

# Malachi 3:6–12

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Preacher: Bing Nieh

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, this is the second sermon for this morning. That's actually what a sacrament is.

It's a visible sermon of sorts. And we just were able to witness a baptism, which is a visible sermon. I encourage you to keep your Bibles open in Malachi, as I will refer to it, the text, over the course of these next moments together.

Just a brief prayer. Father, we come to your word. And we want to hear from you, that we do not want to hear from mere man or mere worldly philosophies or agendas.

We want to hear from the living God, the God who not only created all things, but sustains and preserves all things and will finally bring all things to a close.

[ 1 : 27 ] And so, Father, as we turn to your word, illuminate your word for us, unstop our ears, soften our hearts, open our eyes, that we may see the wonderful things of your law.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. At the end of each school year growing up, there was the highly anticipated day of receiving that year's yearbook.

At least for me, I would flip through the indices and the pages to try to find where I was to ensure that I wasn't humiliated by what was now in print.

Along with fanning through the yearbook, there was the ritual of signing one another's yearbooks. Frequent exchanges were made, repetitive interactions took place where people would pass their books to one another amongst their peers, groups, peer groups and classmates, even strangers, that they might meet for the first time.

I remember phone numbers would be left, comments made, notes jotted down, acronyms etched, like K-I-T, you know, keep in touch. Stay cool was another one, or maybe just me.

[ 2 : 56 ] We acted as if we would never see one another again, only to be separated by a short three months in the scheme of all things. One of the lines that always got me was, never change.

Don't ever change. The sentiment went along the lines of, well, you're kind, and you're sweet, and you're nice, so don't ever change.

And though constancy is desired, it is very elusive. We've become certain of one thing, maybe as young and older, and even older adults, the most certain thing in life is change.

romantic relationships end, with the claim that the other party has changed. Love relationships cease, because one party has changed, leading to separation, and only leaving devastation in its wake.

This morning we come to our text, and the people of Israel in Malachi's day are certain of one thing. God, you have changed.

[ 4 : 15 ] You are not the same God who delivered us. You are not the same God who redeemed us. You are not the same God that lavished your love upon us.

You don't love us anymore. It's the story of, it's the movie story, of two young lovers having that final conversation, encountering the imminent breakup.

One looks at the other and says, why are we breaking up? And the other says, because you've changed. He no longer loves us, is the accusation in chapter 1.

His morals have changed, is the accusation of God, in chapter 2, verse 17. Here in chapter 3, the assertion is there, God has cursed us, according to verse 9.

He is no longer for us. You see, the people were saying he's fickle in his dealings with humanity.

[ 5 : 26 ] He's actually changed his mind about us. He has recanted his promises for us. And against this assertion, God speaks.

The text this morning is astounding in how it opens. From the mouth of God himself, and he declares, for I, the Lord, do not change.

I do not change. Theologically speaking, this is one of God's attributes. His immutability. His unchangeableness.

He always remains. He has no variation. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He is unchanging in both his being, and his character.

He is unchanging in both his purposes, and his promises. This is the anchor of our passage this morning. God cannot change, because he has made a promise, and he will keep it.

[ 6 : 25 ] Think about the notions of change. I've been married 10 months. 10 months. 10 months. 10 months.

It feels like 10 months. No. 10 years. My wife's home ill this morning. Admittedly, there are times where you go, man, if only the other party would change.

She says that about me often. Because the notion of change is what? Perhaps he might be better. He might be kinder.

He might be more compassionate. More patient. More loving. More gentle. We have aspirations for our loved ones to change.

And from the outset, God says, I cannot change. I cannot become better. I cannot be more compassionate. I cannot be more loving or kind or patient.

[ 7 : 28 ] I am God. There is no deficiency in me. I do not change. And because I do not change, he cannot change.

He is not fickle. He is not hot-headed one day and patient the next day. He does not treat us in a wavering fashion. He cannot be improved upon.

He is holy and perfect. He cannot increase or decrease. He doesn't become more loving. He cannot grow in generosity. He is great in faithfulness and greatly to be praised.

A.W. Tozer, a pastor formerly on the South Side who is now gone, he writes this, In this world where men forget us, they change and change their attitude toward us as their private interests dictate and revise their opinion of us for the slightest cause, is it not a source of wondrous strength to know that the God with whom we have changes not?

That his attitude toward us is the same as it was in eternity past, and it will be for eternity future. The assertion is that God is faithful.

[ 8 : 47 ] This is the great encouragement of the text this morning for the children of Jacob or the people of Israel. Because of God's faithfulness, they are not consumed.

Other translations read, I do not change, therefore Israel is not destroyed. In other words, because of God's great faithfulness, God preserves His people. See, the people weren't abandoned in exile. To give you a brief history lesson, what happened to Israel is they were led out of captivity under the hand of Pharaoh, and they were brought into the promised land after a couple of complications along the way.

And in the promised land, they were experiencing the land's bounty and blessing and fruitfulness. They were able to build a massive temple to worship the Lord.

But over the course of time, they became defiant, rebellious. They rejected God's rule, so to say. So God handed them over to captivity.

[ 9 : 53 ] So foreign armies would come in and take Israel captive. And perhaps the most famous, they were taken to exile into Babylon. And they were sentenced, they were in a foreign country with foreign gods, foreign people, foreign food.

And in all of that, their question was, where is God in this? And out of God's kindness, God brings them back into the land. And they're restored.

You see, God never abandoned them in exile. They weren't left as orphans in foreign countries. As a matter of fact, they were brought back because God was faithful. And the point being made is that God doesn't act flippantly based on momentary convenience.

Or He would have put an end to His people a long time ago. One passage reads, Nevertheless, in your great mercies, you did not make an end of Israel or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.

God had made a promise beginning in Genesis 2 that out of Abraham He would create a people for Himself. This promised people was established through a covenant or a contractual obligation of sorts which God could not and would not violate.

[ 11 : 18 ] He was binding Himself to His own word. and therefore God would preserve His people out of His great faithfulness.

See, the people had presumed that the Lord had turned away from them. Yet Malachi reminded them that it has always been the people who have turned aside. As a matter of fact, the people have a history of turning aside from keeping God's statutes.

And beginning in the second half of verse 7 is the crux of the passage. And I want to propose this this morning. The passage is establishing this truth.

Repentance leads to restoration. Repentance leads to restoration. In other words, returning to the Lord would lead to the return of His blessing.

Returning to the Lord would lead to the restoration of His blessing. firstly, they're summoned or they're commanded to return to the Lord.

[ 12 : 28 ] Return to me, verse 7 reads, and I will return to you. The word return is where we get the word repentance from.

Because they have turned aside, they are now commanded to turn again in repentance.

repentance. In the minor prophets, the idea of repentance is largely founded upon a relationship that has gone awry.

An equivalent verse in Jeremiah reads, if you return, I will restore you. If you come back, I will take you back. And that's what God is instructing His people to do.

Come back. Return. Turn around. Repent. And the people respond with a dispute or a complaint that we've seen throughout the book of Malachi.

How shall we return? How shall we return? The question is actually the people were saying how can we return if we've never gone wrong?

[ 13 : 38 ] That's what we've never gone away. Actually, God, we've always been here. See, for the people, their understanding was God, we've done all the right things. We're back in the land that you promised.

We've built the temple where your worship takes place. We've even begun instructing people about the laws in Judaism earlier in this book. But you see, at some level, they thought what they were doing was correct, but they were simply going through the motions and faking it.

You see it because they're bringing crippled and lame sacrifices. You see in their instruction that it's actually with partiality, probably favoring the rich over the poor, marginalizing some over others.

And God is calling them out and saying a half-hearted devotion to the Lord is equivalent to abandoning me altogether.

A half-hearted devotion to the Lord is equivalent to abandonment of the Lord altogether. See, the people had already been confronted with their various failures. And the Lord could have brought them all up again.

[ 14 : 58 ] But he calls his attention to one. One scholar calls it the economic angle. God is saying, well let's assess how you use your possessions.

Let's take a closer look on how you handle your money. Let's examine your stewardship. You see, Israel's attitude toward the use of their finances would be indicative of the health of their relationship with God.

God is saying, if you assert you've been faithful to me, then let's test your faithfulness when it comes to your money. The people's departure was depicted in how they handled their resources before the Lord.

The prophet uses a scathing rebuke, saying the people were actually robbing God. Now, I don't know if there's a robbery school, but there are movies about these great heists.

You know, the whole oceans, 9, 10, 11, 12. It's not even a trilogy now. It's, what do you call that, four-parter? And these movies are fascinating.

[ 16 : 16 ] One, because it's these clever people trying to collaborate on how to pull off the biggest heist or robbery. And, of course, the objects that they're trying to take are the most extravagant and luxurious.

But, in these movies, there's always someone that they are taking from. And, depending on the power of the individuals that they're stealing or robbing, comes the consequences.

And, here in Malachi, God writes, you are actually stealing from me. created beings are stealing from the Creator Himself.

You see, the Old Testament had made it clear that the land, everything that Israel had, belonged to the Lord. Leviticus reads, the land is mine.

And, he says to Israel, you're just strangers and sojourners. The people were to understand that they were stewards, they were tenants, they were caretakers of God's land.

[ 17 : 23 ] It didn't belong to them. And, on top of that, whatever they received from the fruit of the land, whether harvest time or in livestock, they were to allocate part of it unto the Lord.

The tithe in the Old Testament was to accomplish three main things. First, it was to uphold Israel's worship system.

So, it was a way to fund the temple and the tabernacle and its employees. Secondly, it was to alleviate the impoverished and the poor.

And, lastly, the tithe was, firstly, it was to uphold their worship, it was to preserve the poor, and, finally, it was to preserve the priesthood, the employees of the temple.

And, so, in the Old Testament, if you read the priests actually didn't earn an income, they couldn't own land, because the people, out of their generosity, would support the priesthood.

[ 18 : 33 ] Those were the three things the tithe were to do. And, you see, the indictment was scathing, because the whole nation, the Bible tells us in verse 9, were robbing God. If the land belonged to him, the tithe doubly belonged to him, and the people were deliberately withholding from God.

And, because they did so, it actually would run the temple to ruins. It would neglect the poor.

And, Nehemiah tells us that the priests were now in the fields trying to earn a living. As a result, they had incurred a curse upon them.

The curses were declared in Deuteronomy chapter 28. The nation of Israel, a special people, one that experienced God's deliverance and divine blessing, now found themselves under a self-inflicted curse.

If they had obeyed the Lord, they would have received limitless blessing. Now, they've chosen to turn away. Now, and as a result, they receive limitless curses.

[ 19 : 53 ] God called His people to return and to repent. And if they did so, a blessing would be restored. Restoration.

Well, the turning away was exemplified by the withholding of the tithe. And the Lord challenges them and actually confronts them and says, test me, test me, evaluate my dependability, bring the full tithe into the storehouse as a demonstration of your genuine repentance.

And if you choose to do so, three things will happen. One, I will open up the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will no longer be any need.

I will bless you extravagantly to cover every need in the nation. The nation would experience God's provision. Secondly, I will give you bountiful harvest that's untarnished by infestation.

God would protect the crop not only from foreign invasions of people but also of bugs. the nation would experience God's protection.

[ 21 : 09 ] And thirdly, the nation would become a visible sign attesting to God's favor on Israel. The nation would prosper in ways that would lead to her praise.

That because of their repentance, God would restore the nation's beauty and joy. A nation that used to be shameful would now be glorious.

three things would be the result. God's provision from heaven, God's protection, and then God's making of Israel great.

These would be the sign that they were God's people if they returned to him. Repentance would lead to restoration. Restoration that would bring a lavish blessedness upon the people.

And the question that we ask this morning is, well, how does this apply to us? What are we to do with our finances? What are we to do with our money?

[ 22 : 17 ] Well, I want to make brief remarks. For Malachi, God is concerned with two things. The quality of the heart of the giver and the quantity of the gift.

God was concerned about the quality of the heart of the giver, calling them to repent, to stop going through the motions and actually give themselves wholeheartedly to him.

And also about the quantity of the gift. See, God was seeking a faithful people who kept his law, not out of obligation, but out of heartfelt sincerity, that it would be manifest in the giving of the full tithe.

So do we tithe today? We're not obligated by the law. We're actually people under God's grace.

And what should that look like? Well, I think the principle has strong parallels. God is concerned still with two things. The quality of the heart of the giver and the quantity that is given.

[ 23 : 24 ] Let me explain. Well, the New Testament describes the heart or the attitude with which we are to give. It tells us to give generously. It tells us not to give reluctantly or under compulsion. It tells us to give cheerfully. It tells us there is an attitude of the heart that we are to possess when we give. But the New Testament also tells us about quantity.

You're probably waiting, well, what's the percentage being? I just need to know the percentage. Well, the New Testament describes we're to give according to our means.

In 2 Corinthians 8, it even describes people giving beyond their means. It tells us that whoever sows sparingly reaps sparingly. Whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully in the New Testament.

It gives us stories. stories of Jesus sitting at the temple with his disciples in Mark. And he actually sits from afar and he watches people tithe.

[ 24 : 36 ] And he watches the wealthy in Mark chapter 12 drop large quantities in. And the disciples are surely saying, wow, that's so much.

They're so generous. And then Jesus points out a widow who drops in two copper coins, totaling one penny. And he turns to his disciples and he says, you know what?

She gave more than all that preceded her. We're to give sacrificially. And so when it comes to New Testament, what are we to understand?

One, I don't know the amount you're supposed to give. But I think I can make this claim. If the widow could give out of poverty almost nothing that appears to be everything for Jesus, it is not okay to give nothing.

I think I could stand on that. The testimony of the Bible in its entirety is it is not okay for God's people to give nothing. After that, I can say, give generously, without compulsion, according to your means, sacrificially.

[ 26 : 03 ] And for some, I don't know. I don't know what that is. But I do know this. We give out of obedience. And I remember when I was in college, I didn't make money.

I actually had to pay a lot of money. And I had this thought that, oh yeah, I'll just give when I'm later, later, later.

Of course, God gives me a lucrative job after school that gave a young man far too much money than he can manage. And you know what? Even at that point, oh, I gotta save.

I'm gonna save God. I gotta save, I'll give later, later, later. And finally, under great conviction, the time to give I realized was now, out of obedience.

And you know what giving did? It actually revealed to me my idols. because with money, you're able to buy the things that you love.

[ 27 : 16 ] And the things that you love tend to be the things that displace the Lord. And as I said, oh man, I want to set aside this amount, but what about, oh, those shoes, those shoes, that car, that apartment.

and the Lord began to confront idols in my heart. Because giving is not only about obedience, it is about dethroning things that lay siege on your heart.

And so, I don't know, I mean, that's what the Lord has done in my life. And I trust that that's what he will continue to do in yours. God uses money to test your faithfulness as a servant.

Does it honor Christ? Am I stewarding well? Am I living in ways that are honorable to the Lord?

Well, for the people in Malachi's day, it was revealing.

They were withholding from God. They were robbing God. And it was a heart issue. The quantity was wrong because the quality of their heart was wrong. And I'm convinced that if the quality of one's heart is right, the quantity will always be right.

[ 28 : 40 ] Well, repentance is not merely seen in contrition of the heart. Repentance is seen as a conviction to act.

We're not only to foster repentance in our heart as an internal transformation, it creates an outward transformation. How does one actually know that they are Christian? Well, I can say that I've repented, but it's as you steward your resources that you demonstrate the reality of that faith. See, faith is not invisible. People will say faith is invisible. You can't see it. It's unquantifiable. No, it's visible, observable, measurable.

I could tell you a man or woman's faith based on how they steward their time. I could tell you about a man and woman's faith based on how they allocate their Sundays.

I can tell you about a man's faith based on his profession of faith in the act of baptism. I can tell you about a person's faith based on how they use and steward their tongue.

[ 29 : 46 ] I can tell you about a man's faith and how they share their thoughts. I can tell you about a person's faith based on how loudly they sing on a Sunday morning.

faith is visible. It is detectable. It is measurable. It is seen in conduct and concerns.

It is verifiable in how one chooses to spend their finances. It is attested to in how one gives money.

It is reflected in committing to faithful stewardship.

Now to be clear, giving is not a means of earning God's approval. It is not buying God's favor. We're not trying to buy a new heart. We were given a new heart and with that new heart comes new affections, new concerns, new desires, new will, new generosity, new sacrifices.

And so, 430 years after Malachi comes another one of God's messengers. believers. He's found amongst God's people reiterating the exact same message that Malachi is proclaiming.

[ 31 : 03 ] Return to me and I will return to you. The message is the same even 430 years from Malachi. It is the same now 2,000 years later.

The message is the same. Why? Because the Lord is the same. I am the Lord. I do not change. His faithfulness persists. And this messenger comes on the scene and he shares this fascinating story. I think it's familiar to many of us. A story about two sons who are both lost. And the younger one approaches the father in defiance, in rebellion. And he says, hey dad, I know you're not dead yet, but you know that inheritance?

Can I get like a cash advance? And the father obliges and gives it to him. So the younger son leaves home with his inheritance, goes off to a distant city, and squanders his wealth in wild living. His life and his fate are destitute when famine strikes. He's employed, caring for pigs, and longs to even eat what the pigs eat.

[ 32 : 14 ] And the story continues that one day he comes to realization, he goes, you know, I'm here trying to eat what the pigs are eating. Even the servants in my father's house have enough food to eat.

I'm going to arise and I will go to my father and I'm going to say to him, I've sinned against you. I'm no longer worthy to be called your son. So the son rises from that distant country and he makes the long road or sets out on the long road of repentance.

And to his surprise, he's welcomed by a waiting father filled with compassion, embraced and kissed, lavished with new attire, a new ring and new shoes, a celebration and a banquet ensues.

And the parable is told to demonstrate, yes, the return and the return of a repentant son, but it's told to demonstrate the faithfulness of the father.

What is astounding about the passage is that the father receives the son. The story is actually so insulting that the older brother gets angry.

[ 33 : 33 ] How could you? If you knew how far he went, if you knew how he spent his money, if you knew how he wasted his time, if you knew how he squandered his resources, you would not receive him.

And the scandal of it all is the father says, rejoice, celebrate, kill the fattened calf, bring in the neighbors, declare to the entire town that my son was lost and is now found.

And staggeringly, he was dead and now he's alive again. And that is the scandal of the gospel, is it not?

That regardless of how heinous your sin, regardless of how far you've gone, regardless of how long you've been in it, how deep you sit in it, if you just get up and turn, and repent, I can say on authority of God's word, because he is the same forever and ever, he will say to every repentant sinner, walk him home, throw the party, kill the calf, give him the ring, put on the robe, God's God's people turn, they will find God's compassion awaiting.

Wow. Repentance that leads to restoration. It's true between you and I. it's true between you and the Lord.

[ 35 : 39 ] Lord. As we've crafted this series in preparation for Advent, it is not only that way in our calendar, that Advent starts shortly, but it's how it's situated in our Bibles.

Malachi is the last book before Jesus comes on the scene. And God has sent a long line of messengers, Malachi, John the Baptist, Jesus, the apostles, frail men up front, and the message is the same.

Repent. Be restored. Repent and be restored. Let's pray.

Father, we ... ..