

Malachi 3:6–12
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*⁶“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From 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?’ ⁸Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. ⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. ¹⁰Bring the full tithe 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. ¹¹I 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. ¹²Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.*

A pastor I know was referencing an elder I know, who had referenced an RC Sproul I don't know when he asked a question in Sunday school; the question – “what is the biggest problem we face?” The general consensus was sin – but that wasn't the greatest problem.

God is Holy – That's our problem. Because – if you are like me - you are starting to compare His holiness with your sinful nature and your knees start to quiver a bit – don't they.

He's set apart. And we know that God cannot be anything other than what He is and cannot act any way inconsistent from who He is. He is perfect; He is wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. God is God. We are not God.

I think that's a pretty good way to start a sermon right?

This passage is about advancing our understanding of this premise. God is God, man is man, and God's people are to expect a wonderful inheritance, and our entire life is preparing for the day we receive it.

We have just heard a passage where the Lord is rebuking Israel. It's very serious. And though, at a glance, and it doesn't look like it; He is instructing them how to be free – and He is pining for their affections and He loves them.

His holiness approaches and we are not destroyed. And something greater happens...

God spends time with those he loves – and we do the same – we run to places we love.

You see where this is going? We go to those places we want to go. We do those things we want to do. In fact, it has everything to do with the gospel. We go to Jesus because we want to. Those who don't want to - don't go. It's why I don't spend much of my time in the evolution/creation debate. Certainly, it's good to have an understanding of these things, but I have never seen anyone converted by my “well-thought-out convincing” arguments - though I have seen people hardened by them. I've come to the conclusion; either I am the aroma of Christ – or I'm not. Those who are interested in Christ will smell Him and come closer – others will smell it and think it stinks.¹

Sure, they might find the conversation interesting, but if that person doesn't want Jesus - He won't go to him - not even if I performed the greatest miracle. Miracles really only confirm faith in believers, and they create fodder for those who do not believe. You don't have to look farther than the story of Lazarus to understand that. Some rejoiced at his resurrection, some complained and even plotted his death and Jesus' death. They did not want to believe it.

¹ 2 Corinthians 2:15,16

You either love him or hate him,² - hot or cold. The world does not want Jesus - and they think it is strange when we do things that Jesus asks us to do.

The enemy, I'm sure, thought it quite strange when a band of 300 of Gideon's men came smashing pots and blowing trumpets; but they were not alive long enough to think about it too much. And like that, God asks us to do strange things - or at least, he asks us to do things that don't always sit with something we think as "plain reason." Things of faith often conflict with temporal reasoning.

Let's apply this to Malachi:

Malachi is the last book in the Old Testament, written after Israel's return from exile. It was written about 400 years before Christ, to a group of very discouraged people, corrupted by sin and disillusioned after their return from Babylon. This book tells of a coming messiah, and calls them to repentance as a form of preparation. It is as if to say, "Repent - Be encouraged - get ready - your savior is coming." Interestingly, 400 years later, we see John the Baptist beginning with the same theme: "Repent - Be encouraged - get ready - your savior is coming." It is a repentance that casts off those things that obscure our view of liberty we have in Christ.

But repentance requires us to do things that don't seem to fit with "plain reason."

God is helping them see this, now that they have returned from a 70-year exile to Babylon. These were not wealthy people. They needed financial assistance and spiritual encouragement – A Stimulus package. When every penny counted, the LORD was commanding them to give tithes and offerings to the temple storehouse. Does that make sense?

To many that doesn't make sense – and it depends on how you see God.

How you think of God determines how you respond to him when he brings you into adversity. If you think of him as a loving father, you expect him to care for you as a loving father would. If you think of him as an impersonal judge, you will spend your time fearing his judgment.

Our fears do not take God by surprise; He knows this. He knows we live in fear – that we worry about money – or the lack of it. He knows we spend an enormous amount of time being afraid of some unforeseen event in the future.

But this comes back to God's Holiness. When God's Holiness approaches our pride and our fears, there is turmoil. But for God's people, this manufactures liberty.

Here is a picture of liberty as it pertains to this passage:

God is Holy and He keeps His promises
God is loving and He prepares us to receive him.
God owns everything and He wants to give it to us.

God is Holy and He keeps His promises

He begins with a reminder, He says, "I the Lord do not change..." and he addresses the "children" or "descendants of Israel." He's saying, "I am God—yes, I Am. I haven't changed. And because I haven't changed, you, the descendants of Jacob, haven't been destroyed."³ God is reminding his people who He is – God is God - reminding them that He has a promise to keep and that because of that promise – and because He is a God who cannot break His promise, He will not destroy them.

² Revelation 3:16

³ The Message

In fact, embedded in this first statement is the promise He gave to Jacob; the “heel,” who was given an inheritance – and not because of what Jacob did, but because of the promise of Abraham. That promise, that God himself would be their inheritance. It is by far the most incredible blessing, the most honorable gift that anyone could receive. Embedded in his command is hope. He says, I am preparing you for something ----and we are given insight into the spirit of the command. He loves you. He is reminding His people to remember what He has done for them. He reminds us to recall His promise. And He is telling us to rest in His love. Sound familiar?

Remember – what does He say before the 10 commandments. In Ex 20, he says, "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." Then He gave the perfect law.

Remember - He saved Israel countless times, and He has also promised to them that a savior is coming who will save them once and forever more.

He’s talking to His people; they haven’t heard God speak through a prophet in 70 years, and the last time He did, He was sending them away to Babylon. Now they are hearing Nehemiah, Ezra – Malachi – they are getting direct communication from God when just a few years prior, they were wondering if God is paying attention. Their worship is sloppy, it’s blending other cultures, they are in poverty, their temple is in shambles, and they are in bondage to their own sin.

And God’s Holiness approaches.

Remember – God did not just give 10 commandments, He also shook the mountains and made them smoke. He created pillars of fire, He smote the Baals, and Edom. He built the temple at the center of the city where they would offer blood stained sacrifices for sin, He sent them away in their disobedience, but He did not destroy them; God disciplines those He loves.⁴ And He reminded them of what He would do for His namesake. God is very interested in His name. Ultimately He is pointing all things to His son, and He is worthy of our worship.

He must be worshipped, and when we don’t worship him, He considers it theft. He says, “when you do not worship me with your whole heart, you are robbing me....you are breaking the 8th commandment...” You are stealing.

It is part of His promise; I am the God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You are the sinner I could have justly destroyed; you broke all my commands - but I have chosen to love you. Weaved in the book of Malachi is the promise...it starts out: God says, "I love you." You replied, "Really? How have you loved us?" "Look at history" (this is God's answer). "Look at how differently I've treated you, Jacob, from Esau: I loved Jacob and hated Esau. Him I destroyed, look how faithfully I've loved you..."

Remember – Remember! Repent - Get Ready - Your savior is coming...” **God is Holy and He keeps His promises.**

God is loving and He prepares us to receive him.

Tim Keller preached on Luke 12:22-34, and titled it “How money makes us orphans.” In his sermon, he talked about the amount of energy we waste worrying about money. That money feeds our “God – Complex,” which is a modern way of talking about idol worship.

We want to be in control, we want to be Gods, and when we have money, it allows us to nurture the illusion that we are in control of our circumstances, to take the credit, to forget our weakness and to tell ourselves that we don’t need God.

When we listen to the old man in us, we will easily sell out eternal reward for temporary comfort. We don’t want to approach God in His holiness and so we run from it in our everyday living.

⁴ Hebrews 12:6

And since God doesn't change and doesn't break His promise, He is faithful to His promise to restore us to himself.

This means that He will actively remove those things that bind our hearts in slavery. The first of those things is our **self-worship** – especially as it pertains to money. That self-worship means that we would rather trust temporal things, rather than the eternal God who created them.

Fortunately, our loving father won't stand for it. In fact, He drives us – head on – to collide with our fears and false presumptions, which crowds God from our hearts.

DOCTRINE: God is preparing the people He loves to remember His deeds, to recall His covenant, to receive His affections and to expect a great inheritance.

We love money. We live for it. Any yet, as my pastor said, money never cared about us when we have it, and it doesn't think twice about us when it's gone. God knows that money cannot protect you and He is showing us how foolish we are in thinking it can.

But money is a reality of our world. **Money represents our time**, right? As cliché as that sounds "time is money"; it's a reality. We spend most of our week at work, trying to make money – we know if we spend it, there is an internal clock that reminds us how many hours that money was worth. Money stands for time.

When you give tithes and offerings, you are stating that this money doesn't really belong to you. Though you are its manager, and you are using it, hopefully wisely – But you are giving it back to God, because you operate under the premise that God is the one who gave it to you.

When you give an offering to God, you are saying that He is the primary cause of your revenues and He is the one who gives us what we need. When we rest in this truth, we can celebrate what Paul says, "As for me, I can be content in riches or in want..." And God, in His holiness, is saying – don't you remember – I will not destroy you – I love you. So part of the promise is – that if we lose money – we won't lose our life.

Yet we are all prone to distorting this. We see wealthy people and we think "their time is more valuable, therefore, they must be more valuable." We worry about money all the time. We fret about the economy, and we don't want to walk into adversity. We certainly don't want to do anything that would send us into poverty – why would anyone want to do that?

Do you see all the panic on Wall St. right now? They are coming face-to-face with the reality that money is nothing? Come to think of it – \$1 in 1913 is now worth \$.03 cents. At this rate, it will truly be worth nothing soon.

Our 401 K's are now 201-K's, we cannot go anywhere without hearing about credit card fraud...it seems that all our hard work – our time – is vanishing before our eyes, as if it is under a curse. So – why did we trust in that again?

God says – when you do that you are robbing Him. We are saying that God is not God. We don't need Him, and though our words might say – God is God – it has not practical value. You can't say God is God and spend your life worrying about nothing.

Let's go back; why God says we should not worry.

1. First – Go to the beginning of Malachi – what does He say? "I love you."
2. Second – Look at the 10 commandments – what does He say? I brought you out of slavery.
3. Third – How has He treated you for generations? "Jacob I loved – Esau I hated." You are Jacob.
4. Fourth – What has He promised you? A savior – the inheritance of a king – you are a royal priesthood. God Himself will be your inheritance; He owns everything, He is the Alpha and Omega, and He is driving you towards perfect union with Himself. And your mediator who bridges the gap between God's Holiness and your sin - who took that turmoil and conquered it for you. He did not trust in money – he descended from heaven – take on the

miseries of this life – in poverty – he lived the 10 commandments in complete freedom, and he did so with the knowledge of who his father is.

Some people say that Jesus had great faith. But he also had something else - He also had knowledge of the Father, and what it was like to be in perfect union with him. His knowledge certainly exceeded our own. Yet, his revealed knowledge of the father is being imparted to us, and this type of knowledge feeds faith - and encourages us. The two work together until that day we are in heaven, when we won't have faith – we will have sight. Your knowledge and perfect union with Christ will still grow, but it will work with sight. That knowledge of God combined with perfect union is part of your inheritance.

God is saying; step out in faith now – then you will know – your faith will grow – and one day you will have sight of your inheritance. You will gain a type of knowledge - of God - that will set you free. But you cannot do that if you are clinging to all the nothings that surround you.

God is reminding us of His steadfast affection for us and is building in us a desire to love him. He strips away the illusion that money is security and works in us an active faith that not only rests in Him, but will put him to the test.

God owns everything and He wants to give it to us.

His chief desire is to sanctify – or set apart – or produce His Lordship in your heart. ⁵ He's like a surgeon, probing until he discovers weakness and pain. Then he takes you there - often into turmoil - and delivers you from your fears.

God is preparing you; **first**, by not letting you cling to the illusion that you are a God, or that money is your protector – and **second**, by delivering through your fears.

Is there suffering there? Yes. It requires you to die to those things that you cling to. Sometimes this brings great pain. It requires you to live in a fallen world where bad things happen. But there is a great reward – where one day the pests will not devour your fields – and you will see more of your inheritance than you can count. God Himself is the Blessing.

Give me your tithes and offerings. I will amaze you like I did Joshua when I parted the seas, like I amazed Israel when I protected them with a pillar of fire, like the time I drew water from a stone, like when Gideon won with only 300 men.

AND when you step out you should do so with the expectation. “ I am preparing you to receive something so great, you cannot even fathom it,” He says. So - Go on “Test ME!”

God is teaching about first fruits. ⁶ When we give our first fruits, we are stepping forth and saying that God is our King – God is God. He is the primary cause of all things. Yet there is more: There is expectation – we know something will come out of it. We expect that if we do this, God will not only keep us alive, but that He will prosper us. There is also an insight into heavenly things: we learn something about loss, the Son, and His Bride. The Son is the first fruit of the Father – and the Bride is the first fruit of the Son.

Do you see how we are robbing God?

It's about the story – the greatest story that was ever told. And when we don't give our first fruits, we are saying it isn't true. ...that God didn't give His son – that God doesn't love us – that God isn't watching over us – and that God doesn't want to give us an inheritance.

So – yes, in this passage, God is showing His anger, but it is NOT blind rage – it is out of longing for His bride, who continually sells herself to the highest bidder.

⁵ 1 Peter 3:15

⁶ James 1:18

Imagine how you would feel if your wife told you one day: We are short on cash, I think I'll be a prostitute. That's what our worry and dependence on money is like before a righteous and Holy God.

So God commands an active form of worship that tests our hearts with expectation so that we might receive His love.

He is showing His discouraged people how they can build hope. He is saving them from the illusion that they are Gods.

I'm a business owner. I get spreadsheets & cash flow statements. These are good things, important things, necessary things...but they are not primary things. These are secondary causes. God can use them to build your estates or to tear them down. We can fill our projection spreadsheets with as many positive variables in the universe, but we cannot project God's will. We can, however, test Him where He wants us to test him.

Come on! "TEST ME!" I'll show you that I am a God who keeps His promise. This is as relevant today as it was then. "I'm the God who parted the seas, you think I can't prosper you? Give me your worship, let go of those things that you cling to and watch me fill you with so much blessing that you can't store it. I dare you!"

This isn't Legalism. This is liberty! He's preparing us to let go of our worldly desires and watch God restore our souls.

Conclusion:

Do you spend your eternal capital? Are you spending eternal capital or clinging to the green.

This isn't about how much; it's about the condition of your heart. God isn't looking for your money, and a church shouldn't be either. Our goals are the same; God and His bride want you to live in freedom. There are a myriad of things that cling to your heart, which obscure your union with Christ. They weigh you down because you fear losing them – they keep you from seeing how loved, how protected, how wealthy you really are. They keep you from seeing the eternal peace of Jesus, and though they are nothing, they are demanding sacrifices from you – money is just one of them.

Do you wake at night thinking about work? Do you worry, worry, worry about how people think about you?

Liberality

Paul, the former legalist, didn't reference the law when he was talking about giving. He emphasized liberality rather than limitations – peoples' willingness was more important than requirement. He refers to the Macedonians, who gave with exceptional liberality, though they lived in Poverty.

Two of the most touted pictures in the NT, regarding giving, are the widow who gave everything and the Macedonians. Though they were poor, they had been released from the idea that money can save them. They gave liberally, if not all of what they had in order that they might spend their real wealth.

Am I asking you to give all your money away? Well – what is your motive in saying that? Do you fear that God will not feed you?

Do you give with liberality or in limitation? Do you ask questions like; "should I tithe off the gross or the net – or do you say, how much do you need?" Brother, if you are purchasing a new entertainment center while another in the body is suffering financially, I'd like you to start asking questions... "Am I living in limitation or liberality?" "Am I clinging to the green - to my own comfort - or am I spending eternal capital?"

God is preparing you to receive Himself. When you die to your fears and stop waiting around to secure your financial position - and then start living in your heavenly position, which is already secure in heaven, then you will see Liberty. Christ is waiting for you.

If you are seeking to set this command aside, do not do so except to awaken some deeper freedom from the love of money. Ask, am I seeking to save my life or to lose it?

Christ says in all 4 gospels..."for whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it."⁷ This is repeated many times in scripture? Because it is the resounding theme of scripture, and it goes back to Genesis 1:1: "In the beginning, God..." God is God, man is man; and God – Oh Jacob – is preparing you to receive Himself.

"I love you, "He says. "Receive Him - Repent – get ready – your savior is coming." – Amen.

Complementary Scripture.

2 Corinthians 9:6-8 (English Standard Version) - The Cheerful Giver

⁶The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ⁷Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. ⁸And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency[b] in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.

Luke 12:22-34 (English Standard Version) And he said to his disciples, "Therefore I tell you,) do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat, nor about your body, what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Of how much more value are you than the birds! And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass, which is alive in the field today, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith! And do not seek what you are to eat and what you are to drink, nor be worried. For) all the nations of the world seek after these things, and your Father knows that you need them. Instead,) see his kingdom, and these things will be added to you.

"Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

⁷ Matt 10:39, Matt 16:25, Mark 8:35, Luke 9:24, Luke 17:33, John 12:25