

PostExilicProphets 22-03-30b

Thank you, Dan and Lori, for that reminder of how important the cross is and what God has done for us in and through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. Something that comes to mind when we look at our passage in Malachi as we pick up our study in chapter one, the expression of God's love ought to create a response of love. We love because He first loved us, John says.

And for any other response, we're misleading ourselves, we are being deceived, we are not enjoying the fullness of the relationship that God has gone to so much trouble to establish with us. And it's worth stopping the flow of activities and information and distractions and pausing to reflect on the Word of God, pausing to communicate with God in prayer, to appreciate Him, to come before His presence, enter into His gates with thanksgiving and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him and bless His name because He has been so good to us and continues to be so good.

It is easy to be deflected. That's the whole principle of magic. Magicians are skilled and practiced in the art of misdirection.

They don't want you looking where they are pulling out the hidden dove or the empty hat rabbit. You watch their hands, watch their face, they drop a deck of cards and when you're not looking they've pulled something from beneath the table. It's the art of misdirection, to put your attention in a place it doesn't need to be.

And our world is nothing but misdirection. Even political statements that are made, people know that they are nonsensical, they know that they are hypocritical, but they make them anyway because they don't expect to convince you that they're right. They generally don't expect to persuade you that their case is sound or their cause is just.

All they want is your attention because even as you fume and vent and rant at the craziness of things that are being said and the hypocrisy and your accusing of exactly the things that you are doing yourself, what are they doing? Picking your pocket. They don't expect to convert you, they don't expect to convince you, they expect to distract, they expect to focus attention where they want it focused so it is not focused somewhere else. We as the people of God have to start from our spiritual bedrock.

We should start our day there. We should pause in the middle of our day and get back there and we should end our day at the oasis of living water, not perseverating and ruminating and gesticulating in our minds and shaking our fist at the machine and the little mouse shaking his fist as the eagle is swooping down. Most of these things, if we didn't know about them, we wouldn't care about them.

Why do we know about them? Because they are sluiced into our living rooms and over our phones and Walt Disney this and Judge Thomas that and this guy slapping that guy and whatever may be going on in the news. Every second that our minds are occupied with that

stuff, they are not occupied with who am I, why am I here? As Jesus said, and we saw on Sunday in Matthew 24, when you hear of wars and reports of war, behold it, take a look, but don't be alarmed. Don't be shaken as though there's too little too late that we're all going to die.

A tragic misstep has been made from which there is no return. That's what threo means and Jesus says don't be thrown off your stride. You can be walking down the narrow road heading for the straight gate and you can look to your left and you can look to your right and you can see what's going on in the world.

You can observe it. You can discern the relative degree of evil that it represents or the relative degree of goodness or preservation of godly values and such that might be reflected there. Don't stop walking.

Don't pause and turn aside to see this great sight. Remember Moses is in the hills and he sees smoke and he sees a fire and well here's a bush that's burning and it is not being consumed. I will turn aside to see this great sight.

Well, it was good that he turned aside, but we're on a good path. We don't need to be distracted and deflected. It is so much better to do the kind of reflection that we saw in our first session tonight.

Cicero, not even a believer, but wise, perceptive, observing. Bernard, Thomas Aquinas, thinking, observing, drawing conclusions that are biblically sound and illuminate the page of scripture. I've got a whole fresh sensitivity when I run across the word honor or fear or obey.

Those words, by the way, in our context, are significant in Hebrew. If you take a look at our passage, you have the word for fear, which is mora, M-O-R-A. And you notice this is not fear in the sense of respect.

This is its root meaning is terror. As in Genesis chapter nine, verse two. The fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, on all the fish of the sea.

They are given into your hand. They're going to run away when they see you. And if you see a deer and so on around here, you know that that is how the reaction often is.

But fear or terror, sometimes it is reverence for God. You can see the third in your Strong's Concordance. The gloss on it is a fear, a terror.

And if you go a little further down to Brown, Driver and Briggs, which is what, you know, you look things up in Hebrew and that typically. And you can see that there is reverence. Where's the reverence to me? Our passage Malachi 1 6. The third definition in BDB is object of reverence, especially God.

And you go to Isaiah 8, 12 and 13. If you look at this in a. Well, maybe we won't do that. This

people call a conspiracy and a threat.

Their threats do not be troubled and do not be afraid. And more is used here for their threats. It's this is something that would strike fear or terror into someone's heart.

And that's what God says. Even a slave for his master would have some kind of of attention paid to the master, even if it is out of fear, fear of punishment, fear of negative consequences. But Israel has lost even that.

Now, here's here's a pop quiz question for you. Where do you think we are in Malachi relative to Haggai and Zechariah? What was the message that God sent Haggai and Zechariah to his people to deliver? What did he want them to do? Build the temple, right? So in Haggai's day and in Zechariah's day, the thing had not been built. Right.

What clues do we have in Malachi as to distance in time from the days of Haggai and Zechariah? Well, let's keep reading in our passage. Verse seven. You offer defiled food on my altar, but say, in what way have we defiled you? In saying the table of the Lord is contemptible.

And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? When you offer the lame and sick, is it not evil? Offer it then to your governor. Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you favorably, says the Lord of hosts? So there is a standing temple at this point. There is a functional altar.

There are priests serving there. Not just a few token sacrifices when they first built an altar and didn't have a temple yet. We know this because God is talking to the priests.

In verse six. Says the Lord of hosts to you priests who despise my name. The initial shine of now we have a temple, now we can worship the way we used to has worn off.

And it has become a charade. Here is your second quiz question. The first question was what was the primary message of Haggai and Zechariah especially the beginning of Zechariah? Build the temple? Here is your second question.

What did we perceive in that message from Haggai and in Zechariah that God was really talking about? Did he really just want the physical building built? What was the spiritual message that that build the temple message was designed to convey and to represent? Why has this project laid fallow for 18 plus years? Your heart's not in it. If you loved God, if you desired his presence, if you wanted Shekinah glory in the Holy of Holies, you would have found a way to keep this project going. What is the problem of which failing to build the temple is a symptom? Coming back from the captivity.

They have not learned the lesson. Of their fathers. That got their fathers sent into captivity 70 years earlier.

Right? They had dropped down all three steps. They no longer loved the Lord their God. They

did not honor him.

And ultimately they did not fear him. And they went out. Now they have come back.

God says build the temple. So what have they done? It's an externality. There is a standing temple.

There is a functional altar. There is an active priesthood. But the service has the same problem that Haggai and Zechariah pointed out.

Your heart is not in this. You are not doing this motivated by love. And you remember what Bernard said about about honor without love and fear without love.

They get all twisted. They are corrupted. They result in a lack of grace.

They result in the opposite of the intended effect. So you offer defiled food on my altar. But say in what way have we defiled you? Defiled food on the altar.

This altar is going to be referred to a bit further down. As the table of the Lord. The table of the Lord is contemptible.

You offer defiled food on my altar saying the table of the Lord is contemptible. When you offer the blind, you offer the lame and the sick. Is it not evil? Try that with your governor.

This also tells us that this is in the days when they had a Persian governor still ruling the area. And there is more fear of the Persian governor than there is fear of the Lord. They would never bring rotten food, contemptible food, if they were putting on a meal that the governor was going to attend.

But here the altar of God is referenced as a table. Because what is a table? Used to be this is where the family gathers for communion. We used to call communion the Lord's table.

There's no mention of a table in the upper room per se. But it was often referred to as the Lord's table because communion was a shared sacramental meal. And the meals in a church when we went through Corinthians and saw Paul using the upper room meal with the bread and the cup as an example of what genuine fellowship ought to be.

They're having the meal and everybody is invited, but how are they treating the poor? No love. No honor. And they certainly don't fear the poor.

So there is the external show, the external opportunity to have a meal. But the spirit in which that meal was supposed to be given and partaken of is lacking in Corinth. And Paul calls them out on it.

Well, here this altar and table are given as synonymous. And this has precedent. If you turn to Ezekiel chapter 41, verse 22, the altar of the Lord is referred to as a table.

41, 22 of Ezekiel. The altar was of wood, three cubits high and its length two cubits. Its corners, its length and its sides were of wood.

And he said to me, remember now, this is the number 40 through 48 are the millennial temple and all of its accouterments. He said to me, this is the table that is before the Lord. This altar is the table of the Lord.

It is a picture and people have made all kinds of crazy comparisons to pagan gods. You know that they're actually looking for the food on the altar to consume it. It's a metaphor.

It is supposed to be a place of communion, a fellowship. You find this over and over again in Ezekiel 41, 15 and 16. I think I misread that.

These are all in Roman numerals. They shall come near to my table. I think maybe Ezekiel, well that's XLI, isn't that 41? I'm not seeing it there.

I read it, but I must have looked it up differently. At any rate, it's the table. Now, what is on the table? It is bread.

In the King James, it was translated bread. God says in Leviticus 21, 6, when you offer my bread, the fat and the blood, it's my food. Bread meant food in general, not just bread.

There's been some confusion. The reason I'm belaboring this a little bit is people have said, well, isn't the table the table of showbread? And it mentions bread. If you do this in the King James, you've got bread and a table, and you think, well, showbread.

But the table of showbread is not an altar. And so then it gets confusing. Well, the table he's talking about is the altar, and the bread that is mentioned is in fact the sacrifice.

These could have been menka offerings. They could have been eve and wave offerings that were actually put on the altar. But they include meat offerings.

And we know this because of what he continues on to say, that the sacrifices are blind and lame and so on. And this is directly prohibited in the law to have any blemishes in the sacrifices. So it's a direct contravention of multiple scriptures that talk about the quality of a sacrifice.

Deuteronomy chapter 15, verse 21. If there is a defect in an animal sacrifice, if it is lame or blind or has any serious defect, you shall not sacrifice it to the Lord, your God. Deuteronomy 15, 21.

Leviticus 22, 20 through 25. Whatever has a defect, you shall not offer, for it shall not be acceptable on your behalf. Whoever offers a sacrifice of a peace offering to the Lord to fulfill his vow, free will offering from the cattle or sheep, it must be perfect to be accepted.

There shall be no defect in it. Those that are blind or broken or maimed, have an ulcer, eczema or scabs, you shall not offer to the Lord, nor make an offering by fire of them on the altar to the Lord. Either a bull or a lamb that has any limb too long or too short, you may offer as a free will

offering, but for a vow, it shall not be accepted.

Because for a vow, you are putting the animal directly for yourself. We saw this when we did Levitical offerings. So we say, well, but we're past the days of animal sacrifice.

So if I'm trying to turn the corner from observation into interpretation and application, what would we say? If you love God, think about people you love on this earth. If you love someone, if you love them dearly, how far out will you put yourself on their behalf? Do you express genuine deep love for someone with a tacky last minute gift you got at the dime store? They don't even have dime stores anymore. What are they? Dollar stores.

Tells you about inflation right there. When I was a kid, there were dime stores. When my parents were kids, there was the five and ten.

Now dollar stores are having trouble staying open. But the gift is an effort to reflect your appreciation, your love for someone, right? When we do things for one another, it is an expression of love. It's an expression of esteem and appreciation, right? So if these people are bringing the lame and the blind as sacrifices, and it's a well-known fact that the table of the Lord is contemptible, I wouldn't eat.

That's why I'm putting it on the altar. I wouldn't even bring that home and cut a steak or a roast off it and eat it myself. No lamb chops off of that animal.

That thing's got scabs and blemishes and weird running sores. Well, let's take it down to the temple. We'll offer it there.

That'll suffice. You think about how far down the scale God is when you wouldn't even let the governor see an animal like this being prepared for his meal, but you'll take it down to the temple and offer it to God. Well, what would that represent to us? What are our sacrifices today? Do we have sacrifice? How many times have we seen Romans 12, 1 and 2? We present ourselves a living sacrifice, blemished, blind, and lame.

Is that what it says? Holy and acceptable to God, which is our reasonable service. Present yourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable. So is there a potential for presenting ourselves as a blind, lame, and diseased sacrifice? How would that happen? Not availing ourselves of the grace of God for cleansing, for healing, for rehabilitation.

It is a reflection of our love or lack thereof, the extent to which we come before God unblemished, undamaged, uncorrupted. Now we sin, we fail all the time, but there is a fountain filled with blood drawn from Emmanuel's veins and sinners plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stains. We are made whole.

We are restored. We are sanctified. We are washed by the Word of God, by the Spirit of God, because of the work of Jesus Christ on our behalf.

But in the same way that salvation is not automatic for the world, God loved the world and sent His Son to die for the world, but not all the world is going to be saved. Believers have the opportunity to be cleansed, to be forgiven, to be restored and made whole, but in the same way, it is only going to happen if we claim it, if we exercise that privilege, if we go to the place of cleansing with the humility to acknowledge our sins. God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

If we are forgiven and cleansed, we are sanctified, not by works of righteousness, which we have done, but according to His mercy. We are delivered. We can be delivered out of this present evil age, from its pull, its drag, its deception, its deflection, its distractions, but we have to go to God actively.

Why would we go to God and present ourselves holy and acceptable as sacrifices? Because we don't have the attitude these Malachi priests and people had, where God is trivial and unimportant, and His name doesn't mean anything. We carry His name. We have Bibles around.

We've got a verse on the wall. But do we care enough to offer the sacrifices of praise, to offer the sacrifices of thanksgiving, and to offer ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable, to examine ourselves, find out where the failures are, and go to the only power in the universe that can fix them, fix them at their source, and make us better than we are. That's what it takes.

So, look at these specific problems that are prohibited in the law for a reason. Because you say the table of the Lord is contemptible, it's not worth visiting. It's not worth sanctifying.

It's not worth honoring or reverencing, much less loving. The table is contemptible. You know, many of the sacrifices in Israel ended up being a meal, where some of it would go to the priest, and the rest of it would be eaten by the guy offering it, or the family offering the sacrifice.

We saw this again when we went through Levitical offerings. But oftentimes there was a shared meal, and you could eat the meat the same day or the next day. You couldn't save it two days.

And there were portions that were eaten by the priest. But if they're saying the table is contemptible, you know what this means? They're offering it to God, but they're not eating it themselves. And the priests are looking at it, and this is not Hophni and Phinehas taking the clawed hook and pulling the meat out of the pot and saying, I'm going to eat this.

They said, I wouldn't eat that. But they're offering it to God, offering to God what they won't touch. And God says, try that with your governor.

See how far you get. And yet now you're going to come to me and make requests. Verse nine, entreat God's favor that he may be gracious to us as kind of a lucky charm.

Or, well, it can't hurt. I'll send up a prayer, but I'm not going to fear, honor, much less love God in the process. So it's contemptible.

You offer the blind as a sacrifice. How would I, Sam, offer myself as a blind sacrifice in Romans 12, 1 and 2? What would my problem be? Remember the Pharisees? Gospel of Matthew. John chapter nine.

Are we blind also? If you were blind, you would have no sin because God can fix it. But because you say we see when you are actually blind, your sin remains. You don't go to God to have the scales removed from your eyes, to have the mud applied to your eyes, to have Jesus do the healing to confer sight.

Not just sight, but navigational, recognitional, and all the other abilities that go with it that take us years to learn. Hand-eye coordination. The guy got it all instantaneously from the Lord Jesus.

Blindness cured by the power of God. But if you say I don't need the power of God, I don't consider myself to be blind, your sin remains. Blind.

Blind to the love of God. How does this begin? In what way have you loved us? Blind to the expression of God's love. Blind to His provision.

Blind to His protection. Blind to His discipline. His judgment.

His exhortations. His prophets. Those who are sent.

Blind to the message. Blind to the grace. Blind to the opportunity.

This is much worse in our case than bringing a blind animal. We're bringing a blind self to the altar. When you offer the blind as a sacrifice, is it not evil? And when you offer the lame and the sick, what does it mean to not be able to walk? How many walk exhortations do we have in the New Testament? We walk by faith and not by sight.

Walk worthy of your calling. The Christian walk, it's become a phrase for your spiritual life. The walk of faith.

Walking the narrow road. If you're lame, you're not making progress. And it's the lowest form.

Those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength and fly. Right? They shall mount up with wings as eagles. They shall run and not be weary.

They'll walk and not faint. If you're lame, can't get enough airspeed up to get off the ground. Can't maintain a run.

You just end up limping and staggering down the road. The lame. What does my walk of faith look like? Am I genuinely trusting God when fear invades? When frustration? When annoyance? When impatience? When anger at the state of things and the flippant ways that our national history and our social conscience and everything else is being abused and misdirected.

The heinous things that are going on all around us. Does it trip us? Does it make us stumble?

Do we fall? Or do we renew our strength? And if it's too rough a ground to walk on, well, let's fly. Let's mount up with wings as eagles.

Eagles, you know, the eagle face on the cherub is the representation of deity. I was reviewing with Denise the themes of the four gospels. You remember that? You've got Matthew presenting Jesus as the conquering king.

You have Mark presenting him as the suffering servant. You have Luke presenting him as the son of man. And then you have John presenting him as the son of God.

And those are the four faces on the cherubim. When you go to Ezekiel and you've got the face of a man, you've got the face of an ox, which is the servant. You've got the face of an eagle, which is his divinity.

Which one am I leaving out? Ox, man, eagle, and what? Lion. The lion of the tribe of Judah. The king.

Conquering king is the lion. Suffering servant is the ox. Son of man, face of a man.

Son of God, face of an eagle. Soaring with the aerial view, the big picture. So, the lame.

What about the sick? Sickness, in the ancient world especially, as in the modern day, tends to come from being exposed to something unhealthy. You eat it. You come in contact with it.

Other than congenital problems, like the man that was blind from birth or lame from birth. But generally, sickness, illness, came by exposure to something. And prolonged contact with a pathogen or an infectious agent will produce illness.

Is our contact with the world so prolonged that it makes us unable to function and strengthen health? We become anemic. We become lackadaisical. We're unmotivated.

We're innervated. We are infected. Sick.

Is that the kind of sacrifice we want to bring before God once or twice a week? Three or four times a week? You know, there was a lamb sacrificed in the morning and in the evening. Every day in Israel. Daily sacrifice.

Start the day, end the day with a reminder. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Is it not evil? Try that in the human realm.

You've got common sense enough to know that that doesn't fly when you're trying to please people. But you've lost all consciousness of who God is. Well, it's something to think about.

If you're going to entreat God's favor, as He says in verse 9, that He may be gracious to us while this is being done by your hands, will He accept you favorably? Fair question. I have one final thought. It's only peripherally related here.

But I was thinking about Joshua. Joshua has been getting a bad rap in progressive Christianity. They don't like Joshua because he perpetrated genocide.

And so that can't be the Word of God. Jesus never did a genocide. Jesus never approved genocide.

If you've seen Jesus, you've seen the Father. Jesus didn't do genocide. Therefore, the Father doesn't do genocide.

So if you see genocide, it's not God. It's something else. And they will always cite Joshua leading the Israelites into the land of Canaan and wiping out the Amorites.

So here's my final thought for the day. A little trivia question. What was Joshua's original name? Joshua the son of Nun.

What's his original name? Because Joshua is not it. Anybody remember? You can go back. You can find this in Numbers.

I can't remember. I think it may be 1311 or something. I don't have it written down.

But his original name was Hosea. Hosea. Comes from the same root.

He's Hosea the son of Nun. Or Hosea the son of Nun. Hosea means salvation.

But Moses changed his name. And the annotation of it is given when they're giving the list of the spies that went into the land of Canaan. And it says that Hosea the son of Nun, Moses changed his name to Joshua.

Yahoshua. Which is Yahweh saves. Moses said, you know, there's such a thing as deliverance.

There's such a thing as salvation. But when I look at you, what I think of is the Lord's deliverance. The Lord's salvation.

And he changed his name. And that is the name that was given to the Lord Jesus Christ. Yahoshua.

The Lord's deliverance. Don't let anybody throw rocks at Joshua the son of Nun. He is one of the few figures in the Old Testament about whom nothing negative is ever said.

He had no failures. And I take umbrage when people throw rocks at Joshua and use him as a negative example from scripture as though he did something wrong. There's a reason God named his own son Joshua.

And there's a reason Moses changed Hosea's name to Joshua. It's a good name. He was a good man.

And he doesn't deserve the drubbing he's getting from the lips of believers who don't know

what they're talking about. Anyway, just thought I'd tack that on. Free, no charge.

But we do want to think about the charge. This section in Malachi, this is the longest section in the book. This conversation God has with sort of representative priests and people in Israel.

And it's the last thing God presents to his people before a long silence. And the next time God speaks, he is going to speak through his son, Joshua. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for its enabling power, its convicting power, the instruction, the rebuke, the correction that we receive through it. We pray that your Holy Spirit will help us to understand how it pertains and applies in our lives. Not just what we should do, but how we can do it so that we can truly benefit, be enabled and empowered by your strength to undertake the purpose for which you have put us on this earth and given us this life so that we can represent the Lord Jesus now and we can accompany him in the future and the fulfillment of your plan and purpose throughout the ages.

We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.