling of arms to 'western-friendly' regimes ... we live in a world where the poor can be exploited. Why? It's a bit like breaking the speed limit. Why do we do that? Because we think the speed limit is a recommendation rather than a rule? Because we think it only applies to dangerous drivers, not sensible ones? Or because whatever is on our to-do list today is more important than the speed limit? It's probably a combination of factors. But over and above it all is this:

"Who's watching?" "Who sees?" "Who cares?"

God says, "I do." And notice: He isn't talking to the Gentile world here, the unbelieving world. He's talking to His people – the Israelites – because in a way they were just as guilty. It's not so much that they were doing this stuff themselves (though some of them might have been). They'd just stopped caring. Compassion-fatigue.

The message of Malachi is: God knows; God sees; God cares. And He intends to do something about it.

2) The World: As It Will Be. As we enter ch3, God promises that things are going to change. And He uses 2 pictures to get across what is needed:

A refiner's fire, and a fuller's soap (3:2-3):

- **A Refiner's Fire.** In the ancient world, a metalsmith would use a furnace to purify precious metals. The heat would cause the impurities to rise to the surface, and the metalsmith would scrape them off. And the ultimate test of a metal's purity? Whether the metalsmith could see his image reflected in that metal.
- **2) A Fuller's Soap.** Malachi's not talking some kind of nicely-scented *Lush* product. This is laundry soap, a mix of wood-ash and animal fat. A

woman would wash the wool in a bucket of urine, scrub it with a fuller's bar, and beat it dry with a stick in a set-apart 'Fuller's Field' (because it was deemed to be 'unclean').

What is Malachi saying, then? That God, like a metalsmith or a washer-woman, is going to remove the dross and dirt, the sin and selfishness of this world, starting with Israel. How? "I'm going to send My messenger (another one!), and he's going to prepare the way ... for *Me*."

Who's the messenger? John the Baptist. And who did he prepare the way for? Who's the 'Me' speaking here? That's right. Jesus of Nazareth. Because it's through Jesus that the world is going to change, one person at a time.

But what has this got to do with worship, I hear you ask? Jesus died for us, not just so we can get a ticket to heaven, but so that we can show the world what the Kingdom of God really looks like. Right here, right now. To be a witness, in word – and in action. Too often we get worked up over peripheral issues like the time a service starts, the kind of songs we sing, and whether Steve is going to say anything relevant to us this week. And all the time millions of people are going to bed each night hungry.

What might God be more concerned about?

Let's Move

With that in mind, let's mind-map the word 'worship' again. What can we add to our list from earlier on? What might God add to that list?

Generosity? Yes.

Equality? Yes.

Freedom? Yes.

Justice? Yes.

Sacrifice? Yes.

Compassion? Yes.

Isaiah said it. Amos said it. Micah said it. *Jesus* said it. These are the "righteous offerings" God was looking for; the worship that He wants to see (hence Acts 4:34).

What then do we do with this? Time for some questions!

- What selfish actions and attitudes does Jesus still need to remove from *me*?
- Are God's priorities *my* priorities? Do the things that matter most to God matter most to *me*?
- Why am I here? What has God for me to do? How does God want to use *me*?