

REACH|15

The Irony of Weary Worship and Global Missions

Malachi 1

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⁶“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. But you say, ‘How have we despised your name?’⁷ By offering polluted food upon my altar. But you say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ By saying that the LORD’s table may be despised.⁸ When you offer blind animals in sacrifice, is that not evil? And when you offer those that are lame or sick, is that not evil? Present that to your governor; will he accept you or show you favor? says the LORD of hosts.⁹ And now entreat the favor of God, that he may be gracious to us. With such a gift from your hand, will he show favor to any of you? says the LORD of hosts.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ For 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, says the LORD of hosts.¹² But you profane it when you say that the Lord’s table is polluted, and its fruit, that is, its food may be despised.¹³ But you say, ‘What a 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 you bring as your offering! Shall I accept that from your hand? says the LORD.¹⁴ Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations. (Malachi 1:6–14)

Today is our third and final Sunday of REACH|15, where our aim has been to focus our attention on the mission of our church to reach the nations. We take these three Sundays to focus on global missions because reaching unreached peoples is central to our mission as a church. As we continue to think about our personal spiritual growth, the spiritual needs of our neighbors, and what we can do to help the Brookside neighborhood in downtown Indianapolis, we want to lift our eyes to the needs of the 3 billion people (over 40 percent of the world) who will never even hear the name of Jesus unless something radical happens.

In nine weeks we will have the opportunity to participate in one of the most strategic things that we do as a church to reach unchurched peoples: We will give. Our Christmas offering is a simple, tangible, and effective way for our church to make a difference in the landscape of unreached people groups. Because of past offerings, there are new translations of the Bible that are being used and new translations that are in the works right now. Bible colleges and training centers have been built in remote and dangerous areas. Christian schools have been started in areas that have never heard the gospel. A hospital has been constructed in West Africa. And this year our vision is to see what God might do through the refugee crisis in Lebanon and Ukraine.

But it is not just our money that we are giving. We are also giving our people. Over the last eight years that I’ve been at College Park, it has been amazing to see how many people have been sent out of our church. I asked Nate to pull together a list of the people and families who have been sent out

from our church in the last eight years. It's a total of 35 people in the last eight years!

Plus, we have forty people presently enrolled in JIM night who are actively exploring the Lord's will about their futures, and we have two people who are raising support to go to the mission field.

Our vision for REACH is to help us lift up our eyes and see the field of ministry around the world. REACH is designed to reconnect us to the mantra that Nate gave us a few years ago: "This is for That."

Worship and Missions

Now we need a season like REACH because our vision for missions tends to leak. Next Sunday we'll be back in Romans, and if we are not careful, we could almost forget about or simply not think about our global calling. In fact, it can be very easy to consistently disconnect what we do Sunday after Sunday after Sunday from the reality of global missions.

The burden for this message is born out of this question: How does Sunday morning affect global missions? Or you could think of it this way: What kind of connection is there between worship and missions? I'm going to suggest to you that **theology and doxology fuel missiology**. And not just three Sundays a year, but every Sunday. At least, that is how it should be.

My calling to you on this last Sunday of REACH is to see the connection between your view of God, your worship of God, and your vision for the nations. And then for you to fight against the tendency to disconnect your theology (what you think about God), your doxology (how you worship God) from your missiology (your mission to reach the world). Through Malachi 1, I want you to see that worship fuels global missions, as we see both the beauty of God's plan and the irony of weary worship.

The Beauty of God's Plan

I chose Malachi 1 because of the beautiful vision regarding God's name that is expressed in verse 11:

¹¹ For 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, says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 1:11 (ESV)

But in order to understand the significance of what Malachi is saying, you need to understand something about the context of why this is being said. Let me give you a very brief history.

Malachi was written in middle of the fifth century before the birth of Christ. The divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah had both fallen to foreign invaders. Israel fell to the Assyrians, and Judah, along with the city of Jerusalem, was devastated by the Babylonians. When Babylon was conquered by the Persians, a decree was issued by Cyrus to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 36:22). A number of Jews returned to Jerusalem, the temple was rebuilt, Passover was celebrated, and worship of God in Jerusalem resumed (Ezra 6).

However, the nation of Israel was not restored to her former glory. The people continued to struggle under the weight of being a displaced people. Life was hard and disappointing. And the effect on

worship was substantial. The pressures of daily life began to negatively impact their doxology, their theology, and their sense of mission.

Malachi's burden is to awaken a distracted people out of their worship slumber and reconnect them to the beauty of God's plan in two key ways.

1) Sovereign Love

Malachi 1:2-4 begins with an assurance of God's love for His people based upon His sovereignty. In verse 2 God affirms that He loves His people, and this affirmation is necessary because the people are questioning God's love for them: "... you say, 'How have you loved us?'" (Mal. 1:2b).

God's response is one that the apostle Paul quotes in Romans 9. God says, "I have loved Jacob but Esau I have hated" (Mal. 2:2b-3a). God uses this simple statement to communicate that the basis of everything, including the salvation of nations and individuals, is God's undeserved and unearned love.¹ God's relationship with Israel and the people of God is not based upon circumstances, but upon His sovereign love.

The beauty of this is that there is hope for God's people. Their future, despite the present landscape, is one that is filled with hope. God loves His people, and He is not finished with them. And to make this point clear, Malachi references Edom in verse 4. Even if Edom says that they will rebuild, the Lord will tear it down. Edom will suffer under sovereign judgment forever because of their disobedience outside the people of God.

Malachi wants the people of Israel to have new eyes to look at the plan of God such that they will say (v 5), "Great is the Lord beyond the border of Israel." God loves His people, and they need to remember who they are, who God is, and the significance of His love – even during seasons where life is proving to be disappointing. Underneath their lives is a wellspring of sovereign love.

2) Sovereign Future

The second thing that emerges in this text is God's plan for the future. He not only loves His people, but He also has a plan for the future that is directly connected to His name. Notice the following verses about the greatness of God or the greatness of His name in Malachi 1:

⁵ *Your own eyes shall see this, and you shall say, "Great is the LORD beyond the border of Israel!" Malachi 1:5 (ESV)*

¹¹ *For 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, says the LORD of hosts. Malachi 1:11 (ESV)*

¹ For a full treatment of this concept see: <http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/believing-in-gods-promises-despite-israels-unbelief/> and <http://www.yourchurch.com/sermon/is-election-unfair/>

¹⁴ . . . *For I am a great King, says the LORD of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.*
Malachi 1:14b (ESV)

All three verses are meant to point the people of God to a vision of who God is and what He is doing that goes beyond their present circumstances and their limited view of history. Malachi is trying to remind them the story of Israel is not ultimately about Israel. God set His love on Israel in order to demonstrate His goodness, His kindness, His love and His redemption so that the world would see the beauty of God.

The arc of human history and the trajectory of redemption is to make the name of God known throughout the world. God's name is so great and so glorious that everything is moving toward the ultimate display of His majesty and might. Even the New Testament picks up on this theme:

⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,* ⁵ *even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—* ⁶ *and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,* ⁷ *so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.* *Ephesians 2:4–7 (ESV)*

When the greatness of God's name and the beauty of His name are in its rightful place, it becomes the unifying and the motivating reality for the people of God. They are a people marked by the name of God. What's more, the vision of God's name becoming great among the nations defines their purpose and, very practically, it defines their worship. A people rescued by a God like this see the world differently, and they worship differently because they see God differently. The greatness of God's name to them and to the nations affects both worship and mission.

I understood this fully when I read the first chapter of the book *Let the Nations be Glad*. The first few sentences are worth the price of the book. It directly connects worship and missions because the glory of God is at the center:

*"Missions is not the ultimate goal of the church. Worship is. Missions exists because worship doesn't. Worship is ultimate, not missions, because God is ultimate, not man. When this age is over, and the countless millions of the redeemed fall on their faces before the throne of God, missions will be no more. It is a temporary necessity. But worship abides forever. . . . Worship, therefore, is the fuel and goal in missions. It's the goal of missions because in missions we simply aim to bring the nations into the white-hot enjoyment of God's glory. The goal of missions is the gladness of the peoples in the greatness of God [see Ps 67:3-4; 97:1]. . . . But worship is also the fuel of missions. Passion for God in worship precedes the offer of God in preaching. You can't commend what you don't cherish. . . . Missions begins and ends in worship."*²

God is on a mission to make His name known. The call of Abraham, the Exodus, the conquering of Canaan, the exile to Babylon, the rebuilding of the temple, the coming of Christ, the death and resurrection of Jesus, the establishment of the church, the founding of this church, the moment you

² John Piper, *Let the Nations be Glad* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 11.

put your faith in Christ, this very Sunday, and the second coming of Jesus are all part of His beautiful plan to make His great name known.

When this great name and this sovereign plan are understood, they become the fuel for missions. Have you ever wondered why a missionary would leave his or her family and a familiar country? It is because they cherish and love something more! We recently had someone donate an entire house to be used by missionaries when they are home on furlough! What would cause someone to donate a house? What causes you to break through the awkward moments of a normal conversation and turn it towards the gospel? It happens because you love something more. It is the beauty of God's name that moves us out of our comfort zone.

But why is Malachi saying this about the glory of God? Because something is terribly wrong, and it relates to their worship.

The Irony of Weary Worship

Malachi sets up a stark contrast between the great, glorious, and global name of God in comparison to the weak and weary worship of the people of God. The people of Israel had allowed their worship to become small, thin, rote, and ironically mundane. Worship no longer fueled anything. Their bad theology led to weak doxology, which led to a misaligned missiology. Weary worship leads to a wimpy mission.

In verses 6-9, we see how God unpacks their poor worship:

- God asks where is His honor or respect, the kind of honor offered to a father or to a master (1:6)
- He rebukes the priests for offering polluted offerings (1:7)
- He specifically addresses the fact that they were offering blind and lame animals (1:8)
- God sarcastically suggests that they should offer such gifts to their governor and see what his response would be (1:8b)
- He suggests that God is not about to show His people favor because of their favor-less worship (1:9)
- The people have a very poor attitudes, and they feel justified in their despising of worship (1:12)
- Their words and their actions are revealing – they “snort” at worship and say “What a weariness this is!” (1:13)
- Their offerings were taken by violence, or they were lame or sick animals (1:13b)
- They were cheating the Lord by giving only to “fulfill” the vow through the sacrifice of something that was blemished (1:14)

Do you see what is going on here? The people had fallen into an all-too common pattern when it comes to worship. They had forgotten who it was that they were meeting with, and they found short-cus and half-hearted ways to act like they were worshipping, when in reality their hearts were far from God. Their leaders and the people treated the worship of God with terrible attitudes.

Lame and blind sheep, polluted food, and hearts that were tired of it all were the things that characterized them. They were not just going through the motions; they were faking it, doing just enough to make it seem like they were worshipping God, but in reality their worship was a joke.

God knew their hearts. He knew what was going on, and I want you to notice the stunning thing that He says in Malachi 1:10.

¹⁰ 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. Malachi 1:10 (ESV)

Can you imagine! God wants to shut the whole thing down: Shut the doors, lock the temple, and extinguish the fire. In our setting it would be turn off the lights, shut the doors, and send everyone home. That is a pretty dramatic statement. But it fits with the severity of the problem.

Frankly, God is offended. After all, there is a reason behind the offering of a lame sheep or a blind goat. Do you know what it is? The worshipper weighs the value of the good sheep to his livelihood, and he compares that to the value of God in his life. He gives a sheep because he wants to keep up appearances. But he gives a lame sheep because he loves the promise of a healthy sheep over the promise of great God. Therefore, the lame sheep is merely symptomatic of a deep-seated values' issue.

Weary worship happens because of a low view of God. It does not fit with the greatness of God, the beauty of His name or the compelling nature of His mission in the world. And that is why God says, "Shut it down."

The tragic irony of weary worship is that the people of God are gathered before the face of God, but their vision and valuation of God is so misplaced that they miss what could be. They miss the beauty of God's redemptive love. They miss the awe of His sovereign grace in their lives. They miss the stunning reminder that everything they have is a gift from Him. They miss the power of connecting their lives to the greater mission of God. They are bored with the most amazing reality in the universe. The irony is startling and tragic.

For some of you, that is how you view a focus on missions. You barely tolerate it. And maybe you have even recently thought, "What is the big deal?" You cannot wait to get back to other topics or themes that are more "applicable." But do you know what the real problem is? The problem is that your vision of God is not big enough. You may come to church. You look to get something out of it. But you are missing the greater reality of God's greatness and the fame of His name.

Do you know that you can actually come to church and not have anything related to worship be about God? You can snort at what happens in church, especially during REACH, because the real reason that you are here is you think Christianity is simply about going to heaven and having a better life now with Jesus inside of you. And you may have missed the key reality of the gospel, which is that Jesus died in order to reconcile you to God! The cross and empty tomb are the means of something more: reconciliation with a holy God who will be worshipped by every nation, tribe, and tongue.

Weary worship in light of who God is and what He has done is not only ironic; it is tragic and dangerous. Let me give you a few examples by way of some pastoral implications.

Pastoral Implications

If theology and doxology fuel missiology, then there are some things we should carefully consider:

1. Work to develop and pray for a high view of God

Notice that I'm saying that you should both work at it and pray for it. A high view of God is something that is both given and cultivated. We cultivate it by what we read, memorize, think about, take notes on, and create. We stir up big thoughts about God as we sing and as we worship God in prayer. And in response to these spiritual resources, God helps us to see things about Himself that we have never seen before. Something supernatural happens through the Word, through singing, and through prayer – whether in private or in a congregation. God gives us a vision of who He is.

I love the heart of the psalmist in Psalm 27 – *“One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” Psalm 27:4 (ESV)*

2. Do not take Sundays for granted

One of the vital ways that you can create and re-engage your heart with the greatness of God and His purpose in the world is to not take Sunday worship for granted. By that I mean: What is your attitude in regard to the gathering of God's people? How do you prepare your heart for worship on the Lord's Day? What is your attitude when it comes to receiving the Word of God? Is there any sense of anticipation in your heart as you come to worship on a Sunday?

Weary-hearted and unintentional worship is not just bad for your soul; it fails to connect us to the greater mission that God has called us to. Churches with a big view of God and robust worship are more inclined to reach the world because week after week they are reminded about the one thing that motivates going or giving: the fame of God's name.

3. Foster a passionate God-centered culture

Finally, I want to ask you to consider what you are doing to facilitate a God-centered culture around you. What will you do in the next month in order to keep God's fame and God's name in the forefront of your mind and heart? What will your family do to keep the glory of God and the spread of His name in the midst of your value-set?

What can you do to keep worship from becoming weary? What steps can you take to be sure that you don't allow yourself to slip back into a pattern of self-concern, forgetting about the nations?

I think that there is a link between theology, doxology and missions. I think that there is a link between your vision of God, your worship of God, and your heart for the nations. And I want our church, my life, and your life to reflect the vision of Malachi 1:10 -

From the rising of the sun to its setting, may the Lord's name be great among the nations.

Because from Sunday to Sunday, at College Park Church, the Lord's name was seen as great!

Because day after day, the Lord's name was treasured as great in all of our lives.

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