

Malachi 3:6-10 'Robbing God!'

Last time we looked at Malachi 3:2-5 as I asked the question, Are you prepared to meet the King? The Jews during Malachi's day, (though their behaviour as a nation was appalling, and they did respond to God's rebukes and chastisements) it was not in repentance, but with rebellious taunts and affronts to His very character, claiming that He doesn't care about the cause of the upright and downtrodden, He even loves the evildoer, or worse still, He doesn't even exist at all! Chapter 2:17.

Yet Even so, they still believed that all would be well when the Messiah, the true King appeared! Yes, they would greet Him with cheers and hallelujahs, but no. Chapter 3:1 "See," or *you will see*. Then in verse 2 "But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?" So, not '1, 2, 3, Jesus loves me', not bubble-gum Christianity, but Revelation 6:16-17: "They called to the mountains and to the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of Lamb. For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

Yes, "who can endure?" "Who can stand?" And as I said, of themselves, no one! Self-sufficiency is a no-win situation in the presence of God. Remember, Ecclesiastes 12:13: "Now all has been heard here is the conclusion of the matter. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." We need to remember who God is and who we are; through a sober assessment of the Holiness of God, and who we are, the sinner! We need to be aware of, and constantly assessing our sin. And to beware of those times when our sin seems to rest easily upon our shoulders. Satan whispers to us that *it doesn't matter, no one will know, God doesn't really care*. But we know he lies! Because that for which His Son died, sin, does matter to God!

Remember, when Jesus comes "He will be like a refiner's fire." From the old Collins dictionary we saw that to "refine" means to free from impurities, to polish, to make pure, to free from coarseness and vulgarity. Yes, Jesus will make us clean. He will burn away the sin with the fires of His Blood, while leaving behind the precious new creation. "Then the Lord will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness verse 5.

So I asked the question, What are "offerings of righteousness" today? Romans 12:1 "Therefore I urge you brothers in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, for this is your spiritual act of worship." No, it's not about dead animals as a testimony to our devotion to God anymore, which found Israel at that time in such sin and denial of what they were. It's about living lives of self-denial. "Living sacrifices," which bear testimony to that Ecclesiastes 12:13 "conclusion of the matter. To fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man!" Yes knowing who God is. And who we are. That's what we need to know!

Well so to this morning's text: Malachi 3:6-10 'Robbing God!' Now before I begin, let me first say, that this is a subject which unless specifically asked to preach upon, very few preachers would choose to do so. Because many people are very private, sensitive, protective, jealous, and a whole bunch of other adjectives about their finances and wealth. And without question, they have the right to feel that way. A person's financial situation and standing is between them and God. Unless for some reason, they choose to share it with another.

So let me just say, where it not the next section in this series, I wouldn't choose to do so, but it is. Never let it be said that I would shy away from a text simply because it presented difficulties. And please let me say with all sensitivity, I'm not looking to peer into anyone's giving, that is between yourselves and God. I'm simply going to present what He says about such things!

Well, let's examine the text. Malachi 3:6 "I the Lord do not change. So you O descendants of Jacob are not destroyed." But before he begins unravelling their secretive tight-fistedness toward Himself and His House, (the temple of the Lord) God makes this statement. That though they had become this cynical, hypocritical, ungrateful and fearless people, (for they had no fear of God in them) God makes this statement that He Himself had not "changed." Hebrews tells us that "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever." Now for us brothers and sisters, depending if we are or are not truly saved, this is a tremendously comforting or tremendously terrifying statement. Because although there are many today who seem to want to speak of the Old Testament God and the New Testament God even as though they were different, the truth is, that this is not the case, as I have mentioned many times before.

No, "I the Lord do not change." And "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever." Yes many today want to tell all about Jesus, and praise the Lord that they do. But it seems to me, that they don't want to tell people about His Father, God! It's as though the Old Testament is about the scary God stuff, (nations put to the sword, cities destroyed, a flood of God's Wrath poured out upon the world. While the New Testament is all about God's love. So there is this sense, that the two are almost different, or even separate, as I have mentioned before. But no, they are not! John 10:30: "I and the father are one." John 14:9b: "Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." And finally John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but the will of him who sent me."

So even the suggestion that you can separate the two is not only heresy, but would also be horrifying to Jesus! And again, when it says that "I the Lord do not change" for the Christian, this brings tremendous assurance and comfort. Can you imagine, if this were not true? If we could seek to serve Him faithfully all of our lives by clinging to Jesus our Saviour, and then when we came before the King's throne He says to us. That it was all for nothing, because He has changed His mind! What a horrifying thought that is. But no, He doesn't change. He is eternally the same. So we are on a solid and firm foundation of faith in Him! And yet how terrifying for the unbeliever this statement is. The One who created, and even put to the sword entire nations in the Old Testament for their rebellion and sin, will "not change His mind," or look away, come judgement day. If we continue in unrepentant sin, hell awaits!

While for the Israelites during Malachi's time, this was a statement of God's sustaining goodness and mercy to them. That is why there were still some of His people left. Otherwise, they would all have perished collectively in their rebellion and rejection of Him! But no, "I the Lord do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob are not destroyed." Yes were it not for God's Old Testament love and mercy there would be none of them left. They were all collectively worthless and ungodly rebels!

Look at how long God had persevered with them. "Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you says the Lord Almighty." So over for 1000 years, God had nurtured them, rebuked and discipline them in His love, and then in His mercy, brought them back to Himself. But to no avail it seems. No they were as ungrateful and wicked as ever. It's only been about 100 years, since they returned from the exile in Babylon, and yet they seemed to have learned nothing! Now when it says, "return to me and I will return to you," It's not as though God had gone anywhere, He is omnipresent, meaning that He is present everywhere all the time. No, what He is saying is *turn your hearts back toward Me. Bring the whole person to worship Me. Bring mind body and soul to my altar, not just your lip service!* "Return to me. But you ask how are we to return?" they respond.

And now here is God's indictment against them. v8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me." Now if we think about what it actually means to rob someone the answer is very simple. To take something

without permission which belongs to someone else. That's fair enough isn't it? The 8th Commandment: "Thou shalt not steal." I guess there are many ways by which we can steal from one another. Among these are: We can pretend to be something which we are not and so steal their friendship. We can have them pour out their heart to us when in need of counselling, but then choose to share that confidence with another, and so steal away and betray their trust. We can break into their house and take their valuables. And we can win their trust or admiration, bring them in so to speak, and then swindle them out of their savings. It happens all the time today, doesn't it.

And we can do the same kinds of things in our relationship with God! Matthew 16:24-26 "Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it. And whoever loses his life for me will find it. For what would it profit a man if he gains the whole world and yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" So to be called a follower of Jesus, a Christian, means a life of denial of self. Not a life of misery, sadness, emptiness, or being continually downcast, No. But to put our own selfish needs and desires aside, and then take on the desires of a life lived for God!

So a life, not of selfishness but of selflessness. Our time, our efforts, our aspirations and desires, our commitments, our emotions and our finances! So what God is saying to His people here, (and to all of His people throughout the ages including ourselves) is that one of the clearest evidences of our heartfelt devotion to Him, is how we express that love by way of our financial giving to His house and His Work! Look at what He says. "But you ask how do we rob you? In tyres and offerings," God says. Now as I said there are many ways which we might rob others and God. but here it is clear, that He's addressing that financial kind of robbing.

We first encounter man making offerings to God in Genesis 4, with Cain and Abel. And then the actual idea of a certain amount in Genesis 4:18-20, we read, "Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God most high and he blessed Abram saying, "Blessed be Abram of God most high Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God most high who delivered your enemies into your hand". Then Abram gave him a 10th of everything." So of all of the plunder and riches which Abram received from his victory over those five kings, through his rescue of his nephew Lot. He gave back to God one 10th of everything, recognising, that it had all come from God in the first place.

The word tithe, carries with it the idea of one 10th! Now having said that, this is not a legalistic give your 10% or you are going to go to hell, no. 2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." Luke 21:1-4 "As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. "I tell you the truth", he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth, but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on." And Luke 18:9-14: "To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable, "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself. 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, robbers, evil doers, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat upon his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, the sinner.' I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Clearly we can see that it is not about the amount so much, as it is about the heart behind the offering. Although we shouldn't use this as an excuse to be tight-fisted in our giving. Some gave a tenth out of their great abundance, while the woman gave all she had to live on." So is Jesus saying we should all sell all that we own and give it to God's work and then go begging on the streets? Well no of course not. Because then we would become a burden to someone else. Is that glorifying to God? Well no. We are called to be good stewards, or good managers of all that God has given us. Our time, our commitments, and our finances. It's all about proportional giving as we have determined in our hearts, to give back to God. Because remember, everything comes from Him in the first place!

Now I say this with all sensitivity: It shouldn't be whatever we dig into our pockets and find on the day. The Christian life is one of discipline. To be a disciple of Christ means that we are living in the disciplines of Jesus. And this should effect every area of our lives, including our giving. What I do in our home is put aside a set amount every week, which comes out of what we earn as a base figure, that we give back to God. And you know, doing it this way is a very liberating thing. Because I do not see that money as my own anymore, it belongs to the Lord. And regardless of what my bills might be, I'm not going to touch that money, because to me, that would indeed be robbing God. Stealing from Him. In the same way, that it would be stealing from anyone else If I took something that belonged to them!

Friends, may I suggest, that what each of us needs to do, is prayerfully consider what we will commit to God's work every week. And to think of those funds as belonging to Him, and then simply give them. Because clearly, as is everything else, our giving is a reflection of what the Cross of Jesus and our salvation means to us. Yes, is the Kingdom of Jesus a worthy investment? That's the question! Look at what He says. "You are under a curse, the whole nation of you because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven."

Can you see that God is not saying that they don't give at all. He's saying that He is last on their list. So they'll pay everything which is on their list, and perhaps even put some away for a rainy day or a just in case, and when they've done all of that, only then will they give God a tenth of what's left over. Is that faith in God? And is that faithfulness to Him dear friends? Well I don't believe it is! We do need to remember what that tithes were all about. They were an expression of thanks to God for His provision. While also supporting the Levites who did the work in God's temple, and then for the provision of the poor and needy. And then a tenth of the tenth, was kept in the temple treasury for God's work, as it were! 'There is nothing in my house for the traveller and alien among you. What kind of testimony is this to the stranger and the perishing world around you?' God might have said. "Test me in this and see if I will not open the floodgates of heaven."

Now again brothers and sisters I say these things with all sensitivity. Do we want to see our church grow spiritually and also numerically? Do we want one day to call a full time pastor? Do we want others to come and join us so our church will become self sustainable? And we be I guess, a real presence for Jesus in our area? And I guess the question we must all ask ourselves, Is what I give to God I reflection of my heart? And ultimately, do I consider God and my salvation in Him and what Jesus has done for me upon that cross of suffering and shame, a worthy investment. Well if the answer to these questions is yes, then perhaps, in light of the passage, we do need to reconsider our giving. Not only our finances, but also our commitment to prayer and Bible study even al whole life for Christ! Yes "test me in this and see" God says.

Let's pray!