

From the Pulpit of Keith Miller  
Northwest Church  
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## God's Faithfulness; Our Delight Malachi 3:6-12

### **Introduction**

*Carpe Diem*: Seize the day; make your life extraordinary. We see in Malachi that Israel had grown cold towards God in their worship of Him both in their living and their giving. We look at how Israel experienced the hand of God and wonder how it is that they could have so many spiritual problems; I think the reason is that we read Israel's story without seeing our own story, our own sin.

Before we get too hard on Israel, we need to remember that we have received what they only dreamed of receiving: God's Holy Spirit who empowers us unto holy living. But you see our story is Israel's story because we too often fall short in our walk with God.

There is still a part of us that is inclined to sin. We will always remain imperfect people who are in the process of taking on the image of the Lord Jesus, and will not experience total freedom from our sin nature until death or a resurrection.

So, as we survey church history what we see is that Christians are just as capable of the sins Israel was guilty of. Like Israel in Malachi's day, those who boast as being members of Christ's Bride have grown to be skeptical, careless, indifferent, disobedient, adulterous, stingy people. We, as members of the Bride of Christ, have proven faithless from time to time (2 Tim. 2:13).

We have been careless in our worship, we have gossiped, we have shown ourselves to be adulterous in both our actions and thoughts. We sin! And as long as we sin, our story is Israel's story. We don't always give God our all, we lust, we have had thoughts rooted in lust for someone other than our wives/husbands. We sin!

There are three important lessons we glean from this passage concerning Israel and concerning ourselves...

### **God Does Not Change (v. 6)**

*"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."*

This is an amazing truth: God does not change. What God reminds Israel is that He has a reputation of honoring His covenant promises. When God says, "I, who am Yahweh do not change" what He is saying is that He will never do anything that is out of character of who He is. J.I. Packer writes,

"Strain, or shock, or a lobotomy, can alter the character of a person, but nothing can alter the character of God... He never becomes less truthful, or merciful, or just, or good than

he used to be. The character of God is today, and always will be exactly what it was in the Bible times.”<sup>1</sup>

God can not get any better because He is as good as He can possibly get, nor could He get any worse because if He did He would no longer be God.

- God can not get any holier, because He is Holy.
- God can't become any more loving, because He is Love.
- God can't gain any more wisdom, because He is wisdom.
- God can't gain any more control over all that exists, because He is Sovereign.
- God can be trusted because He is the embodiment of truth.
- God is merciful and at the same time Just.
- His justice demands his wrath, but never compromising the fact that He is a God of grace.

God is all of these things, and never will He do anything that contradicts His holiness, love, wisdom, sovereignty, mercy, grace, or justice. In other words He will pour out His mercy (refraining from giving what you deserve) and still remain just (because He poured out His wrath on Jesus). So you can take comfort in the fact that God is unchanging because He is who He is.

Because God is unchanging, we can bank on the fact that He keeps His promises. This is why God tells Israel that they are not consumed: God had every right to wipe them off the face of the earth but He didn't. Why? Because He promised Abraham long ago that He would cause His descendants to be a blessing to the World. If God were to wipe Israel off the map in Malachi's day, Jesus would have never been born. There would be no promised seed of Eve, Noah, Abraham, or David. God would have been made the liar.

Which brings me to an important principle regarding your salvation: If you have placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ, you only needed to do it once and you can never lose it. You have heard the phrase, “once saved; always saved;” this is a marvelous truth, not because someone made it up, but because Jesus stated it in John 10:27-28,

*“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one.”*

So when we read in Malachi 3:6, “*For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed*” we can go to the bank that our salvation is secure in Jesus Christ and not even my own hand can take that away from me. What God is telling Israel, is the reason they are not wiped off the face of the earth due to their wickedness is proof of His unchanging character.

Which leads me to the next point we see in this passage...

### **Israel Needs to Change (vv. 7-8)**

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<sup>1</sup> J.I. Packer. *Knowing God* (Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press; 1993), pp. 77-8.

*“From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’<sup>8</sup> Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions.”*

We are reminded that God does not change in verse 6, but here in verse 7, God gives Israel a history lesson: *“You have had a history of not following after me.”* In Deuteronomy 28, Israel was warned that there would be curses for disobedience and blessing for obedience. Over and over again, we see Israel’s short lived obedience contrasted by her long history of disobedience. Over and over again God demonstrated His faithfulness to His covenant promise to Abraham by sparing Israel of being utterly annihilated.

So what does God exhort them to do? Repent. What will He do in response? He offers hope: *“Return to Me and I will return to you.”* What is Israel’s response? How? How God, how can we return to you.

Listen to God’s answer: *“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.”* Now how in the world can someone rob God? Doesn’t God own everything anyway? Who can hold Him at gunpoint? Who would dare try to overtake God in a dark alley? Who can take what is His against His will? After all, doesn’t the Bible say, *“The earth is the LORD’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers”* (Psalm 24:1-2).

God holds the deed of all that exists because He is the owner. The air we breath, the ability to experience the bright rays of a magnificent sun, the black night lit up by the bright moon and the stars surrounding it, the ability to get up in the morning and go to work or enjoy retirement, the paycheck or social security check received in the mail, the refrigerator full of food, the breakfast you ate this morning, everything that you experience and enjoy is a gift from God regardless of your relationship with Him.

But you see Israel had more than any of the other nations could possible dream of having: a relationship with the God who gives all things. Israel’s neighbors didn’t have the type of Prophets that Israel had who spoke the very words of God Himself, Israel’s neighbors didn’t have a Tabernacle where God’s glory dwelled, the other nations didn’t have the type of full-time priests who provided their services which enabled Israel to learn of God.

The Temple was where the people of Israel went to church; it was where they worshiped the God of all creation. Israel could enjoy singing praises to God, giving in worship, and the instruction that came from the Priest’s lips.

So much work was required of the priests to keep the Temple running that they were set apart to perform their duties full-time. Where do you think their income came from: from the tithes and contributions that the people of Israel would bring to the Temple.

The word “tithe” means tenth; out of all that God had given Israel, He required only a small portion (a tenth) of that to go to the Levites for their maintenance and service of the Temple (Lev. 27:30-33). The Levites then took the tenth of what was given by Israel and gave that portion to the ministering priests (Num. 18:25-32). So how were the people robbing God? By not giving all of their tithe to finance the ministry of the Temple. Their lack of cheerfulness and generosity was an indication of where their hearts were with God.

Remember the story of the rich man who approached Jesus? Let’s look at Mark 10:17,

*“And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”<sup>18</sup> And Jesus said to him, “Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone.<sup>19</sup> You know the commandments: ‘Do not murder, Do not commit adultery, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Do not defraud, Honor your father and mother.’”<sup>20</sup> And he said to him, “Teacher, all these I have kept from my youth.”<sup>21</sup> And Jesus, looking at him, loved him, and said to him, “You lack one thing: go, sell all that you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”<sup>22</sup> Disheartened by the saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”*

Why did the rich man walk away sorrowful? Because Jesus got to the heart of the man’s spiritual problem: by addressing his wealth; this is exactly what God does with Israel through Malachi. Israel wants to know how to turn back to God, and God answers by telling them start with their wallets. Often times, how you use your income and possessions gives some indication of what you treasure most in life.

Now the question that is on some of your minds is whether or not Christians are obligated to give a tenth of all that God gives them? No, I don’t think so. But we are commanded to give weekly offerings to the ministry of Christ’s Church (1 Corinthians 16:2). In fact, the giving of one’s resources and property was a big part of worship in the first century Church.

I like how Dr. James Montgomery Boice commented on this verse,

*“...while we are not required to give a specific tenth of our income, it is hard to think of a normal Christian, blessed with the fullness of the gospel of Jesus Christ, doing less. Under reasonable circumstance any true believer in Christ should give more than the tenth, for all we have is the Lord’s.”*

Boice goes on to observe,

*“I wonder how many believers today even approach that ideal. I wonder if God would not say to most today, “You rob me” (Mal. 3:8). Why should this be? Why should we who have been blessed so abundantly be so ungenerous?”*

*I think the reason is that we really do not trust God to take care of us. We think we have to store up the money for ourselves against the day when money may run out and God will be unable to provide.”<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>2</sup> James Montgomery Boice. *The Minor Prophets*, v. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books; 1986); p. 602.

I think he is right. The root of Israel's problem was not so much what they were or were not giving, it was their heart. Often, the symptom that we are not walking with God is measured by the willingness to give back to Him through your local church as well as other ministries that might be outside of this church. We tend to give our money to what takes the biggest priority in our lives; what place does God have in your life?

So what we learn so far is that God does not change, we need to change, and now we see that when we repent of our lukewarmness, we will experience God's blessing in our lives, for this is what we see in our final point...

### **God will Bless Israel's Change (vv. 9-12)**

*"You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. <sup>10</sup> Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. <sup>11</sup> I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. <sup>12</sup> Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts."*

One of the biggest hurdles to tithing is a lack of faith that God will provide for your needs. The curse that Israel was experiencing was most likely famine, drought, produce of their farms which is part of the curse of disobedience that God warned Israel of in Deuteronomy 28:15-68.

But does God stop there? Does He leave Israel hopeless? No, in fact, God invites His people to test Him. He does not tell them to bring more than ten percent of their income and produce, He only tells them to be faithful with giving the full ten percent, and if they do this what does God promise? That He will open *"the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."*

Now God does not promise a brand new Hummer or a new house, or a new job, like some of the bone head televangelist say he promises to provide. God was not telling His people that He was going to make them rich, what He was telling them was that He would provide for them and the end result would be that their faithfulness would result in others standing up and taking notice of God's blessing in their lives.

I can tell you that God is true to His word. I was living on my own, making only \$6.50 an hour while living one my own; the last thing I felt I could do was give a tenth of what I was making. Until one day someone pointed out to me that my lack of giving was a lack of believing that the God who parted the red sea could bless my faithfulness in giving by meeting me needs. Did I have to adjust my spending? Yes. Did God provide for my needs? You better believe it.

I have given at least a tenth of all my income since the day I started giving, and I tell you that God has continually met my needs. Do I have a BMW in my driveway? No. But the last two years of my bible college education and about \$20,000.00 of \$40,000.00 seminary has been given to me. My point is not that God will do for you what He has done for our family; my point

is that giving back to God through your local church is a good way to see both the hand of God and spiritual growth in your life.

### **Application**

So what is the overall message that I think God wants us to hear this morning? Where is your heart? Is Jesus Christ the highest treasure in your life or is it a new house, a new car, that TV or computer you have been wanting to buy, being comfortable in this life? What is your highest treasure in life? Israel's highest treasure was measured by the tithes and contributions back to God.

Giving is only part of your worship, worship involves all that we do: how we work, relate to our spouses, raise our children, treat our neighbors, study, sing – worship is what we are called too. This is why the Bible tells us,

*“...to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* (Rom. 12:1-2)

Do you know what I think God is telling us to do in Malachi 3:6-12? Make your life count in this life; be extraordinary. This life is very short; don't waste it on trivial things, don't let anger, or resentment, or things steal from you the life you can experience if you and I would just give God our all in all that we do.

We are at a pivotal time in our church's history; God is doing something in this church. I really believe that the best days of Northwest's history are still ahead; don't waste the few days God has given you on this earth on things that do not matter, but use your days for Him.

If you are harboring bitterness against someone go to that person and get it right, if there is sin in your life that you have not dealt with, repent of it and move forward, if you are concerned about some of the recent events of Northwest talk to the Church council. Let's repent of whatever sins we are guilty of and move forward as a church. Worship God with your whole heart! Make your life extraordinary with the few years you have left.

Many have gone before us who were not content with the status-quo. They gave their all to the God they loved; they seized the few years God gave them and put their whole heart into following hard after God; lets do the same. Let me end with this challenge from Hebrews 12,

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, <sup>2</sup> looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Heb. 12:1-2)