

Malachi 3:10b-15 'Test Me In This!'

Last time in Malachi we examined v6-10a, 'Robbing God' I entitled the sermon. Firstly we saw in v6 "I the Lord do not change so you are descendants of Jacob are not destroyed." And from Hebrews 13:8 "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday today and forever." I made the point that although many today seem to seek to separate the Old Testament and New Testament God, it is just not true. They are One and the same! John 10:30 "I and the Father are One." Yes they are One and the same. So it's not that the Old Testament God is the scary God of Judgement and the New Testament God the loving God, no. "I the Lord do not change." That is why there were still some of the Israelites left.

So for the Christian tremendous comfort and assurance at such truth. And yet for the unbeliever, a terrifying reality! That the God who created the universe and everything in it, (and did indeed put entire nations to the sword for their sin and rebellion will continue to call to account, not changing His mind) all who rebel against Him!

We also looked at the issue of giving, and what it meant to be robbing God. He was telling His people to 'Return to Me', and yet in their proud and vain hearts they threw it back in God's face by saying, 'How are we to return?' And God's answer, "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me?" But again from them. "How do we rob you?" "In tithes and offerings." So I asked what does it mean to rob someone? And simply put, to take something from someone else without asking their permission. And we thought of the different ways we can rob someone. Their friendship, their trust, their possessions and their finances. And we can do the same things with God!

Then we looked at the history of offering back to God. Beginning in Genesis 4 with Cain and Abel, then Genesis 14, where Abraham gave "Melchizedek, who was king of Salem, and priest of God most high a tenth of all of the plunder." So a tenth was the recognised amount. But it was not give your 10th or you will go to hell, no. 1 Corinthians 9:7 "For God loves a cheerful giver." So it wasn't about the amount so much, but the heart behind the gift. And yet we shouldn't use this as an excuse to be tight-fisted in our giving to God and His Work! And I also said, It's not what we find in our pocket on Sunday morning. We must each one of us prayerfully consider what we have predetermined in our heart to give back to God, remembering, that all things come from Him in the first place anyway! v10a "bring the whole tithe." So it was not that they were giving nothing, but that God was the last on their list. Perhaps once all the bills were paid.

And finally, I asked the questions: Do we want our church to grow spiritually and in God's time numerically? Do we want one day to call a full time Pastor? Do we want our church to become self sustainable, and be a real force in this area for Christ? And if the answer to those questions was yes, then in light of the passage, we need to consider our giving. Yes, our commitment, our prayer, our Bible study and our giving!

Which is where we pick up the text today. Malachi 3:10b- 15 'Test Me In This!' V10b "Test me in this," says the Lord Almighty. "And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." Friends, here we begin on the road to trying to understand what God really means by these words. Is He saying that if we bring out 10 percent every week, we are all going to be rich? So that is the secret to prosperity and wealth? Now before I begin to open up these words, let me first say, that personally, I do not believe for a moment that that is what God is saying. Matthew 19:21-24 "Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then

come, follow me." When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. Then Jesus said to his disciples, "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God."

So to the rich young man, "Go sell all you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, and follow me." So, clearly then we can see here that wealth in the wrong hands can become a tremendous impediment to following Jesus and being part of His Kingdom. Yet as we do know He does go on to say, "but all things are possible with God."

But again, as we can see wealth and riches, can even be as a brick wall between ourselves and God. So if that is the case, would God then desire us all to have this problem between ourselves and entering heaven? Matthew 6:19-21, "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and with thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is there will your heart be also."

But yet again we can see, there is the sense that being rich in the things of the Kingdom of Jesus, and being rich in the things of this world at the same time, brings with it a real problem. Because there is this sense of divided loyalties. Jesus goes on to say in verse 24 of Matthew 6 "No one can serve two masters, either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and mammon." And may I suggest, that along with their hypocrisy and lip service, this also may have been part of their problem in Malachi's day. If it were not so, then those prescribed tithes and offerings would not have been a problem for them to bring. But they were! They held back from God what rightfully belonged to Him.

And perhaps friends this might be our problem also at times. We can get confused as to what is most important to us, and what is most valuable. What is our true treasure. We need to remember that we are citizens of another Kingdom. And subjects of another King. You see there are many today who would use this verse and others to promote such things as: *'Come to Jesus and He'll make you healthy and wealthy and also wise'*. But Jesus never promoted such things. He promised persecutions, trials, hardships, and struggles. He said you had better "count the cost" before you come after Me because His life was full of those things. It wasn't a breeze. He himself said, "A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master. It is enough for the student to be like his teacher and a servant like his master."

And also as we saw from Matthew 16-24 last time, "Jesus said, 'If anyone would come after me he must deny himself take up his cross and follow me.'" And as we know, to "take up your cross" meant you were not coming back, it was a one way ticket to pain, suffering, and death!

So what do we make of this text which speaks of "the floodgates of heaven being opened and so much blessing being poured out that they would not have enough room in their storehouses for it?" It's something which I've really wrestled with over the years. The best explanation which I could find, comes from John Calvin. He first explains, one of the reasons why God said, "I the Lord do not change." Is because they had indeed accused Him of changing. Of been less caring. Less of a provider than He had been in the past. So the reason then why they were hungry, was of course all God's fault! Whereas God says in v9, "You are under a curse the whole nation of you because you are robbing me." The all-important context then, is one of hardship and drought, and with Israel accusing God for all that is that needs someone to blame! V13 "You have said harsh things against me" says the Lord." So although they were right in saying that the rain had been withheld, and the

crops were dying in the ground because God had caused it to happen, the blame lie solely at their own feet. Due to their lip service and hypocrisy, in their worship and giving to God! So in the midst of all of those things He says, "Return to me. Bring the whole tithe. And see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven."

So it seems to me that He is saying, *my abundant blessing and provision will again rain down upon you, if you would but have repentance in your hearts*. And to an agricultural people these words would have been very clear. Firstly, the rains would begin to fall again, so the seed could again be planted in the ground. That seed would burst forth with life from the blessing of God's Hand. The crops would grow lush and strong, all the while being sustained and protected by God! He would not permit the pests to attack the crops. The locusts, the grasshoppers and the beetles. And the vines in the fields would not cast their fruit. They would be plump and heavy for harvest, and not fall wastefully upon the ground. And the fruit fly would not find a home there. Says the Lord Almighty. So it would be a bountiful harvest. Yes a blessed harvest from the storehouses of God's provision for His people. And so much so, that it would be obvious to the whole world around them! v12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land", says the Lord Almighty." It is as though God were painting one of those time lapse pictures of the desert, seemingly dead. But then comes the life-giving rains and a myriad of life bursts forth.

So if we break it all down what do we find? Well, it is really quite clear. It is that God would provide for them and sustain them, every step of the way. So as they look to Him, yes as they raise their returning hearts of faith to Him, showing the evidence of those changed hearts, (by honouring him with those whole tithes) God would provide! From the clouds to the ground. From the seed to the plant. To the prevention of pests, to the fruit, to the harvest, and to the belly. Yes God would provide. So it is not riches which God is talking about here, it is simply his abundant provision for His people! v13 "You have said harsh things against me, says the Lord Almighty."

Friends, do you ever find yourself in that category? Yes do you ever find yourself there? Though you may not say the words out loud, you find yourself in your heart almost accusing God, for all of those bad things in your life. Just as the Israelites were doing here. But if we actually take a step back and seriously reflect upon those bad things, whatever they may be, (and I'm not talking about health and illness problems) but yes if we seriously reflect upon those bad things, we will often find that we are in fact at the very centre of our problems. And that God is not to blame!

But if you're anything like me, you might just briefly listen to those whisperings from Satan, and momentarily think as God is saying here in v14 "It is futile to serve the Lord." Can you see, that this is Satan's chief goal, to get the servants of God into believing that what they have devoted their whole lives toward, is useless. Yes "it is futile." And again, if you are anything like me, though they be fleeting, there will be those moments of doubt which have you feel this way! Perhaps you've put a lot of effort into something for Jesus which has gone almost unnoticed, or unappreciated. Or you seem to find yourself in situations of conflict through no fault of your own. But you always seem to come away as the bad guy. You want God to vindicate you. You want Him to declare to everyone that this is unjust, you are not to blame. And again, even though it only be fleeting, and you know in your heart of hearts that it's not true, you think to yourself, Why am I doing all of this stuff? It's all a waste of effort. I feel so used and abused at times. Yes "it is futile to serve the Lord."

Brothers and sisters, I just want to reassure you that you are not alone. We all, and I repeat all, feel such things at times. But what we can't let ourselves do is give in to such thoughts and feelings, because we know it's all a lie. And that's what the devil wants us to believe! In Job2:9 Job's wife is the tool in the devil's hand, as she taunts her husband with, "Are you still holding on to your

integrity? Curse God and die." You see, Satan does want us to believe that it is all a waste of time. But Beloved, when we go through those times of trouble and anguish, and by God's mercy we come through them, we can begin to get a tiny insight into what Jesus has done for us upon that Cross. Because sin is not a small thing. No the Cross of Jesus was no small thing, as we will visit it again in two weeks' time.

Do you remember his words? "Father why hast thou forsaken me?" You see the joy of our salvation must be understood within the trials and hardships of everyday life, as Christians who live as strangers in a sin ridden world. We are just passing through, and our true joy and reward await us! We don't completely receive them in the here and now.

But do you see? During Malachi's day, these weren't momentary or fleeting thoughts, theirs were lives that were filled with contempt. Listen to their words. "What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the Lord Almighty? Life is miserable under God they say. It's a life of do's and don'ts, with rules and regulations and for what? In what way have we gained anything? A thousand years of doing what He says and bringing sacrifices to Him, and we are no better off than anyone else. No it's worse than that, because we are worse off, than all the rest!

V15 "But now we called the arrogant blessed. Certainly the evil doers prosper, and those who challenge God escape." Yes it's all waste of time and effort! You know it's interesting, that their taunts and false accusations against God, have become in part, the reality of the days in which we live. "Evil doers do prosper." And the "world calls the arrogant blessed." Society has been turned on its head. What was bad is now called good. Unparalleled sexual depravity, perversion, devious behaviour, and immorality. Living totally for self, with little regard for anyone else, lest it suits our purpose. *Yes all these things are good! Whereas God, sexual purity, and living lives of self-sacrifice are seen as foolishness, or on the whole bad!*

So I guess in closing this morning, it does remain for each one of us to ask ourselves: Is it all for nothing? Is it merely a waste of time and effort? Should we not do as the world says, "Just eat drink and be merry for tomorrow we die?" Because as Kerry Packer said many years ago after his brush with death (literally being brought back from being dead), *'The good news is that there is no hell or the devil. The bad news is that there is no God, or heaven. No there's nothing!'*

Friends, these are things which each one of us must search out for ourselves. They are the deep questions of life. Why am I here? What is this life all about? All of this Christianity and God stuff, is it real after all? Well friends as for me, I choose to throw my lot in with Job and Joshua. In Job 19:25-27 we read "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand up on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God, I myself will see him with my own eyes I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me."

Yes, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand up on the earth." So when all things have come to their ultimate conclusion, the Creator and Judge of the entire universe "will stand upon the Earth!" Yes friends I see the Work of the God of life, as daily He gives me life. I see His Work in my life. Because when all hope is gone, and I can't rely upon myself any longer because I've got nothing left, there is God. To pick me up and carry me through. To strengthen me, to hear me when I pray, and to answer those prayers when and how he sees fit!

And often I just break it down to this. As when all of His other followers were deserting Jesus because He explained what lay ahead, and that it was not going to be all smiles and sweets. He then asked the apostles what about you guys? Are you going to leave me too? And they answered through Peter, "Where else are we to go, for you alone have words of eternal life." You see I've tried

living apart from Jesus. Yes I've lived that empty meaningless life of self-indulgence where all roads lead to nowhere. So as the hymn goes, I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, I have decided to follow Jesus, no turning back, no turning back! No I've got nowhere else to go. So I will continue to say with Paul, amidst all of my mistakes and failures, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."

Yes dear friends you must ask yourselves, Is it worth it? Or is it all for nothing? A waste of time and effort? And only you can answer that. But as does Job, Joshua also speaks for me. But As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord!

Let's pray.