

THE CHANGE AGENT/ Sunday, August 30, 2015

Unifying Topic: RETURN TO A JUST GOD

Lesson Text

I. A Messenger Is Coming (Malachi 3:1-6)

II. Will Anyone Rob God? (Malachi 3:7-10)

The Main Thought: Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets. (Matthew 7:12, KJV).

Unifying Principle: Fairness and philanthropy are most apparent during times of great tragedy and loss. How do the faithful demonstrate the same benevolent and just spirit all the time? Malachi and Matthew inform the faithful that God requires justice and faithfulness, and that He will bestow bountiful blessings in proportion to their willingness to give.

Lesson Aim: To review Malachi's prophecy about possessions, wealth, and hospitality in light of faithfulness and justice.

Life Aim: To lead believers to think about how to give in a way that honors the Lord.

HISTORY:

¹"Malachi" means "my messenger." Much is uncertain about the prophetic book of Malachi. Some suggest that the book was written anonymously being that it could be a title rather than a proper name. No one can completely be sure, but some guesses are more probable than others. For instance, Malachi's emphasis on the temple and on correct priestly ritual indicates that he spoke at a time when there was a temple standing, either before the temple was destroyed in 586 B.C, or after the second temple was completed in 515 B.C. The later time is suggested by the reference to Judah's political ruler as "your governor" (Mal.1:8), since it was during the Persian period that Judah no longer had a king. Also, it's when the priests and people had grown complacent.

Malachi's preaching has a very priestly tone. The sins that he condemns are sins of inappropriate worship: offering blemished sacrifices (1:8, 14); carelessness on the part of priests (2:7, 8), and neglecting the temple tithes (3:8-10). Such an emphasis fits well in the priest-dominated community of returned exiles, though Malachi's criticism of unworthy priests would surely not have been popular among the priests themselves. This is the final book of the Old Testament

LESSON:

3:1 Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. "Behold", means listen... we all need to listen, for the Lord alerts us that something important follows. In this case the messenger is being sent to remove the obstacles of sin... It was a custom in the East for kings to send messengers before them to remove obstacles to their visit. There are two messengers in this verse being sent. The Lord Himself announced He was sending one ("The Lord's Messenger"), who would "prepare the way before Me (Him)." This is "the voice of one crying in the wilderness" (Is.40:3) and Matt.11:10; Lk.7:27 who comes before the Lord Jesus Christ. The NT clearly identifies him this first messenger as John the Baptist, the representative prophet—the forerunner of the Messiah. He shall prepare the way before Him, by calling men to repentance.

"To come suddenly" does not mean immediately, but instantaneously and unannounced. When all the preparations are completed, the Lord will come, not to Zerubbabel's temple, not in partial fulfillment to Herod's temple, but finally to that Millennial Temple which Ezekiel describes in Ezek.40-48. "The messenger of the covenant," is identified as the

¹Chronological Study Bible

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

Lord, the One the Jews delight in. The Jews proclaimed Christ as the Messiah, but they would not listen to Him. "*The messenger of the covenant*," is the owner of the Temple—a clear reference to Jesus the Messiah (the second messenger). He has all authority to reward and judge His people on the basics of their faithfulness to His covenant. The "*covenant*" is a promise between God and man, and the covenant referred to here is the covenant God made to send His children a redeemer. "*Behold, again, He shall come saith the Lord of hosts*" (Lord of the heavenly armies).

3:2 But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap:—The question is asked, "*But who may abide the day of His coming? and who shall stand when he appear?*" The question calls attention to the sinfulness of the nation. When the Lord comes to His temple, four things will happen:

- Nobody will be able to stay, or remain.
- Nobody will be able to stand. Everybody will fall down.
- He will burn away the dirt in everybody that makes them unholy.
- He will be like soap and water; washing them clean.

The purpose of the "*refiner's fire*" is to purge out dross and uncleanness; and likewise "*fuller's soap*" is for cleansing. The people had indicated that they wanted the Lord's presence among them. If their request were granted, they would fall to judgment. Verse 1 says "*whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple.*" Therefore, when the Lord comes, judgment will begin not as much on the heathen as they hoped, but on the godless members of the covenant nation.

3:3 And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. If the people are to be pure, the purification must begin with the ministers of God (1 Pt.4:17). The process is described in this verse. Instead of bringing rewards, His coming is likened to two purifying agents: (1) fire to burn off the dross and (2) alkali to whiten. The Lord, as Judge is set forth in the figure of a refiner, who carefully and continuously watches over the crucible to make sure that the fire is hot enough to burn away all of the dross and impurities from the metal being never have been destroyed refined. He keeps removing the dross until He can see His own image clearly reflected in the purified metal. The ministers of God must first be pure, so "*He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver.*" The priests who should have been leaders in righteousness (2:7) have been prime leaders in sin (1:6-2:9) and thus will experience the cleansing judgment first. The purpose of the purification of the priests comes "*that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness.*" The Lord had not been pleased with their offerings (1:6), but once their character conforms to the righteousness of the Law with a proper heart attitude, then they will be pleasing to God.

3:4 Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years. Only after the priesthood is purged and when the people are cleansed will they be able to offer what pleases the Lord as in the days of Solomon (2Chro.7:8-10), Hezekiah (2Chro.30:26), Josiah (2Chro.35:18, and Ezra (Neh.8:7). A cleansed priesthood will be able to minister effectively to a cleansed nation. The days of old and the former years are the days of Moses and David (and may include the early days of Solomon). These were the days when the nation was at its spiritual height, and their offerings were pleasant unto the Lord because they came from a people who were in right relationship with Him. The word "*Then*" is the time when a redeemed and cleansed people will bring an offering to the cleansed priesthood which will be pleasant unto the Lord—the Millennium.

3:5 And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the Lord

of hosts. The people had asked this question in 2:17 "Where is the God of judgment?" He now tells them, and to the point "...I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against... *Witchcraft practice, adulterers, false swearers, oppressor of the wage earner, widow and orphan, and those that turn against the foreigner.*" The Lord of armies said "*fear me not.*" The reason it was said, was because the remark meant that there was no fear of God from these people. Their deeds were irrefutable evidence of their heart relationship that does not reverence the Lord of hosts. This judgment is absolutely coming, for it was directly pronounced by the Lord of hosts.

3:6 For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed. God describes Himself: "*I am the Lord*" (He is Jehovah, the Eternal, the Maker of Heaven and Earth, the One who manifested His love in His choice of Israel), "*I change not*" (He is Immutable and will not go back upon the covenant given to Abraham and the nation, even though they have not conducted themselves as privileged people). He addresses "*the sons of Jacob*" in keeping with the name by which they enjoy covenant relationship to Him. In light of their history of rebellion, Israel's existence was due only to the Lord's unchanging character and unswerving commitment to His covenant promise with the patriarchs. If it were not for God's intervention and love, they would pass out of existence.

3:7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?— From the days of their forefathers, they have been wayward and have not kept God's laws. God invites them; gives them an opportunity to return to Him, for He's ready for them to repent of their sins, so He can return to them. This is their chance to experience God's goodness again and be blessed. In spite of the abundant evidence of their sin and the gracious promise of blessing in response to their repentance, the people incredulously ask: "*Wherein shall we return?*" They are really saying, "*in what way shall we return; we have never gone away?*" Many people really think they have not "*turned away*" from God because they don't really think they did anything wrong. The truth is we change, God never changes. He is righteous; we are unrighteous if we are not dwelling in Christ; or not having that personal relationship with Him! That's a drift away from Him! We have to come to ourselves like the prodigal son in the pigpen and put Him in the forefront as we return to have that personal relationship with Him.

3:8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. From the question in verse 7 "*Wherein shall we return?*" God comes back with another issue. "*Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me.*" "*Rob*" is such a forceful word. It means to steal from; take forcibly. Can you imagine a man robbing God? For one to keep back that which God has declared to be His is robbing God. The people were disputing God's indictment by asking "*Wherein have we robbed thee?*" God's claim against an unrighteous people meant that they didn't have any business disputing a righteous God; didn't have a leg to stand on; He does not lie! Yes, they robbed Him. How? "*In tithes and offerings.*" ²When the people did not give the tithe (vv.10-12), they were keeping wealth that rightly belonged to God. When learning to give biblically, we grow spiritually! Once we come to the knowledge of tithes and offerings we learn that we cannot out-give God! The more we give to God, the more He will bless in return.

According to scripture, all the tithe (a tenth; 10%) of the land, whether of the seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD's: it is holy unto the LORD (Lev.27:30). Tithing did not begin with Moses or the Law. The first mention of tithing refers to Abraham giving tithes to Melchizedek (Gen.14:26; Heb.7:4). As well, Jacob vowed the tenth to the Lord (Gen.28:22). Although, included in the mosaic institution, the fact is, tithing preceded the Law, and continues unto this hour. The word "*tithe*" comes from the number "*ten*" in Hebrew, and means "*a tenth*", and falls

²<http://www.learnthebible.org/tithes-and-offerings-section-4-lesson-6.HTML>
<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

into the same category as the *"firstborn."* In other words, as the firstborn of both man and beast belonged to the Lord, likewise, tithes belong to the Lord presently. Abraham is a type of all believers. Inasmuch as Abraham paid tithe to Melchizedek, we as believers, the children of Abraham continue to pay tithe to Christ by supporting His work, of whom Melchizedek was a type (Heb.7:1-5).

3:9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. In seeking to rob God of tithes and offerings they actually robbed themselves of God's blessings and made themselves the recipient of a curse. They experienced lack of harvest and famine. They were still in the process of robbing and defrauding God, just as some are doing today. To be cursed in Malachi is not merely an issue of the tithe. It has to do with the entire Law of Moses. Moses placed a curse upon anyone who did not obey **all** the law (Deuteronomy 27:26). There were 613 commandments in the Old Testament. If a person under the former covenant broke any one of them, they placed themselves under the curse. The sin was not occurring in isolated instances, for it was manifested by even the whole nation. Because of the love God had bestowed upon them in choosing them for His own, the whole nation still did not recognize its obligation or responsibility. To be *"cursed with a curse"* is depicted as cut off from God's benefits and experiencing a lack or absence of blessings. 2 Corinthians 9:6 tells us that *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly."* Luke 6:38 tells us that *"For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again"*. So whether we call it a curse or absence of blessing, the results are not good because of disobedience.

3:10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. *"Bring ye all the tithes"*— requiring them to make punctual and full payment of all tithes of corn, wine, oil, etc *...into the storehouse*— referring to the Temple and cities of the Levites under the Old Covenant. There were one or more large rooms; chambers in the Temple built for this very purpose, called *"the storehouse."* *"...that there may be Meat"*—food for the priests and Levites in the storehouse.

TITHING:

The word **all** is emphasized, indicating that this was the primary area of fault—they were withholding that which rightly belonged to God. They were to stop withholding and bring it **all** into the storehouse. For what seemed good reasons to them— economic hard times, was not the right thing to do. Under the New Covenant the local church has been claimed to be the storehouse where all giving is brought. Even though tithing was under the law, and Christ took the curse by becoming a curse for us, we are under grace responding to what Christ has done for us, and some still tithe today...

- because the first and the best belong to the Lord. *"God gave His only begotten Son."* *"The earth is the lord's and the fullness thereof."*
- because wisdom cries out that we should (Proverbs 3:9-10).
- because it is a standard to use as a starting point for those who have been saved by grace.
- because New Testament believers gave a percentage of their income consistently and generously (1 Corinthians 16:2).

Tithing is intended to train people to trust God, to break greed and selfishness off our lives; to build healthy spiritual habits that will release God's blessing over our lives; to live a faith filled life by loving God enough to give Him our money. Now consider Hebrews 7:4 when it says *"Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils"* (talking about Melchizedek). Now skip down to verse 7 *"And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better."* Do we trust God enough with all that we have or do we think we can do a better job at blessings ourselves? And don't forget 1 Corinthians 16:2 *"Upon the first day of the* <http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come." We are to give "as God hath prospered us" basing our giving on the tithe of 10%. 2 Corinthians 8:12 "For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not." We give according to what we have, and not, according to what we do not have. Again, some still tithe today...

- because it releases the blessings of God (Malachi 3:10-11; 2 Corinthians 9:8).

3The question is who receives the tithe? The best and safest way to give the tithe is through the church. The collection made in Corinth was to be gathered on the first day of the week when they were gathering for worship (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). They must have brought the money to the church. On the other hand, a pastor is disqualified if he does his work for the sake of filthy lucre--the riches of this world (1 Timothy 3:3; 1 Peter 5:2). If tithes are given directly to him, this puts the preacher in a place where he can be tempted to do certain things just for the money. That's why we are to follow Colo.3:23 "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men." Even in the Old Testament, they brought the tithes into the storehouse (Malachi 3:10). From there it was distributed to the priests and Levites.

The question is, is the tithe on the gross or on the net? We are to give as an expression of our love to the Lord. Giving is an act of worship--which means a declaration of the worth we place on Him. He does not ask for it all, but He does ask for a portion of what He has given us. I will ask: what is God worth to you? You decide. Another point to consider is that we don't want to be like the church in Revelation who had forsaken their first love. And that would include our time, passion, love, and finances. Our giving would not be our leftovers.

Should Christians give ten percent of their gross income (before deductions) or ten percent of their net income (after deductions)? The right answer for the wage earner is to give ten percent before deductions or ten percent of your gross income. Would you like to receive God's gross blessings or His net blessings? Surely you would want to receive the full blessings of God that are available to you!

In Acts 2, many early Christians sold all they had and gave one hundred percent of what they made to the Lord's work. Most of us are better able to give the Old Testament tithe (ten percent), the least proportion, than the New Testament totality (one hundred percent).

OFFERING:

According to this scripture, an "offering" was something that people gave to God. It could be food or drink as well as an animal. ⁴The Levitical sacrificial system had five separate and distinct offerings that could be made to the Lord. These are the five major offerings that are introduced in the first five chapters of Leviticus (by David F. Regan).

1. The Burnt Offering (Leviticus 1)
2. The Meat Offering (Leviticus 2)
3. The Peace Offering (Leviticus 3)
4. The Sin Offering (Leviticus 4)
5. The Trespass Offering (Leviticus 5)

There are other offerings. The purpose of these five offerings of the Law requires almost a threefold approach.

- First, they provide a way for the Israelites to make and keep a right relationship with God.
- Second, they are a type of Jesus Christ and a description of His sacrifice for us.
- Third, they are a pattern for our own approach to God. There is a difference between the Old Testament Israelites and the New Testament saints:

First, consider the order of the offerings as they point to the sacrifice of Christ.

³<http://www.learnthebible.org/tithing.html>

⁴<https://www.learnthebible.org/sermon-outlines/the-five-major-offerings.html>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

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| Burnt Offering | Christ surrendered Himself entirely to God being fully consumed in His commitment (Phil.2:6-8) |
| Meat Offering | Christ gave Himself as a living sacrifice continually doing the will of the Father (Jh.4:34) |
| Peace Offering | Christ made peace with God on the behalf of man (Eph.2:13-14) |
| Sin Offering | Christ atoned for our fallen sin nature on the cross and satisfied the wrath of God (Is.53:10-11; Heb.9:26) |
| Trespass Offering | Christ paid for our individual sins in His death on the cross (Heb.10:12) |

Now, the New Testament saints when we come to God, we must do so in reverse order. Notice the following table with the offerings given in reverse order and their symbology explained.

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| Trespass Offering | We realize the guilt of our sins and our need for forgiveness of these sins in Jesus Christ (1 Jh.2:2) |
| Sin Offering | We need a power that can even conquer our sin nature or else we will lose our salvation as soon as we gain it (2 Cor.5:21) |
| Peace Offering | We find that through the cross of Christ He opened the way for true fellowship with God (1 Jh.1:3) |
| Meat Offering | Through His obedient life, Christ shows us the way to be a living sacrifice for God (Rom.12:1) |
| Burnt Offering | We find the greatest blessing in being fully consumed in our commitment to God (Phil.2:17) |

An "offering" is considered to be the amount given after the "tithe." The "tithe" is an obligation to give; the "offering" is an opportunity to give. However, we also learn here that **there is a problem in giving**. There are actually two problems which hinder God's people from giving.

- 1. Financial Problems:** Some people claim they cannot afford to fail in tithing. This is the most common problem which hinders scriptural giving. Many have unwisely spent and have incurred debt beyond what they can reasonable pay. The truth is you cannot afford to fail to tithe. Financial giving to God along with biblical principles of finance is the road back to financial well-being. The most basic principle to financial recovery is to honor God with your tithe first!
- 2. Faith Problem:** It is not the lack of finances which keep one from tithing, but rather it is the lack of faith. Failure to tithe is a failure of your faith.

⁵The problem is that many people are reluctant to give scripturally. Some say they do not have to give the tithe because they are not under the law. However, it is not the law that motivates the Christian to give, but rather it is love!

The Lord of hosts says "*prove me*"; "*try me*"; "*test me*." There is a reason why they were to prove Him. If they would honor Him by reversing their robbery and in a show of true repentance bring what He required, He would shower them with excessive abundance, protect them from locusts, and they would be the delight of the nation. He would "*open the windows of heaven, and pour out a blessing, that there would not be room enough to receive it*"— blessings unparalleled.

The blessings of God would come not because God got His 10% of the tithes of wealth, but because in giving the tithe you are in that place of obedience and subjection to God. This outward sign of obedience and subjection to God is the giving of the tithe. This principle holds true today! God blesses not because you were made to give, but because of your cheerful giving in keeping with the measure that God has blessed you; you are then giving testimony of your obedience, subjection, and dependence upon God. You are proving Him at His Word, by trusting Him!

SUMMARY:

⁶Malachi's message up to this point has been bleak indeed. The Jews have spurned the love of God. But the hour of reckoning is about to come (v.1). When He comes in majesty He will separate evil men from good, even as a refiner separates precious metal from dross (vv.2-4). Not only will the priesthood be purified but the land itself will be cleansed of its wicked inhabitants. Christ's earthly kingdom will be made holy. Sorcerers, adulterers, perjurers and

⁵<http://www.learnthebible.org/tithes-and-offerings-section-4-lesson-6.HTML>

⁶<http://www.family-times.net/commentary/malachi-31/>

<http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-sunday-school.html>

oppressors will be dealt with (v.5). This includes all who fear not the Lord. The figures of "a refiner's fire" and "launder's soap" points out the effectiveness of God's spiritual purging of the nation. The refining process purifies a metal from all its alloys and dross. Applying the heat burns out whatever is worthless, leaving a pure product. From this passage we see God is just in His preparation (v.1a) in His coming (v.1b-2) in His refining (v.3-4) and in His judgment (v.5-6).

Israel had gone away from God's ordinances; not keeping them, even in the days of their fathers. If they would return to God, He would return to them. However, they wondered wherein shall they return? (v.7) Israel was robbing God by not bringing their tithes and offerings (v.8) and the result was famine; a curse (v.9). If they would bring the tithe to the temple (the storehouse; the chambers in the Temple); there would be meat in God's house (food for the priests and the Levites) (v.10a). It rightly belonged to God. And since there was none, they had robbed God; even the whole nation participated in this. There is a principle of bringing the tithes and offerings in the house of God to support the work of God, and in that sense, believers today should bring their tithes and offerings to the local church of which they are members to support the work of the Lord on and through that local church. The challenge was presented to them and us today: "Prove me now..." "Put me to the test to see if I will not open up the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing." He's guaranteeing "that there would not be room enough to receive it" (v.10b).