

Worship Duty

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[0 : 00] And we've just got some really talented people here at the church. We're good with computers and animation and Alex Tullow and Esther Matthew did a great job with that. You can applaud. We're in an Anglican church, but you can still...

It's so good to be with you tonight to open up a new sermon series with you. As we look into the book of Malachi over the next four weeks, we're going to use Malachi as a mirror for our own church, our own experience of God.

We're going to see what God has to teach us from this book of Malachi. And I guess I need to preface tonight in a few different ways. First of all, I've had a few people come up to me tonight.

And if you're new or visiting, you don't know that normally this is not how we set up the church. And a few people have quite mischievously said to me that as soon as Paul leaves, we rearrange the church.

That's not the case at all. I just need to say that. We never approached Paul about this and he was never opposed to us doing anything creative at all. So you need to shelve that. We just thought we'd mess around with the place and I like it.

[1 : 15] So it's going to stay. So tonight, what we're going to do is do a little bit of housekeeping.

I feel like I need to do a bit of housekeeping here tonight. And you need to know, just so you don't freak out if you're kind of a Bible nerd or you're a bit concerned, what we normally do and what I normally do is preach 40, 50 minute sermons verse by verse through the text.

So you need to know that that's the way we do things here. But tonight, that's not the way I'm going to do this sermon. I sort of feel I have a burden from God to talk to us as a church.

And so it's a little bit ironic, but I think the sermon tonight is going to be a very inward looking sermon about how we need to be more outward looking. So you need to bear with me in this. And also tonight, you might hear some criticism of us as a congregation.

And you need to hear that as criticism coming toward myself as well as us. And I want you to accept it in a godly way and not reject it outright.

[2 : 21] I need you to hear me and see what God might be saying to us through that. And we can weigh it together. So why don't I pray for us?

We'll get into the text. I'll go really briefly through a bit of Malachi. And then we'll talk about worship evangelism in this service, in this church, with these people.

All right, let's pray. Heavenly Father, we need your help to understand your word. And we need your help to discern what you're saying to us. So I pray that your spirit would come and really move among us.

That those who are here who are Christians would be really convicted and changed to be more like Jesus. That our church would become a better place. That serves you better. Glorifies you better.

Welcomes people better. Draws people in more thoroughly. I pray, Lord, that if there are those here who are not Christians, that you would turn their hearts towards you.

[3 : 16] That you would raise them from spiritual death and bring them into an eternal relationship with your son. In whose name we pray. Amen. All right, so if you've got a Bible, please turn to Malachi chapter 1.

If you don't have a Bible in front of you, just get someone in your row to go down to the back pews and get you on. Okay, so everyone needs one. I want you to track with me through this. I said we're going to move briefly through Malachi, but it's still important that we have the text there.

So just by way of a little bit of background, the book of Malachi, as you might know, it's the last book in the Old Testament. And in terms of the historical context, we're about 450 BC.

Okay, and this is post-exile. So remember the people of Israel, God disciplined them for their sin and for their wanton, habitual, unrepentant sin against him.

He disciplined them by exiling them from the land. And so the Babylonians come in and carried them away and they were exiled. The temple was destroyed and Jerusalem kind of caved in on itself.

[4 : 24] And so this is after that. After they'd spent this time being disciplined by God, away from their precious land, they've come back into the land after this punishment and after about 70 years in exile.

And so they've come back to Jerusalem. Jerusalem's been rebuilt. The temple has been restored. And the question is, I need you to look at me. Hey guys, I know this is going to be really hard because it's hot, but I need you to stay with me right the way through this.

Okay, because this is important stuff. So, listen, the people came back into the land after this 70 years of exile. And the question on the lips of every angel in heaven, okay, and everyone looking on was, will the people have changed?

Will God's people be any different than when they were exiled? And the answer is no. They're not.

They haven't changed. They're still sinful. They're still rebellious. They still fail to trust God. They still fail to keep his commandments. And so you can imagine every angel in heaven just watching this going, what are you doing?

[5 : 37] What are you doing? God loves you. He wants you to be in relationship with him. But we're going to see over the next four weeks that the people of God are sceptical about God's love, whether he loves them or not.

They're careless in their worship. They're indifferent to truth. Right? They're disobedient to the covenant. They're faithless in their marriages. And they're really stingy when it comes to giving God out of their possessions and their money.

And you can just see those angels despairing. It's a tragedy. They've come back from this time of discipline and yet they're no different.

So rather than send one of those angels to speak to the people of God, God, as he often does with the other prophets, sends a man.

And the man's name is Malachi. And Malachi means, does anyone know? Have you seen the promo? Malachi means, one of you knows it.

[6 : 40] Linda, say it. Yes, my messenger. Malachi is God's messenger to his people. And you can see in verse 1, the nature of the message.

It says, an oracle, the word of the Lord to Israel by Malachi. Now the word for that word oracle is burden. That Malachi has a burden that he's carrying around.

It's the word of the Lord to these rebellious people. So what I plan to do, God willing, over the next four weeks is just take this burden of Malachi's and I want to draw out four themes for us over the next four weeks.

And I want to talk about, tonight I want to talk about worship. And particularly worship evangelism. Talk more about what that means in a minute. And I want to talk about justice. The justice and judgment of God next week.

And then the following week, we're going to talk about money and giving. What it means for us to be generous, sacrificial givers. And then in the fourth week, we're going to talk about the gospel according to Malachi. Because Malachi, as with every other book in the Bible, Malachi points to Jesus.

[7 : 54] And Malachi, even more pointedly, points to Jesus. Especially in the final chapter. And we're going to see more about that in the fourth week. So, tonight's big theme.

Worship evangelism. And the truth is this. This is what you need to get in your minds. The big picture is this. God designed public worship, like we've got right here. And one of his designs in creating public worship was that people, outsiders, pagans, unbelievers, would see the people of God worshipping him and they would be drawn to God through that experience.

That like a moth to a flame, they would see us worshipping God and being overwhelmed with gratitude to him and thankfulness for who he is and what he's done. And they would see that and that they would see that God truly is in our midst and that they would want to be with him as well through that.

So, it's an attractional thing. It should be an attractional thing. We shouldn't have worship over here and evangelism over here. They're actually very much intertwined. I've got some scriptures that help explain this.

So, from Isaiah chapter 56, it says this, verse 6 to 8, And the foreigners, that is the unbelievers, the pagans, the God-haters, who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord and to be his servants, all who keep the Sabbath and do not profane it and hold fast to my covenant, these I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer.

[9 : 34] Their burnt offerings and their sacrifices, that is their worship, will be accepted on my altar, for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Thus says the Lord God, who gathers the outcasts of Israel, I will gather others to them besides those already gathered.

That is that people will join in, outsiders will join in with the people of God in their worship of God. About Psalm 67, 3 and 4, Let the peoples praise you, O God.

Let the peoples praise you. Let the nations, that is the unbelievers, be glad. Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon the earth.

Zechariah was around, Zechariah was around about 80 years before Malachi. He said this, chapter 2, verse 11, Many nations shall join themselves to the Lord on that day and shall be my people and I will dwell in your midst and ye shall know that the Lord of hosts has sent me to you.

And from chapter 8, Thus says the Lord of hosts, listen to this, In those days ten men from the nations of every language shall take hold of a Jew, take hold of a believer, grasping his garment and saying, Let us go with you, for we have heard that God is with you.

[10 : 57] Guys, people are supposed to see us worshipping God publicly and they're going to want to take a hold of our garments and say, Can we please go with you to church?

God is with you guys. We want to know God. It's a response to the way that we worship him. Malachi says it himself in chapter 1, We heard it.

God's sort of responding to their faithless worship and their empty worship and their hypocritical worship. And he says, rebuking them, From the rising of the sun to its setting, this is verse 11, My name is great among the nations and in every place incense is offered in my name, that is, worship is offered to me and a pure offering, for my name is great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.

That's the way it's meant to be and yet his people are failing to show the nations what it is to worship God. Malachi's big problem is that the people of God, the people of God are orthodox, they believe in God or at least they say the right things about God, they're not really committing any great heresy, but their orthodoxy is a dead orthodoxy, they're dead inside, they're cold, cold-hearted towards God, they're indifferent.

Isn't that the worst thing? The worst kind of church would be an indifferent church, wouldn't it? Just lukewarm. That's what these guys are like. They're indifferent.

[12 : 37] And so we heard in the reading, they say things like, what a weariness this is to worship you, unmotivated, indifferent people. The ESV study Bible makes a note on it in the introduction.

It says, Malachi's contemporaries, these people of God, they were relatively orthodox in their beliefs, but theirs had become a dead orthodoxy. They were all too ready to make ethical compromises.

That's what happens when you're indifferent towards God, you start compromising ethically, and to dilute the strenuous demands of proper worship. In response to the cynicism and religious malaise that is indifference of his contemporaries, Malachi's prophecy comes as a wake-up call to renewed covenant fidelity or faithfulness.

Malachi's coming to wake these people up to their indifference. So we heard the main problem with Malachi's people, verse 13, they say, what a weariness this is.

Worshipping God, coming to church week in, week out, what a weariness. They don't want to be there. It's worship duty. What a weariness this is, you say, and you sniff at me.

[13 : 57] You bring what has been taken by violence or is lame or is sick, and this you bring as your offering. It's like in the animation that we saw. This guy was way more interested in himself than his wife, and so he did great things for himself, spent his money on himself, and when it came to offering something to his wife, whom he should be honouring, honouring, all he came up with is a five cent flower.

Same with these people. They're keeping for themselves and giving God nothing, and it's growing out of their spiritual indifference and dead orthodoxy.

You know the reason why dead orthodoxy doesn't work? You know that churches are full of these people, don't you? Traditional, kind of nominal church goers, they turn up week in, week out, they don't care what happens as long as they're there and then take off afterwards, maybe get a biki on the way out, right?

Maybe they don't believe anything terribly heretical, but they don't have any love in their heart for God, they're indifferent. The reason it doesn't work is because, as I said, God has designed our worship to be so dynamic that it draws other people in, to be so supernaturally effective, affective, that unbelievers see us and want a piece of it.

See, what dead orthodoxy does is it doesn't draw people in, it actually drives them away.

[15 : 40] You know, this is what happened with Albert Einstein. I was reading this book by John Piper, it's called Let the Nations Be Glad, it's about missions and he mentions how Albert Einstein, even though he was quite a religious man, never kind of went in for institutional religion because what he saw in his science was a God that was incomprehensibly glorious.

Just a majestic God and creator. And what he saw in a church service was a bunch of indifferent worshippers and he thought that they must be worshipping a different God, that they were selling him short and so he never became a church God.

That's what people see when they come in here, if they come in here and see us indifferently worshipping God. So what's our big problem?

What's the obvious big problem for us? Public worship is designed to draw people in. What's our big problem even here tonight? Church isn't full of people who aren't believers.

We get a few visitors here and there, but are we really drawing people in like moths to a lamp? We're not.

[17 : 17] So then, why don't people come? Let's just break it down. Why don't people come? One reason would be that we don't invite them. We don't invite people to come along.

I was trying to figure out why we don't invite people to come along and I'm the same. Long history of not inviting people to church. One reason I think is because we are very inward focused.

We're kind of hoarding all the good stuff to ourselves. And you know what? I know that you guys are good at selling stuff to people, that inviting people into stuff because I've seen you passionately sell things of this world to other people.

like Apple Mac people, right? People like Apple Macs. Put your hands up. Mac evangelists.

I've seen them this week. Mac monks. That's what they're called these days. And I'm one of them, okay? I have no idea why anyone wouldn't buy a Macintosh computer if you're going to buy one. I have no idea. It's incomprehensible to me.

[18 : 24] But these people are the best evangelists in the world. It's just that they're selling their computers instead of introducing people to God. It's one example. But I know you guys can speak to your friends passionately about what you truly treasure in life.

So it's not that we're incapable of inviting our friends to church. I think one of the reasons is because we are we think that church is not for unbelievers.

We think it's for the Christians. Am I right? Church is for the Christians. So we'll invite maybe our Christian friends to church but no one else.

What about this one? Are we embarrassed about inviting our friends to church because they'll see what church is really like? I've been embarrassed to invite people to church.

I'm worried that we'll do something really kind of geeky and overly Christian and cringeworthy. Can we just admit that that we're embarrassed sometimes to bring people to church?

[19 : 32] What about this? We assume that they'll say no. We just assume that there's no point asking that guy. It's no you know he likes footy and he's a plumber or I don't know.

She does science so she wouldn't be interested in this. so often we sell ourselves short and sell the gospel short. I think Australians are much more willing to come to church than we give them credit for.

They really do. So whose responsibility is it to change this? To counter these reasons why we don't bring people to church? I think it's your responsibility.

I think we have a tendency to sit back and say what's Wayne going to do about this? I hate these 500 things and I'm just going to wait until Wayne fixes it and in the meantime I'm going to gossip about it.

Just a lot of whinging going on in this church. Just a lot of whinging and I'm a prime candidate. I know I'm a whinger. It makes me feel better when I can whinge to other people.

[20 : 39] Let's off steam. But where's the action guys? Where's the responsibility? I tell you I've got an open door policy when it comes to suggestions.

Not to implementing those suggestions but to accepting them. Fully open door. So when it comes to stuff that we can work with then bring your suggestions.

These are the things we won't compromise on. Preaching the gospel preaching the bible worshipping Jesus. There's not a lot else.

So when it comes to the stuff we can work with that will make you more comfortable to bring friends, less worried about them being embarrassed, bring us your suggestions. Email, call, text, carry a pigeon.

I'm just giving you that opportunity to do that. You need to stop whinging. You need to start doing.

[21 : 51] So what about, why don't we narrow the focus a little bit more. We looked at Malachi's situation which has been a situation since the start of the church, since God started gathering his people together for thousands of years and it's continued on into the New Testament church and right through church history we've had this problem where God's people don't worship him as they ought.

And we've seen maybe zoom in a little bit about the big picture of our church. What about some definite things that we can talk about when it comes to our church?

church? I want to track us from the time we leave home to come here on a Sunday night right through to the end of the service.

So before you come to church, too many of you guys are coming too late. Just to be honest. Just coming too late, coming after the start.

And here's the thing, right? I'd be the first one to put my hand up and say that because I work here, I'm here early. Other than that, I'd be here late. So I just want to own that.

[23 : 10] But there's no excuse for us to be really coming in late. I mean, we start the service with both of you and kind of grow from there. And it's kind of demoralizing for people who are involved in the service, but way more than that.

And the main reason I want you to be here on time and before the church service starts is because that's the time when we can welcome newcomers. That's the prime time.

Because I tell you what, newcomers, I hope you'll bear with me, but newcomers and visitors tend to head straight for the exit doors afterwards. And the reason is it's intimidating to be here.

So what's the best time to meet them, greet them, welcome them? It's before the service. It's before the service. So I want to invite everyone here every week, 5.30, we pray together.

We ask God to bless the service, that it would be acceptable to him, that it would honour him, pray for the sermon and the music and all of that. And so I want to invite you to come to that, 5.30. We just pray for 5 or 10 minutes and then you've got 20 minutes to welcome people, to grab yourself a seat, to relax.

[24 : 21] That would be a really good thing. That would be a really good thing. The other thing is too about being on the way here is that it's a great opportunity for you to pray just individually.

When you're on your way here in the car, pray that people become Christians, pray that this service would honour God. What about during the service?

When it comes to singing? By the way, I should plug this. A lot of these ideas come from a really good article that Martin pointed out to me called Ministry of the Pew.

We're going to look at this in more depth on Thursday night if you're a young adult. Next year in some training about how we as a church can minister to one another from the pews.

But a lot of the ideas are coming from here. Ministry of the Pew, it's a Sydney thing. During singing, many of us don't sing as we ought to. Many of us are singing about the most glorious things in creation and we couldn't be any more indifferent.

[25 : 29] Again, I put my hand up. I'm not a singer. I don't like the sound of my voice. I think it's a bad singing voice and I'm a guy. So if I sing too much, I start to think that my manhood is being called into question.

And on top of that, the only times I sing outside of church are in previous life when I had too much to drink or before a football game. And so I know it's hard for some of us to sing, but when we're singing about the most glorious truths in the universe, sing it with all your heart.

Seriously. And you know what? It's hard to be up here as a singer when people aren't joining in. So let's help these guys.

They give so much time. You'd have no idea how much time they put into this ministry for us. So join them. What about during the sermon?

Guys, man, this service right here is the toughest crowd that I've ever preached to in my life.

[26 : 44] It's the toughest crowd. And I tell you what, five, six, seven, eight more visiting preachers have commented to me after the service or sometime afterwards that this was the toughest crowd they've preached to.

So before I came here, I thought, man, 6pm is going to be a walkover, 10am is going to be a little bit harder, 8am, that's going to be a tough crowd because it's traditional and people are old and it's almost the exact opposite.

And I don't know how to diagnose it, but you just need to know that. It's a real wall to preach to here. And it's not just me, that's a common experience of preachers.

I'll read you something from Ministry of the Pew. It's about active listening. And please just continue to take this in the love that I hope you're receiving.

The guy talks about active listening, okay? Actively listen to this. People in the pews have an enormous, I would say, an incredibly enormous impact on those who are teaching and leading.

[28 : 00] Communication is always a two-way process. Energetic listening through taking notes, making eye contact with the preacher, sitting at the front, laughing at jokes, even old ones, will spur on the preacher.

It is very, very hard to preach enthusiastically to a sleepy, distracted, fidgety group. Our active listening will also infect others with enthusiasm for learning, just as our fidgeting will discourage them.

Unbelievers will also pick up that these ideas are worth listening to if they see rows of regulars eagerly soaking up the Bible. That's so true, man. So true.

So I know that me saying this now is not going to transform us into a really engaged group. And we need to do some more thinking about this, but just hear that. Hear that as a rebuke and take it and pray that God would change us.

Finally, I just want to talk about logistics. It's another big one for us. I think as soon as we walk out of those doors, many of you guys, and particularly you young guys I've seen really emerge in the last year, are really logistically savvy young guys.

[29 : 24] And by that I mean you look for problems to fix and you look for seats to grab if people don't have a seat and that kind of thing. But as soon as we walk in here, I don't know what happens.

We put the blinkers on and it's just like I can't move. I want to scratch my ear but I can't do that because I'm in church now and it's just ridiculous. So let me read from this guy again.

Logistics in church, in the service. Each member in the pew, this is you guys, also has an important part to play in the smooth running of the meeting.

The devil, Satan, will use anything to distract people from hearing the word of God. We mustn't rely on ushers to fix things. If the window needs to be opened, get up and do it.

If the microphones are not right, signal the speaker so the problem can be fixed before they continue without being heard. So it's just about stepping up and taking responsibility for your own service, taking initiative, getting things done.

[30 : 27] in addition to that, after the service, this is stuff we've talked about more often but we need to hear it again, that we have a responsibility to speak to people we don't know, welcome people we haven't seen before, don't feel embarrassed if you think they've been around for a while but you haven't yet talked to them, just admit it, get to know them.

playing with some ideas about how to do that better and you'll hear more about that in the coming weeks but again this is your responsibility, you guys know what needs to be done so just step up and do it.

That's a big chunk of criticism and I trust that you guys will accept it as perhaps what God is saying to us as a group so that we can become more like the people he wants us to be in our corporate worship, in our public worship, that people will be drawn in and when they're drawn in they can hear the gospel preached and be saved.

We want to be an attractive community. So I've gone on a lot longer than I planned to but what I'd really like us to do, I don't want to lose this opportunity, is to get into small groups, four or five, six people each.

And I've got a question up on the PowerPoint here, just a sec. Yeah. It's a quote from a really good book. It's a pretty good book. It's got me thinking anyway.

[32 : 06] Worship evangelism, it's a few years old now but you're welcome to borrow it off me if you've got more thinking to do. There's a quote that I'd really like us to discuss just by way of reflection on what we've heard and I'll give us about five minutes to do that.

Please feel free to share your thoughts. If you're new or visiting, please feel like you can speak into our situation here so that we can benefit from your thoughts and your experience and then Ross will continue to lead us through the service.

Let me just pray before we discuss. Father, please just work among us as a group.

Please help us not to react to what we've heard but to really embrace it and to take ownership for this congregation. Please help us to see our responsibility as the people of God, to care for one another, to welcome newcomers, to make this a place that is attractive.

Please be with us in our discussions and to help us to come at it with the right attitude that we might discuss things that will be helpful as we go forward as a church.

[33 : 33] I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.