

in their faith and who have fallen into careless worship.

We must remember that worship is to be God focused, but we must also remember that it is to be found as the center of the community that follows Jesus.

Joel Green comments “God’s purpose in the world is not the creation of holy individuals so much as a holy community, a people whose very existence in the world is a testimony to his rule. First Peter implies that this is the foundation for how the church will demonstrate the distinctiveness of its God to its surrounding culture.”

Beach, Lee (2015-01-05). *The Church in Exile: Living in Hope After Christendom* (Kindle Locations 1839-1841). Intervarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

We also avoid careless worship by remembering that worship is our witness to the world. If I have learned anything in my time away studying the church after Christendom, I have learned that the primary witness to the culture is the church at worship.

Last week, on Saturday night, Robin and I were in Barcelona Spain and we entered into the great Cathedral when Saturday night Mass was being held. It was an interesting moment. While there were many tourists at the back of the Cathedral whispering, looking around and taking pictures, at the front of the Cathedral the Mass was being held. Several hundred individuals were participating. Prayers were being recited, hymns being sung, words of institution spoken and participants going to the altar for communion. While this was happening tourists were in the back. Some were completely oblivious to what was happening. Others were curious enough to stand behind the ropes and catch a glimpse. Some of them had the look of someone who had stumbled onto an alien city. What was this strange thing and who were these strange people. All the while the church worshipped. They were not concerned that everyone did not join them. Why should they? They were not concerned that everyone understood what they were doing? How could they? They did not expect the world to embrace them or join them. They just knew that they were God’s people and that God was worthy of worship.



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TRINITY PULPIT

COME LET US WORSHIP

The Problem With Careless Worship

Malachi 1:6-14



When I say the word worship, what is the first thought that comes to your mind? For some, it might be this moment we are experiencing right now. For many of us, it is to picture this sanctuary and sitting where you sit each week. For others, it might be to recall a powerful anthem by the choir. For some, the first thought might be “boring.” (We will address that in a few moments.) There are many images and words that come to our minds when we say worship.

In our culture we describe worship with many terms and descriptors. Some of the adjectives are simply an indication of time. It might be morning worship or evening worship or mid-week worship. We might use terms to state for whom the worship service is planned. It might be “children’s worship” or “youth worship.” In recent decades we have used adjectives to describe certain styles, mostly meaning music, in regards to worship. So we speak of traditional worship, contemporary worship, liturgical worship, blended worship, ancient-future worship, contemplative worship, and even casual worship. However we describe it, we can agree that what is to occur in these moments of gathering is worship. The intent of the worship service of the church should be to honor and give glory to God. Now that does not always happen, but that of course is our intent.

In our value statement regarding worship we state:

Trinity Baptist Church values biblical worship, which stresses the presence and the majesty of God. Worship should be God directed. Worship should inform, challenge, and encourage the believer. Worship should declare God’s message of love through Christ. Worship should involve all of the senses and the intellect.

Most of our statement is projected in the right direction. We describe our worship as biblical. What we mean by that is to follow the example of scripture in worship. The worship in the Old Testament and New Testament is that

which is filled with singing and praise, prayer, reading and listening to God’s word, a time of teaching, a time of giving and response to God. All of those are found in our time of worship. However, what is the essence of our value statement is that worship is to be God directed. Worship is to focus on who God is and what God has done in and through God’s son Jesus. When we fail to do this, then we have failed to truly worship.

In our text from Malachi, the people and namely the priests were guilty of what we might call careless worship. They were still offering sacrifices. They were still going through the motions, but their attitude toward worship had become careless. So much so that God says in verse 10 “I wish one of you would just shut the Temple doors so that you would not light these useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you.” In other words, God says if you go to worship this way then just shut it down. I would rather there not be worship than this careless worship, which you are participating in. How were the priests and people of Malachi’s day guilty of careless worship? That is what the priests were asking as well. God says you have shown contempt for my name. The priests respond how have we shown contempt for your name? Careless worship had become such the norm that they did not even recognize it. God calls them to something more.

They were careless because they did not offer God the honor and glory due God. God’s first charge is where is the honor due me? God states, “a son honors his father and a servant his master. If I am a father where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me? There are two illustrations used by God to make the point. The first is master. The master/servant relationship is not one that is necessarily filled with affection. But, whether you feel like it or not, just the matter of position makes one show honor and respect. Then there is another relationship and that is father and son. This would have implied a more intimate relationship and one that could be filled with emotion. God has already stated God’s love for His people, indicating a deepening relationship over master and servant. God asks, if I am

you father where is the honor due me? The two words honor and respect are closely related. The word honor comes from a term meaning heaviness or burden. The concept is that in a father/child relationship there is an understanding that there should be honor. It is imposed on us through relationship. The second term, which is translated respect means glory, splendor, or abundant in riches and is in regard to external circumstances. Again, whether we feel it or not...God deserves honor and respect.

The carelessness of the worship of those in Malachi was that they essentially offered empty words. They may have spoke of God, as master or even father but the honor that accompanied those words were absent.

They were careless in worship because they did not offer God their best. This is a theme that is found throughout our text. First, they were offering animals for sacrifice that were diseased, blind and cripple. The instructions of what type of animals to be offered as sacrifices were clear. They were to be without blemish but here the priests had become so casual and careless that they were offering animals that were not the best, but really they were offering the worst. The attitude is "what difference does it make?" The attitude is "God will understand."

God asks, "Is this not wrong?" The question is asked in a way as to suggest the answer of the priests is "no this is not wrong." They had become use to their careless approach to God and to worship that they also had rationalized that offering anything to God was better than offering nothing. Surely God should be pleased that we make some type of effort, even as poor as it might be. God will surely understand our dilemma. Why should we offer our best when we can offer these animals? After all, they are going to be sacrificed. What a waste it would be to offer the best when these diseased and blemished animals are available.

They rationalized they could offer God seconds and leftovers and God would forgive them. God says "you offer this to me an then implore me to be gracious to you." Yet, they rationalized God would understand. However, God responds by asking would you offer such a sacrifice to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? What you would never consider doing in regards to and earthly leader you without hesitation offer to God.

As our culture continues, it moves away from Christendom and primary role of the church in culture and the influence of the church in culture we are faced with what shall we offer to God. When it comes to our attention, energy, resources, time and priorities, what shall we offer to God? What place will worship have in our lives in the years to come? Is the worship of God, the gathering of God's people to offer worship, a priority for us? Or is it simply what we do when there is no other pressing matter or matter that we would rather do or would like to do?

Stanley Hauerwas and Will Willmon begin their book "Resident Aliens" with the story of what happened in Greenville South Carolina in 1963. They write:

In Greenville, South Carolina, in defiance of the state's time-honored blue laws, the Fox Theater opened on Sunday. Seven of us— regular attenders of the Methodist Youth Fellowship at Buncombe Street Church— made a pact to enter the front door of the church, be seen, then quietly slip out the back door and join John Wayne at the Fox. That evening has come to represent a watershed in the history of Christendom, South Carolina style. On that night, Greenville, South Carolina— the last pocket of resistance to secularism in the Western world— served notice that it would no longer be a prop for the church. There would be no more free passes for the church, no more free rides. The Fox Theater went head to head with the church over who would provide the worldview for the young. That night in 1963, the Fox Theater won the opening skirmish.

Hauerwas, Stanley (2014-04-15). Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony (Expanded 25th Anniversary Edition) (Kindle Locations 257-263). Abingdon Press. Kindle Edition.

Now that might not be your moment of conflict, but for most of us it was when we had to work on Sunday for the first time or our child's soccer game was scheduled on Sunday morning, or every race or walk for some good charity can be held on a Sunday because that way there is less traffic on the streets for the authorities to contain. It might be the time when you have the opportunity to just take the day off and sleep in and do some work around the house. God knows I am tired, God knows the yard needs to be mowed, God knows we are busy... we implore you God be gracious to us. God will understand.

How easy it is to rationalize God understands our leftovers.

The priests also were guilty of careless worship because of their attitude toward worship. They offered empty words without honor and respect. They rationalized God did not deserve our best. They viewed worship as a burden. God says of the priests you say, "What a burden and you sniff with contempt".

They no longer viewed the worship of God as a privilege or joy, but rather as a burden. Worship had become something we had to do and needed to do. It had become a duty to perform, but not a joy to experience. God says you sniff with contempt. The image is of the priests putting their noses into the air in contempt. Careless worship had become the norm because they just did not want to give the effort needed for true worship. They decided it was jus too difficult. It was not worth their time or energy.

How do we avoid careless worship? How does living in

a culture that does not support our choice of worship, nor understand our choice of ordering our lives with worship do we not make the same mistakes as those of Malachi's day?

First, we must remember that worship is about God and not about me. If we fail to see the greatness and majesty of God, then we can easily fall into careless worship. God makes a statement about himself in verse 11. God says "My name will be great among the nations from the rising to the setting of the sun. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to My name because My name will be great among the nations." God is saying that worship is about Me. It is not about our little glimpse of this world. No God is the great God and will be praised in every place. This is God's creation, this is our Father's world, and as vast and beautiful as God's creation is it is only a glimpse, a testimony to the true greatness of God. God is worthy of our worship.

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We must keep God centered of our worship. I like what John Piper writes in a sermon on this text regarding God's greatness. Piper suggests that we fall into careless worship when we fail to see God's greatness. Piper writes:

But how does this cause careless worship? (Not seeing God's greatness) Malachi's answer: It makes a person bored with God and excited about the world. If you don't see the greatness of God, then all the things that money can buy become very exciting. If you can't see the sun, you will be impressed with a streetlight. If you've never felt thunder and lightning, you'll be impressed with fire works. And if you turn your back on the greatness and majesty of God, you'll fall in love with a world of shadows and short-lived pleasures.

I would add when we fail to recognize God's greatness we also tend to focus on self. Worship in our culture has become very individualistic and is judged from a very subjective point of view. There are some symptoms of careless worship that has replaced God with me at the center.

First, it is passive and not participatory. When we arrive at worship and we sit ourselves down and say ok entertain me or make me feel something. We have adopted an attitude of passivity and not one of participation. We have quickly fallen into careless worship. We arrive at church as consumers and we leave as judges.

Now I know this is hard for us. The truth is everything in our culture says it is about me and me having things my way. The church has spent countless hours, resources and energy seeking to be relevant to the culture. Ironically the more we try to make the church like the world in the name of relevancy the less the world is being transformed

by the church. In other words, putting our needs, our wants and our preferences as the center of worship has failed. You and I never belonged at the center of worship. God and God alone must be the center.

I have heard over the years comments like "I did not get anything out of worship." Most of the time I have responded with a kind pastoral comment like "Oh I am sorry to hear that. What are some things we can do to make the experience more to your liking? We want you to get something from worship." However, I have become convinced that this is the wrong response. I think the proper response is to "I did not get anything from worship" should be "Good, you are not suppose to. Worship is not about us receiving it is about us giving it all away." Worship is about us leaving it all on the altar every Sunday. We enter as consumers, takers and those who claim we are deserving, but when we truly worship and encounter God we leave with a sense of thanksgiving, overwhelmed by grace and rejoicing that we could offer to God our priorities, time, treasures and very lives. If we would avoid careless worship we must keep God as our focus.

We must also remember that worship is corporate. Worship is about God and us. It is true you can engage in personal worship of God, but that is not the purpose of the worship of the church. The church at worship is the gathering of a people who have been called out in this world and are a living witness to God's existence and presence.

In "Daring Greatly," Brene Brown mentions a study regarding popular music over the last 30 years. A study was performed concerning the lyrics of the most popular songs over the last 30 years. Those conducting the study discovered something very interesting. They discovered that in the last 30 years there has been a significant decline in the use of terms like we and us in lyrics and an increase of the words I and me. In addition, there is a decline in words relating to social connections and positive emotions and an increase in words related to anger and antisocial behavior using more words like hate and kill.

This is our world. Our world says it is about me, but the Bible teaches us that it is about God first and us second. Worship is the testimony of the church, the people of God, the community of Christ, giving witness. I believe the more our culture moves away from the church and its influence, the more important the church will become to those who follow Jesus. We will want more and more to be together, and share life together. Gathering will become more important to us. There might not be as many of us in years to come because the truth is our culture is purging the church of those who are luke warm