

“Robbing God” **(An Exposition of Malachi 3:6-12)¹**

Introduction

We have seen in our studies through this book so far that the priests and people of Israel had been under the chastisement of God for some time, even after their return from the Babylonian exile. Despite God's mercies toward them in bringing them back from that long exile in a pagan land and in providing for them to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem, their hearts were still far from Him.

And this was evident in some of the many *sins that they been continuing to commit*, in the way that they approached *worship in the temple*, in offering blind, lame, or sick animals for sacrifice, contrary to the Lord's commandment (1:6-14); in *the failure of the priests* to faithfully teach the law of God to the people, so that many were caused to stumble by their instruction (2:1-9); and in the people committing an **“abomination”** (2:11) before God and *profaning His covenant* by divorcing the wives of their youth and *marrying the daughters of foreign gods* (2:10-16).

And so God had withheld His hand of blessing from them. It seemed to them that the pagan Gentile nations around them were somehow prospering, while they themselves were suffering affliction and lack. And so they complained that God was being unjust in all of this. They said, **“Where is the God of justice?”** (2:17)

As we saw weeks ago, they were essentially *accusing God of having changed*, and changed for the worse. After all, He wasn't blessing them as they thought they deserved. And so in Malachi 3:6 God tells them that nothing could be further from the truth. There He says,

“For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.”

Not only had God *not* changed, but it was only due to the fact that He does *not* change that they had not been consumed or destroyed already because of their sin and unfaithfulness!

In v.7 God tells them that the real problem was *not* that God had changed (because He does *not* do so), but that they themselves *needed* to change (i.e. to repent), and had stubbornly refused to do so. He says,

“From 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?’”

Since the days of their fathers they had **“turned aside”** from God's statutes and not kept them. Even the exile was apparently not enough of a wake-up call to turn them around! And now that the providential signs of God's fatherly displeasure were evident all around them in the national life of Israel, they were still unwilling to repent.

But God graciously calls them to return to Him in humble repentance, and says He would return to them in blessing. He *still* offered mercy and restoration, if they would just turn back to Him! God is good - He does not change. And He is *still* a God who forgives and receives those who repent and believe!

¹ All Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV) unless otherwise noted.

But instead of repenting and returning to God at His gracious invitation, their hearts remained hardened against God. Their response was not humility and repentance, but recalcitrance and self-righteousness. They answered back to God, saying, **“How shall we return?”** (v.7)

Robbing God

Here in our text in v.8-12 God tells them in no uncertain terms how they were to return, and in what ways they had gone astray in the first place. In v.8 He sums it up as them robbing God. There He says,

“Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions.”

God tells them that they were *robbing* Him. That is what they needed to repent of in turning back to Him. The Hebrew word used there has the idea of *cheating* or *defrauding* someone of something that rightly belongs to them.

And so it is not as if they were stealing from God at gunpoint (as we might imagine robbery to entail), but of keeping back something from God that was *rightfully His* – what they were withholding from God simply did not belong to them!

And how were they robbing God? He tells them - **“In your tithes and contributions.”** Now the word “tithe” literally means a “tenth” (i.e. *ten percent*). In this case it mainly had to do with their herds and flocks, the harvest of their crops, and the fruit of their vines.

The **“tithe”** is spoken of in many places in the Old Testament. In the ESV for example, the words **“tithe”**, **“tithes”**, or **“tenth”** appear at *dozens* of times. In Genesis 14:20 (before the law was even given through Moses), we are told that after the rescue of Lot Abram gave Melchizedek **“a tenth of everything”** of the spoils of the battle.

What was (and in many ways *still is*) the *purpose* of the tithes? After all, God does not need anything. God needs nothing from us. So why the tithe? It was given for the relief of the poor, and for the provision or maintenance of the Levites who served in the temple. Numbers 18:21 tells us,

“To the Levites I have given every tithe in Israel for an inheritance, in return for their service that they do, their service in the tent of meeting”

And again in v.24 it says,

“For the tithe of the people of Israel, which they present as a contribution to the LORD, I have given to the Levites for an inheritance. Therefore I have said of them that they shall have no inheritance among the people of Israel.”

This was to support those who were set apart unto the ministry of the things of the Lord. And that principle has *not* been changed or set aside. Those who serve in the ministry today are *still* to be supported by what is given by the members of the church.

That is as true today as it was in Malachi's day, and it is still one of the primary purposes for tithing today. We give to God what is rightfully His, and it is then used to maintain the ministry of His gospel.

That is why Paul in 1 Timothy 5:17–18 says:

“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.””

Are *you* robbing or defrauding God of that which is rightly His? Is this an area in which you personally need to return unto the Lord?

The Consequences of Robbing God

Now in Malachi's day this robbing of God was widespread among the people. And there were *consequences* to their disobedience in this matter. In v.9 it is written:

“You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.”

The Scriptures often speak of blessings and curses. In general, God *blesses* faithfulness and obedience among His people; and likewise He often visits *curses or chastisements* upon His people for their unfaithfulness and iniquity.

Now we must be clear that this is as true in the New Testament as it is in the Old Testament. After all, *God does not change*. In Acts chapter 5, we have the sobering example of *Ananias and Sapphira*, who were struck dead by God. And what was their sin? They sought to defraud God. They sold a piece of property and gave part of the proceeds to the Apostles for the relief of the poor. But they lied and said that they gave all of the proceeds, as if they could deceive God!

In 1 Corinthians 11:28–32 the Apostle Paul tells us of the severe chastisement from the Lord that some in the church experienced for the way that they abused the Lord's Supper. There he writes:

“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”

Paul says that **“many”** among the church in Corinth became **“ill,”** and some had even **“died”** because of the way that they abused the sacrament of the Lord's Supper!

What was the **“curse”** that the people in Malachi's day were experiencing due to their unfaithfulness? The picture becomes clear when we see it as the flip side or opposite of the blessings that God promises to them if they were to repent of their robbery. In v.10-11 it is written:

“Bring 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. I 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.”

Apparently the “**windows of heaven**” had been *closed*, and the Lord had withheld the rain from the land so that their crops languished. Not only that, but “**the devourer**” (perhaps locusts or blight of some kind) destroyed the remaining crops that did grow. The fruits of their soil were being destroyed and their vines failed to bear.

Now God had warned the people about such curses as these before they entered the promised land of Canaan. In Deuteronomy 28:23–24 it is written:

“And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed.”

In Malachi's day the heavens had become “**bronze**” so that not enough rain fell to sustain their crops and livestock. The earth had become as “**iron**” so that it did not produce crops the way it had done before.

To put it in today's terms, their economy had crashed, and poverty was rampant. Sound familiar? It's not really all that hard for us to identify with that situation, is it?

God still does the same things today. Sometimes He withholds rain. *Sometimes He chastises a people by sending them wicked rulers.* Sometimes those wicked rulers act as the “**devourer**” as if they were a plague of locusts upon the land.

Would you like to see America made great again? If so, our greatest need is revival and repentance. There is nothing wrong with being active politically, and seeking the good of the nation (and the good of our neighbors) by seeking to elect godly men to local, state, and national public office. That is commendable and wise.

But none of that will do any real and lasting good without *revival*, without *repentance* and a turning back to God in sincerity and truth.

The more I read and study the book of Malachi (and all of the Old Testament prophets), the more contemporary and relevant it seems to be. The message of the book of Malachi is as needful and pressing for *the church in our own day* as it has ever been.

The Promised Blessings of Bringing in the Full Tithe

God does *not* just pronounce the *curse* that was already upon them for their unfaithfulness, but in His mercy and kindness He encourages them to repentance and faithfulness through *the promise of great blessing!* In v.10-12 we read:

“Bring 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. I 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. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.”

Now God did *not* have to promise any such thing, did He? And yet as serious as the curse was that was threatened, and which they were presently experiencing, look at how much more time He spends on detailing for them the many blessings that He would pour out upon them if they turned back to Him!

He literally tells them to *put Him to the test!* “Try me” or “prove me!” And how were they to do that? By an act of faith and obedience. He tells them to **“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse”** (v.10). It takes *faith* – trust in God and His faithful provision – to tithe. It is the same with *obeying the Sabbath* commandment – it takes faith to trust that God will provide for all of our needs even if we work one less day per week.

When we suffer want, the temptation is to hold back, and *not* to bring our full tithe. And yet that often results in nothing but lacking, doesn't it? *Christian generosity never makes sense to the worldly heart.* The Lord Jesus tells us that *where our treasure is, there will our hearts be also* (Matthew 6:21).

We think that if we give faithfully to the church and to those in need, that we will just become in need ourselves. But Proverbs 11:24–25 says:

**“One gives freely, yet grows all the richer;
another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.
Whoever brings blessing will be enriched,
and one who waters will himself be watered.”**

Do you want to see the **“windows of heaven”** opened and God's blessings poured out so that there is no more need? That is basically the same phrase that is found in Genesis 7:11 when it speaks of the flood of Noah's day! A deluge of blessing!

Now is this a “name it-claim it” prosperity gospel kind of teaching? *No*. We are *not* promised riches in this life. But we are promised *abundant blessing from the Lord*, and part of that will involve our material needs being met.

As our Lord Jesus says to us in Matthew 6:33, **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”** It takes faith to do that, but isn't that the point? Isn't that what being a Christian – a *believer* in Christ – is all about?

If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, seek His kingdom first in all things – including in your finances. Put God to the test in this if you are not already doing so, and see what He will do.

May God work in us what is pleasing in His sight, even in these things, that He might receive all the glory, and that we might know His blessing upon us. - Amen