

Malachi 3:1-12

"Flourishing Or Floundering?"

We read in the book of Hebrews Ch 4, "*For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account.*"¹ God's word pulls no punches but gets right to the heart of the

matter (which is always a matter of the heart). & It has this way of laying us open so that there's nowhere to run, no place to hide, no just excuses to be made, we're just left w/the choice to receive His message & repent or reject His message & rebel. The word of God is the epitome of the exhortation of Eph 4, "...speaking the truth in love."

God doesn't want there to be any uncertainty, any ambiguity, but absolute clarity so that we might respond definitively one way or the other. Here in the book of Malachi God has rebuked the *priesthood*, having dishonored God in sacrifice, in service & in study.

Beginning in Vs 10 of Ch 2 He says the *people* have dealt treacherously, many of the men have divorced the wife of their youth which has born consequences in their families & their walk w/God personally. & Yet for all that they've somehow convinced themselves that the problems they've inherited aren't *their* responsibility, but somehow God has neglected them... Isn't that interesting? We have this way don't we? I suppose ever since the fall we've been masters of the blame shift. We read in Vs 17 of Ch 2.

Vs 17

This isn't 2 different statements, but 2 different ways of saying the same thing. The age-old conundrum of, "If God is a God of justice, then why does it seem like the wicked are always prospering & the righteous are suffering?" "How is it that people who mock God seem to have life on easy street, but as for me, I'm trying to serve God & it's one difficulty, one hardship, one trying time after the next?"

As if there's more blessing in being evil than honoring God, where is the God of justice? (Btw, let me just say that *none of us* truly want justice from God, we want *mercy*).

But God says, "Hey, this kind of ignorant, shortsighted, unbelieving rhetoric is wearisome to Me." It's offensive to God when we accuse Him of injustice.

Why? Because it only demonstrates the fact that we don't know the *heart* of God, nor do we truly believe the *word* of God.

¹ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Heb 4:12-13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

(Write it down so you can read it later, Rom 2:4, 2 Pet 3:9). People have this tendency to interpret the *patience* of God for the acceptance or *approval* of God. God deals w/man on the spectrum of the *eternal*... we have a tendency to focus on the *temporal*.

It was the same problem that Asaph struggled with in Ps 73, he was envious of the boastful when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. He said, "I thought about that, I tried to do the math but it didn't add up, I couldn't connect the dots... until I went into the sanctuary of God. *Then I understood their end...*" You see? It's always about "the end". We get so short sighted, fixated on what's right in front of us & we lose sight of how things are impacting us ultimately, eternally.

Like we read in Jeremiah Ch 5, "*The prophets prophesy falsely, And the priests rule by their own power; And My people love to have it so. But what will you do in the end?*"² You see, God thinks on a different level. People love to hear, "I'm ok, you're ok, God understands, no need to repent, your situation is different..." *But how will that serve you in the end? To be lied to so that you feel better about the sin in your life? God loves you too much to let you live in such a way as to deceive yourself (if we will just give heed to His word).*

But because God doesn't bring judgment immediately (in reality He's allowing people time to repent) but too often His patience is interpreted as approval. Listen to these words out of Ecc Ch 8, "*Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.*"³ Instead of saying, "God thank You for Your patience w/me, forgive me." People think, "God doesn't seem to care so let's keep this train rolling! Let's ramp it up to the next level!" But God reminds them, "Judgment, is coming."

Vs 1-5

One verse, two messengers. One Messenger, two comings. That's what we have in the fascinating section of scripture.

"Behold, I send My messenger." God says, "I'm going to send My messenger, & he will prepare the way before Me." We don't have to guess who this was, this would be fulfilled some 400 yrs later in the person of J.B. (Matthew, Mark & Luke all point to this promise fulfilled in him.) The essence here being, "You're complaining about a lack of justice, but I'm going to set things right through the Messiah & before He comes I'll send a messenger to prepare the way before Me."

² *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Je 5:31] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

³ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Ec 8:11] Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

In ancient times a messenger would go before a royal procession to announce the arrival of the King. To make sure the roads were smooth & obstacles were removed. That was J.B. role in preparing the way for the arrival of Jesus, to admonish the people of God to repent, for the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

Now this is interesting to me because in Malachi's day, Israel seemed to be complaining that the promises of the coming of the Messiah found in Haggai & Zechariah hadn't been fulfilled. But here, Malachi was saying, "You guys aren't ready for it, the way has to be prepared, there's too much 'debris' in the road..." I think this has real application to us because so often we're complaining to God, "Lord, where are You? God, why haven't You moved?" We want to criticize or chastise God when the truth of the matter is that *He's* ready to do a work but there's something in *our lives* that needs to change. Truth be told, we're not waiting on God, He's waiting on *us!* He needs to "prepare the way" in us 1st so that He *can move*.

But look at the role of this messenger. He will prepare the way (Vs 1) "before *Me*." Before who? Before God Himself! This "Messenger" (who will suddenly come to His temple), "Even the Messenger of the covenant" will be none other than God Himself! My point being simply to show you the deity of J.C. isn't seen only in the N.T. but it's shown again & again in the O.T. as well.

"Behold, He is coming." The Messenger of the covenant (Jesus would fulfill the *old covenant* [both the demands of righteousness & the payment for the penalty of sin being the just & the justifier of us all], & establish the *new covenant* in His blood, which was shed for us).

Vs 2

This is what we call, "Prophetic telescoping" & it's not altogether uncommon in scripture where the writer speaks a near/far fulfillment of prophecy in the same section of scripture. So Vs 1 would take place 400 yrs after it was written, Vs 2 takes place more than 2,000 yrs after that (we're still waiting on Vs 2).

In these 2 Vs Malachi speaks of both the 1st & the 2nd coming of J.C. The 1st time He came in grace, the next He comes establishing His government.

"Who can endure the day of His coming? Who can stand when He appears?" The point being that *now* is the time to turn from your sin, when He appears it'll be too late. When Jesus comes again, it'll be a day of disaster & death, the day is coming burning like an oven (Ch 4 Vs 1). God will punish the wicked, but He will *purify* Israel.

“For He is like a refiner’s fire & like launderers soap.” Both the refiner & the launderer share this in common, they’re actions share the common end of cleansing & purifying that which they’re working with. They have a way of causing impurities to rise to the surface so that they might be taken away & the material made clean... pure.

Now; it’s not a pleasant process to be broken down, to be “melted down” in the heat of the refiner’s fire, but often times impurities reside deep w/in the silver, w/in the gold. & It’s only through the fire that they surface, are skimmed off the top & the product is purified. God wants to work w/us well beneath the surface, He wants to purify us deep w/in, through & through.

Here’s a take away, perhaps you’re in the “fire” even now. Let that be a testimony to you, that you (my friend) are gold, precious silver in the sight of God. He’s purifying you & you will serve Him well... “That they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.” (As compared to the lame service/sacrifice they’ve been offering up to this point).

We might say, God doesn’t put up w/pollution in the priesthood, but rather than put them away, He purifies them, purges them (this is the grace of God) so that they offer their offerings to Him in righteousness, holiness... “as in the former years.”

Vs 5

This all ties into Vs 17 of Ch 4, “Where is the God of justice?” When Jesus returns to establish His kingdom, evil will be dealt with decisively. Occultic practitioners (which they’d become familiar with during their days of captivity in Babylon) of which there are no small number today. Adulterers, (those unfaithful to their spouse) Perjurers (or liars), those who exploit employees, not paying them fairly. People who take advantage of the vulnerable & treat immigrants unfairly (this isn’t saying that there shouldn’t be a legal process of immigration, it’s more of a general humanitarian issue).

These kinds of things are rooted having no fear of God. (Cheating on your spouse, lying, occultic practices, exploiting people). If you fear God you’ll show kindness, fairness, faithfulness... you get the idea.

Vs 6-7

In other words, “We didn’t realize we’d gone anywhere.” This is terrifying to me. That we can get so cauterized & desensitized through hollow formalism or mechanical indifference (kind of like Samson in *his* compromise) that we don’t even realize we’ve drifted...

God has pointed out the issues in their sacrifice, their service, their study, their families & here they are, “In what way shall we return?” & God is going to dive into another area that needs addressed as a result.

But we love Vs 6 don't we? “I am the Lord, I do not change, therefore you are not consumed...” Is God a God of judgment? Absolutely! He's also a God of mercy, & a God of grace. A terror to the wicked, but a comfort to any who will turn to Him, trust in Him or *return to Him*.

Aren't you glad that it's not possible for God to change His mind about us? If it were possible then He might just do it & we'd be consumed! Because it's our tendency to “go away from His ordinances.” (His word, His ways). But God doesn't change in His love, His choice toward you, the fact that He's extended His saving grace to you. It's one of the attributes of God, He's immutable, unchangeable (in His purposes & His promises).

Btw, what does the bible says of Jesus? “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.*”⁴ Interesting isn't it, He carries the same attribute that God does, I wonder why that is? ☺ He's God. If He makes a promise to you, it'll never change.

Here's one, “Return to Me, & *I will return to you.*” You've sinned, you've drifted, you've walked away, turn around (repent). Repentance is a word that we use a lot w/reference to the non-believer. Truth is, the bible uses it more toward the people of God! The unbeliever is called to “believe” on the Lord J.C. (certainly turning from sin is *imbedded* in the call to believe) but repentance is applied to the believer who has strayed, who has sinned. “Return to Me”, “You've left your 1st love” “Draw near to God & He will draw near to you.” (James 4:8) It's a promise. (To repent is to return, to return is to repent).

How were they to return? How had they drifted? (Let's buckle up).

Vs 8

Now. Some people get very defensive about the word tithe (which means 10th which is where the principle of 10% comes from). & We'll develop it a little further in a couple minutes, but since that's what God speaks of here, it's what *we're* going to speak of.

I want you to know that for as awkward as it may be to talk about money in the setting of a church service, the Bible speaks of it frequently. There are less than 500 verses in your bible on faith, less than 600 on prayer, yet over 2,000 verses dealing with giving & with money. 1 out of every 10 verses (not consecutively) in the NT deals w/money, giving or possessions.

⁴ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Heb 13:8) Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Of the 38 parables Jesus taught, 16 of them deal directly with giving, money, or possessions. - Do you ever wonder why the Lord is so emphatic about these things? There are certainly a # of reasons, no doubt. But I think one of the primary reasons is because as Jesus said, *"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."*⁵ God wants us to give to Him, not because He needs our money, but because He *wants our heart*.

So as we're following the flow, God is saying, "Quit *robbing Me & return to Me*." It's interesting; every once in a while, we'll hear of a church being broken into... our shed has been robbed consistently & we're continuing to try & improve the security, but we hear that & we think, "How low can you be? I could understand robbing the liquor store or something, but a church? 😊"

We think that people who'd rob a church are at the bottom of the barrel... but what about those who don't rob the "house of God" (if you'll allow me that term), but rob God *Himself*? Who would do that!? God's own people...

Now; initially it sounds almost crazy to think that a man could rob God. What could someone possibly steal from God? How could that even happen? & If it could happen, it would seem like a daring thing to do, wouldn't it? I mean, do you think you'll get away with it? Like, there'll be no ramifications from stealing from *God*? What a shameful, self-destructive, senseless thing to do. Yet God says, "People do it. *My people do it*." How? Through w/holding the tithes & offerings.

God calls it robbery because it's unlawful possession of that which belongs to Him... Truth be told, *everything* belongs to God. The *earth* is the Lord's & *all* its fullness. So, everything we have, we've received from God. Yet God doesn't command us to give Him everything that belongs to Him. He allows us to keep no less that 90% to manage on His behalf. Tithes & offerings (however) are different, they come to the storehouse, they are His to tend to.

So, in Ch 1 God rebuked them because of the *quality* of their sacrifice, they were giving lame, unacceptable sacrifices, things that wouldn't even honor a governor or a mayor, a king or the president, much less the Living God!

Here, it's the *quantity* of their sacrifice. They wouldn't even reach up to a dime from every dollar (which is God's to begin with).

But God wants us to recognize that our giving is connected to our sacrifice, our service, our worship *of* Him & our love *for* Him (the fact that He has our heart).

⁵ [The New King James Version](#). (1982). (Mt 6:21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

& Btw, in the O.T. if you failed to pay your tithe, you were assessed a 20% penalty on top of the 10% (Leviticus 5:14-16; 22:14; 27:31-32).

Now. I realize that some will scream, “Tithing is law, tithing is legalism.” Truth be told, it’s not about law, it’s about love. It predates the law by 100’s of yrs. Ab tithed to Melchizedek as the representative of the Most High God. Jacob vowed to tithe. So it predates the law, however, it *was* codified *in* the law. But at its *root* it’s about *love*. Paul in speaking to the Corinthians in the context of giving said this, “*I speak not by commandment, but I am testing the sincerity of your love...*”⁶ If I love God, I will give to God (where my treasure is, my heart will be).

Ok. You say, “Well, we’re not under the O.C., the N.T. doesn’t command the tithe.” & Strictly speaking, you’d be correct. However, I would say if that under the O.C. the people of God brought their tithes, how could we under the N.C. begin w/anything less? Plus if you look to Luke 11:42, Heb 7:5-9 the N.T. does speak favorably of it when the heart is right. There’s also Romans 2:22, “*You who abhor idols, do you rob temples?*”⁷ What do you think Paul’s talking about? W/holding resources from God...

What *kind* of things does the N.T. say about giving? 1 Cor 16 makes it clear that our giving needs to be **#1 Periodic** (done at regular periods) **#2** It should be **Planned** (thought through in advance) you should know before you get here what you’ve purposed in your heart to give. That way you won’t be manipulated, or sweet talked into a big gift, just pray it over & plan it in advance. **#3** It should be **Proportional** (or percentage based, not random). If you’re a billionaire, giving \$50k isn’t too impressive to God. However, if you’re elderly, living on social security, \$50 may be a significant sacrifice... It should also be **#4 Private** (not done to draw attention to ourselves).

2nd Cor 9 teaches us that giving is to be *generous* (more rather than less), it’s do be done *freely* (meaning not done out of guilt/manipulation) & *cheerful* (given willfully, happily, rejoicing & worshiping God).

I wouldn’t say categorically, but commonly, Christians who argue *against* a tithe do so out of self-interest. However, giving *is* to be proportional, so 10% is certainly a good benchmark. (Again, for some, it’s not near enough, for others it’s a significant sacrifice.)

Allow me to simply say this. If the question of my heart is, “How little can I give and still please God?” then my heart isn’t in the right place to begin with.

⁶ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 8:8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 2:22). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Giving... money management, isn't just a financial issue, it's a spiritual issue.

Vs 9-12

Back in Vs 9 we recognize that a stingy heart is far from God. God is a giver (Jn 3:16). I've discovered that many times (again not every time) but many times people w/financial problems have failed to do the most important thing 1st & that is to honor God w/their resources. Write it down, read it later, Matt 6:33.

In robbing *God*, they were really robbing themselves of the *blessing* of God. Listen, if we won't give to God (because we don't *trust* God to take care of us), then whatever we *are* trusting in will prove futile. Our resources simply seem to be "devoured".

I want you to see this & then we'll be done. Over & over again in the word of God, God says, "Trust Me, trust Me." But as it pertains to giving to Him, He says, "Try Me." Yes, giving is an act of faith, but God rewards faith in every way. Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Bring *all* the tithes into the storehouse. Don't fall short in giving to God what belongs to Him.

I'm of the persuasion that the bible teaches the tithe comes to the place we're being fed, not randomly to this cause or that group or whatever. You just don't find that in your bible. Believe me when I tell you that the church is radically restricted when people don't observe this simple principle (food lacks in His house). The beauty of giving this way is that you have no control, it's totally trusting God. It's not supporting anyone (in particular), we don't get credit from anyone, we're just giving to God in humility, out of love.

You can be generous w/God & He will be generous w/you. Or, you can be cheap toward God, & He will be cheap toward you (2 Cor 9:6). Jesus said this, *Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.*⁸ They were floundering in their faith, God wanted them to flourish. They didn't trust God in their giving. How about you?

We find ourselves at a crossroad. Do we stop at being challenged, or will we allow ourselves to be changed? (Let's turn our hearts to the Lord).

⁸ *The New King James Version*. (1982). [Lk 6:38]. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Prayer Points:

God, in many ways, as we study the book of Malachi we find ourselves examining our own hearts before you. You've left no stone unturned or untouched. Our service, our sacrifice, our study, our marriages, our money... God we want to honor You through it all... & We truly *do* want to be changed. We thank You God that *You never change*, therefore we are not consumed. We thank You for Your love, for Your grace & for Your mercy, renew us, refresh us, refocus our hearts & lives; & we'll give You praise.

If you don't know the Lord, you've not surrendered your heart *to* the Lord. You should know that God loves you. He wants to purify you, to cleanse you & make you new. Believe on the Lord J.C. & you will be saved... It's truly that simple.