

Return:: What do I give to God? March 8, 2009

Intro:

We continue in our series during this Lent Season called “return.” It’s a series that reflects the purpose of Lent, this season before Easter, where Christians throughout history all over the world have spent this time reflecting and returning to Jesus and His purpose in the world. Traditions like fasting and almsgiving are a reflection of this, and it has been very interesting to me to hear of a number of you engaging in some of these practices.

We’ve embarked on a journey through a book by a prophet for this season, the book of Malachi. We’ve done this because the prophets of old were all about this: they were all about calling people back to God more than they were about predicting the future. Forthtelling versus foretelling, as some would say. And so we’re here.

We all have a need to be with God, to find purpose.

This is a series for all of us:

Some may be coming for the first time

Some may be returning

Some may just need the reminder and encouragement to keep on.

Today we reflect on what we “give” to God- which is pretty central in how we relate to God. We’ll start by taking a look at something people did before Jesus’ time- giving an animal sacrifices to God.

Read Text: Malachi 1:6-14

What I want to do is make sure we understand what’s going on in this passage first, and then take the step toward making sure we understand what it means in our day and age.

Context: Malachi’s Day

Sacrifices were a part of worship back then, in a number of different ways. We are probably familiar with the idea of forgiveness of sin, how sacrifices brought forgiveness and purification. But sacrifices were also a part of expressing to God how important He was; so important that we would take something very valuable and give it up in worship to Him. And so this was a part of worship back then.

Now part of the whole ordeal was to make sure the animals given to God were perfect- they were not to have any physical deformity. Some allowed for slight blemishes, but all did not allow for deformity or sickness. God was perfect, and all that was given to him should reflect that sense of perfection and wholeness.

Unfortunately, the Israelites at this time period were not doing a great job sacrificing. They were offering God unfit animals, showing great contempt/disrespect for who God was and is.

And there were at least three reasons for these disrespectful sacrifices to God. We’ll call this the unholy trinity of: Self-centered materialism- desire to keep the best for yourself (v. 14)

Failure to see God as He really is (v.6, 10-11, 14)

And so sacrifices were not going as they should, they had become a burden. God was not going to accept that sort of worship. The people needed to get things realigned. They needed to return to doing things the right way, return to seeing God the right way.

Now, fast forward to our day, what does all this mean for us?

Context: Our Day

What are the Sacrifices?

A Life Given to God, a Life of Worship

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is true worship.

Romans 12:1

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name.

Hebrews 13:15

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To love him [God] with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength... is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Mark 12:33

This was the focus of our Visions of Worship Series. I encourage you to revisit our talks from there, provided online.

A Life Given to Others

To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices. Mark 12:33

Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that openly profess his name. And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.
Hebrews 13:15-16

A life given to others in terms of spiritual friendship. Being with people who need Jesus' touch in their lives.

While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?"

On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."
Matthew 9:10-13

A life given to others in terms of sharing materially. Giving our material goods and money to those in need.

I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

Phillippians 4:18

This is simply foundational for us. And while it may look different for each of us based on our personality types, our various social strengths and weaknesses, our culture, our incomes. But the call is clear.

This is what Easter Weekend is highlighting (note: it's just a highlight because this should be and is happening throughout the week at Ethnos). It is a weekend where we share with our community in material ways through service. But it is also a weekend where we invite our various friends from work, school, the neighborhood, into a spiritual friendship as we invite them to join us on these projects, and on Easter Sunday for our Easter Service.

And this is what our international trips are all about. Whether it be in TJ or Ghana, its about working with our brothers and sisters in those countries, building spiritual friendships and sharing material resources as appropriate.

So:

A life given to God.

A life given to others in terms of spiritual friendship and in terms of sharing materially.

How are we doing in this area? Are we moving forward, or have we gotten stuck somewhere because of our materialism and our failure in seeing God as He is?

A life that is covered by Jesus' sacrifice.

There's one more thing to bring up, though, with all this. And it's simply this fact: our sacrifices will never ultimately be perfect. And that, while it should never cause us to give up, points us to the need for another sacrifice that is relevant to us today. And that is the sacrifice of Jesus: his life given to God and us.

We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.
Hebrews 10:10

Challenge: