

Wholeheartedness

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well good morning everyone. Lovely to see you. Let me encourage you to come expectantly to Malachi chapter 1, those verses that we just read. If you do not know where Malachi is, feel no embarrassment to turn into the contents page of your Bible. It is the last book of the Old Testament. So if you find Matthew, the first book of the New Testament, it is just one back from there. If you don't have a Bible, feel free to pick up the Bibles on the pews round about. And if you want a Bible, I've got three of these to give away this morning. Just come and grab me. It can be yours. I'm going to try and do this every week just to get God's word into people's hands. If you want a Bible, come and grab me and we'll make that happen for you. But Malachi chapter 1, let me try and get us into the heart of the challenge that comes at us in this passage. And I'm going to tell you one of my favourite stories. I think I've told this before, but I love it, so I'm telling it again, right?

Here's my favourite story. It's about two farmyard buds called Chicken and Pig. And their best buds, one evening, they're looking out over the farm, they're hanging out together, and they see a truck drive past. And on the side of this truck, it just says, eggs and bacon, the great British breakfast. And Chicken turns to Pig and says, Pig, Pig, Pig, I've got a wonderful idea. You know that farmer, our farmer that we love that gets up at the crack of dawn every single morning to feed us, to look after us, to care for us. You know that farmer. Here's an idea. How about we get up in the morning and we give him that breakfast? We give him that breakfast. And I tell you what we'll do. We'll meet up the next day on this fence and we'll talk about how good the breakfast was. And Chicken says, I'm all up for it, Pig. Are you up for it? And Pig says to Chicken, he says, I don't think you quite understand, Chicken. When it comes to us giving the farmer bacon and eggs, it only costs part of you, but it costs all of me. Now, what this passage is about this morning, the question is, are we wholehearted? Are we all in when it comes to worshipping the Lord?

So here's a question that's been in my head this week. As I particularly thought about off the back of Christmas, having spent time with my friends and family, I've asked myself this question in their minds as I've lived my life in front of them, what would they conclude is the thing that makes me tick?

Think about it in your own life, okay? What did people think your life orbits around? What do people think that if you didn't have that thing in your life, your life would be the worst for it?

What do people see as they look at you? Another question as well, what would the Lord see if he was to look into your heart deeply this morning? Because what is going to turn Chicken and Pig from being a cute illustrating story to a life-transforming concept is the understanding, the view of the God that we worship? So let me ask you, who is the God of the Bible in your minds today? Is he who he tells us he is in this passage? What does he say? If you've got it there at the end of verse 14, because this generation completely forgotten it, he says, for I am a great king, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations. So three quick fire things here we get about this God. He is a king, he is the Lord of hosts, that's a military term, he's the Lord of angel armies, and his name will be feared among the nations. He is no domestic deity. He is the God of the world. He is the one who laid the foundations of the earth. He is the one who spoke the stars into existence. He is the one who keeps the world spinning and gives us breath by the power of his word every single moment. And we know it's true, don't we, in life that your view of someone affects how you come before them.

[4 : 1 7] Give you a little example of this. I remember a few months back flicking through the pictures from the Queen's Memorial Service as it took place at St. Giles, just down the road on the Royal Mile. Do you remember it? Yeah, all the famous Scots turning up, going inside. And this one picture in particular caught my mind. It's not the greatest graphic, but it's what I had on my phone. It caught my eye, not because of the guy who's in the background. If you're eagle-eyed, you'll see it's

our former first ministers in the background there, yeah? But it was the guy in the foreground who caught my attention. That guy right in the middle there, who's looking like the cat that got the cream, is my friend Neil. Now Neil's the pastor of Jen at Cornerstone, just on Morningside Drive. And Neil got an invite because he was representing the First, sorry, the Free Church of Scotland. And there he is suited and booted. And I was texting him afterwards, and I said, Neil, I feel slightly offended because every time you meet me, you're wearing a jeans and a hoodie. And he texted back and he said, yeah, but for the queen, I make exceptions. He realizes that to come before the queen, to come into her presence, to come into that, that's different. And there's nothing of that with this generation as far as the

Lord is concerned. He says, verse 6, as a son honors his father and a slave his master, there's the logic. Do you see? Son honors his father, a slave honors his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due to me? If I'm a master, where is the respect due to me, says the Lord Almighty. So the Lord sees in their eyes that he is nothing before them. He's like a plumber that you would have in your phone contact list, right? Really useful to have in case of an emergency, in case you need to call on him, but not someone that's on your mind to send a Christmas card to. That's how they understand the Lord.

And so they're doing this sacrificial thing as a nation. They're performing the religious rituals as a people, all the while forgetting why the Lord had put them into their lives in the first place.

Why sacrifice? Well, it is the way that a blindingly holy God can live in fellowship with a sinful people. It is the way that the Lord has said, you can be right with me. And this is the way that you could know peace with me and enjoy fellowship with me forever. And while we're on the subject, let me just say that whoever you are today, and whatever you think of the God of the Bible, the answer that the Bible would give you to why you are here on earth is to enjoy God and worship him forever. That is the reason that you and I were made. If you're thinking what life is all about, if Bono's line from that famous song is your line that I still haven't found what I'm looking for, then know that the Bible would say categorically to all human life, all human life that is wonderfully made and has dignity simply because all human life is made in the image of this God, then this is the reason that you and I were made, to worship him and enjoy fellowship with him forever. In the words of Augustine, who was a church leader writing in the fourth century, he said this, and I remember reading this as a young Christian and thinking, that's true. He said, you have made us for yourself, talking about God, oh Lord, and our heart, and get this, is restless until it finds its rest in you. Now, if you're here today and you're thinking about the things of the

Christian faith, and I love that you're here if that's the case, two good books that I'd recommend you can just come and grab. I've got three of these to give away this morning to whoever wants them. One is to think about the claims of the Christian faith, whether they stack up, and the other one is to think about the one, two, three of Christianity. If you're thinking about what this thing is all about, come and grab me at the end. I've got books to give away. These will serve you wonderfully.

[8 : 35] Now, the thing is that this generation have lost the thrill of who the Lord is. He's nothing in their eyes. Flowing from their hearts that aren't thrilled with a wonderful view of a delightful God, they are offering to God half-hearted worship. Half-hearted worship, doing the religious thing, but their hearts aren't in it. And flowing downstream from their hearts, you get two things in this passage that are going on in the life of the nation. You ready for these? Sound excited? Here's the first one.

Here's the first one that's going on. Shoddy sacrifices. Shoddy sacrifices. God had said to every individual that for your sin against me to be dealt with, bring an animal, a sheep or a bull, without blemish, spotless, undefiled. That's the language there. Worth parking that thought for where we end up in this this morning. Without blemish, spotless, and present it before me for your sin. And here's what God is saying in this day when livestock was in effect what our bank accounts are to us today, where all our wealth and money is tied up. God is saying bring your best. Bring your best. And of course you'd only bring your best if you thought that the Lord was not only worthy of your best, but actually that everything that we had was his in the first place. Right? His are the cattle on a thousand hills. God is saying bring the sacrifice before me at the temple and it will be its life instead of yours. Because being right with God and knowing life with him, there is no greater thing. And yet what are this generation bringing?

Do you see in the text, they are bringing, verse 8, blind animals. Do you see? They are bringing those that are lame and sick. They are bringing in effect. They are bringing roadkill before the Lord.

You compare that to what God had asked them to bring. They are bringing very much second best. There's even a hint, verse 13, if you read it there, that people are stealing from other people's flocks because they're not willing to part with their own. And the thing to see is that their attitude to sacrifice reflects their attitude to God. Do you see? He is nothing in their eyes. It was British author G.K. Chesterton who once said that the absence of praise reveals a religion that is more of a theory than a love affair. I found that really helpful to think about it this week. More of a theory than a love affair. And that's this generation to a T. Remember that question right at the start.

What would people, our friends and family, as they look at our lives, what would they say is the most important thing to us? What would they say our life orbits around? Because people look at this generation and they ain't concluding the Lord. And it's bad enough that people are bringing shoddy sacrifices in this day, but there's something even more sinister going on here.

[12:02] Because when the people bring those shoddy sacrifices to the temple, there's one group of people that should have looked at them and said, back to the person bringing the offering, you've got to be having a laugh. You serious? You're bringing that before the Lord? And this is the second problem.

We've got phony priests. Now, how would you sum up the main responsibilities that you have at work? What do you do as a job? How would you explain to somebody what your job description is, what you do? Well, in this day, the priests, they've got two prongs on their job description.

They are the middlemen, right? They are the go-betweens between God and the people, and between the people and God. That's your two-pronged job description. Prong one, you represent the people to God. So if people want to know, sorry, you represent God to the people.

If people want to know who God is, what God is like, what God has said in his words, then the people come to you to understand who God is, what he said. We're going to be thinking about that prong next week. But the other prong, this is where we are today, is that you represent the people to God. See the first one, God to people. Second one, people to God. And that's where we are today. And how do you do that? Well, it's your job to take the sacrifices that the people bring and offer them to God. And through that work, you bring harmony between the people and God.

You restore fellowship between God and man. Because that sacrifice, you read it in Leviticus, where all these rules are laid out, it becomes a pleasing aroma in the sight of God.

[13:52] Things are good. Things are right because sacrifice has been made. But when the people, do you see this? What are this generation of priests offering? When the people come with their roadkill, instead of saying, on your bike, they're offering, verse 7, do you see, polluted sacrifices. And what are they saying to themselves as they do it? They're saying, verse 13, what a weariness this is.

What a weariness this is. Subtext, I can't be bothered. Is this really making a difference? Are they almost saying, oh, do you know what? Just let's get it done. Just bung it on and we'll get it done. And instead of an awe for the living and holy God who has called them into his service, instead of that being the driving heart of everything that they do, they're just blasé about the whole thing. And do you know what? See, if you're priests, and Ruth was talking about leaders just a minute ago, if the leaders of God's community aren't fussed about the Lord, then the people are going to look at them and think exactly the same.

You know, I listened to an interview on Radio 4, the end of last year. And on this Radio 4 program, they were interviewing a thriller writer.

[15:12] You know what I mean by that? Somebody who writes crime novels, thrillers. Now, I didn't catch her name, and I really looked hard this week to find her name, but I caught what she said. And she talked about this new book that she was working on, and they were asking her about it. And do you know what she said?

She said that for months she's not been able to sleep. Not because she's worried, but because she's so frightened by what she's writing. She's got to sleep with the lights on because she's so engrossed in this thing.

And here was her line. She said, this is the sign of a good author. If it doesn't scare me, then there's no chance it's going to scare those people who buy my book. I love that. Is that not true? You can see right through people who don't believe what they're trying to sell you, can't you?

I remember trying to negotiate a mobile phone contract recently. I'm going to have to pay more than I'm paying already. I said, mate, how does that work? And he said, you know what? You've got a good point.

But it's true, isn't it? That we look to people. Do people really believe what they're trying to sell us? And this generation of priests have zero fear of God in their eyes. You look at them as the people and you think they don't believe in what they're doing.

[16:20] And look how strongly God thinks of it all. Verse 10. He says, oh, that you would shut the door of the temple. Can you imagine that? God came in here today and said, would a lot of you just get out?

And would you shut those doors? Because honestly, you're just making a mockery of my name. And that's stinging, isn't it? Honestly, I'd rather you just didn't bother. And this is the line, again, just park it for where we finish with this today. God says, I've got no pleasure in you. Houston, we've got a worship problem. And there's a worship problem because there's a sin problem.

And the solution to their problem is also the solution to our problem. And it comes in the shape of the one who came to be for us.

The answer to this, who came to be for us both the perfect sacrifice and the perfect priest. You see, that's where both of these things that God would deliberately, had deliberately woven into the fabric of the life of this people, helping them understand how this works.

[17:31] This is where they would ultimately find their fulfillment. And they would find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ. Now, I've got a friend who refers to the Old Testament part of the Bible as almost the pre-match warm-up to the main event, which is the arrival, the life, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus.

I think there's something in that. Jesus is the perfect sacrifice. He is the perfect sacrifice. By his perfect life and by his perfect death on the cross, he becomes the unblemished, spotless sacrifice that the people need to come before and be right with a holy God.

He is that perfect sacrifice for us. This is how you and I are right with God. We are right with God because our unblemished, spotless sacrifice has appeared and lived and died.

You're struggling with your sin this morning. How can God forgive me? That's how God can forgive you. Because Jesus has died in your place, on your behalf. Do you see how God is weaving this into the fabric of the thought life of his people?

To come before me, to be right with me, you need a spotless, sacrificial lamb. There is Jesus Christ. He is the perfect sacrifice and he is the perfect priest.

[18:50] He is the one who perfectly represents us before God and brings us to God through his sacrificial work for us on the cross.

And he is those things. He is those things. But more than that, he is also, if you imagine the hearts of these people, is the true worshiper ever going to come?

He is also the perfect worshiper. He is the perfect worshiper. But what does God want in Malachi chapter 1 verse 11?

What does he desire from his people? His heart, his desire that my name will be great among the nations. It's ironic really because God isn't being honored among his people and yet God has said that is no barrier to me being honored among the nations.

And are we not just a microcosm of that this morning? If we took a straw poll of the countries that we come from, God will be honored among the nations all over the world.

[19:59] From this, my name will be great among the nations, verse 11, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place, incense and pure offerings will be brought to me because my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord Almighty.

Pure offerings. This is what the Lord is after. Someone who will live to glorify the Lord's name.

Someone who will make it their job to spread his name and his fame among the nations.

And there is Jesus Christ, the perfect worshiper. You look at Jesus as you read about him in the gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. And if you haven't read them for yourselves, get in there. You read about Jesus and you have to say, here is a man who knows life to the full. Here is a man who is not lacking in joy.

Here is a man who is not lacking in purpose. He is the most alive person who has ever existed. And I love the snapshot that you get of Jesus in Luke 22.

[21:12] On the eve of his death. You know, what would you be doing if you found out you had 24 hours to live? Jesus is praying for us.

With full knowledge of what is painfully ahead of him, he prays, Father, not my will, but yours be done. Now there is a wholehearted worshiper.

Such is his desire to accomplish the will of his Father in heaven to save captive sinners from hell's grasp. And because of that willingness, he is the one of whom the Father said, in stark contrast to this generation of whom he is not pleased, he is the one who said of his Son in Matthew chapter 3, his baptism with him, I am well pleased.

And what that means, by our faith in him, by his Spirit, and get your head around this, we are being transformed more into his likeness, more into his image.

And that's what it means to grow as a Christian believer. Wonderful question to ask yourself at the outset of this year. As you consider the heart of Jesus, in what areas of our life's friends do we want to grow more like him?

[22 : 46] Where would you love this year to get to the end of the year and think, in this particular area, I grew more like Jesus. And that's why it's so important, and I love this, one of my big takeaways from a time in America in the summer.

Let's familiarize ourselves with the fruit of the Spirit. As God works in our lives by his Spirit, what are the things that we are producing? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, self-control.

These things should be evident in our lives as we grow more like Jesus. What's the answer to this generation's problem? It ain't that they try harder. It's that God, through his Holy Spirit, would transform their inner lives.

And that's what's on offer to us this morning in Jesus Christ. As we are transformed more into his image, wholeheartedness, love and faithfulness to the Lord should be the thing that is ever more evident in our lives.

So let me get real practical real quick, and then we'll finish. What is this going to look like for us? You know, some of us here today, and I love that you guys are back, you're here to finish your university degree.

[24 : 02] Right? Your students, you guys are back. Some of you, I know for a fact, that the next six months, you're on the home run to get your degree. Right? This is the last sprint, what, five months before you're finished.

And as you think about the things that are going to characterize your life beyond university, right, the job that you do, whatever it is, where does serving the Lord rank in your priorities?

Some of us are coming to think about retirement. Again, what is serving the Lord going to look like with your time? Some of us here will be saving, maybe to buy our own home for the first time.

Maybe thinking about renting in a different part of the city. Let me ask you again, where is settling into a good local church where you are going to grow in your affections for Jesus?

Where does that rank in your decision-making priorities? Maybe you're doing the sums, you're budgeting for the year ahead. Maybe there's even a big outlay that's on the horizon for you this year.

[25 : 06] Again, where do God's purposes rank in your thinking? Where do God's service of him factor into the decisions that you make?

Do you see this? This call for wholehearted worship to the Lord, how easy it is to offer him second best. The call in Romans chapter 12 is to offer God living worship, offer our lives as living sacrifices to him.

Friends, what would our friends and family see as they look at us? What's the thing that makes us tick? And what would the Lord see as he pulls back our hearts and sees the things that are going on and what we're really about?

And this is why I want to close. I've had her in my head all week. My friend Amanda. So, we met Amanda when we were in America this summer.

She's in her late 20s. She works as an intensive care pediatric nurse. Now, that is an intense job. And we met her in the States because her mum was the one who hosted us as a family when we were over there.

[26 : 13] And I remember when we got there, Amanda's room was empty in this house. And so we thought we'd try and love our guests well by doing some housework. So I'm hoovering the house.

Okay? And I get to Amanda's room and I thought, well, I'll go in and clean it because it's empty. And I start hoovering. And I get to her built-in cupboard. And I open the cupboard. And there's nothing else in this room, but I open the cupboard and all over the cupboard are post-it notes.

And I start reading these post-it notes and I see things like, Lord, help me, I'm struggling. Jesus, help me to be more like you.

The names of friends and family. Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for me. The Bible verses which are all over there. I love you, Lord. Work's tough this week. Would you help me?

People in our church that she's praying for, verses from the Bible. And after four or five of these, I stopped because I suddenly realized what I'd walked into. And this cupboard was where she went every day to pray.

[27 : 13] Not to the cupboards, just at the cupboard, okay? But this is where she went to pray. Where she got down on her knees every day when no one else was looking.

And that's when people really say that they see what you're about, isn't it? When no one else is looking, who are you? And she's down there on her knees and she's pouring her heart out before the Lord. Pouring her life out before Him.

And that's wholehearted worship. When no one else is looking, pouring out your soul before the Lord. Just her and her Father. You know, what is God's will for our life in 2023?

God's primary will for our lives as His people is that at the end of this year our lives would resemble more of Jesus than they did at the start.

That wonderful hymn by Isaac was with a whole realm of nature mine that were an offering far too small.

[28 : 14] Love so amazing, so divine demands my soul, my life, my all. And may that be our experience this week as we savor more of the greatness of Jesus.

Let us pray. And so this is Romans 12, chapter 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.

Father, I pray here this morning, thank you for this wonderful picture we have of who Jesus is, our perfect sacrifice, as we'll sing in just a minute, our perfect priest.

Thank you, Lord, that we do not need to fear your punishment because we look at Jesus and know he's taken it all. And yet, because of him, we look at you, we can call you and know you as Father. And I pray that your spirit this morning would take that wonderful gospel truth and massage it home into our hearts. May just a sweet assurance assurance of who Jesus, our Savior, is.

[29 : 33] Oh, Lord, may it mold and shape all of our lives. Father, we pray these things in Jesus' worthy name. Amen.