

You have Robbed Me

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[0 : 00] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 1st of June 2003.

The preacher is Paul Dudley. His sermon is entitled You Have Robbed Me and is based on Malachi 3.6-15.

How utterly stupid it was to think that this baby would not come. Yet, the weeks that we had had, it's probably a little understandable, I think, just in my defence.

We just did not think it was going to arrive. In fact, yes, last night, not last night, but the night before when this baby arrived, our precious little joy, Michelle and I looked at each other once the nurses had all gone, left with this precious little bundle.

We looked at each other and we could, we just said to each other, we can't believe that it's actually here. It's actually arrived. There was this sense in which we didn't think it was going to come.

[1 : 11] How utterly stupid to think that, to think that this baby would never come out. There are some things in life that are absolutely sure will happen. Israel, how utterly stupid it was, to think that God would let them continue in their ways, that God would let them, leave them in their disobedience.

Last week we saw that God's judgement would be sure and certain. Oh sure, we can make all the excuses for them. You know, living in the midst there that God didn't appear to be doing anything. But God was going to do something and God has done something. Today, in today's passage, we see some statements that back this judgement up and again, continue to look at the heart of the problem for Israel.

So as we look at it, why don't I pray? Father, we pray for us this morning here that as we look at your word that you will indeed help us to consider Christ, consider the way that we live our lives and that we may see areas that we may be letting you down in.

Help us to change, renew us, we pray, that we may live lives that bring you honour and glory. We pray this in your son's name. Amen. It's often quite difficult to try and work out what your motives are for different things.

[2 : 40] You think, oh, I must do this but then you try and sit down and work out why is it that I'm doing this? Why is it that I've taken this promotion at work? Why is it that I'm helping this person cross the road?

What are our motives for the different things that we do? Malachi, the prophet Malachi, one of the last prophets in the Old Testament before Christ, some 400 years, comes to help them understand what is their motivation, what is in the heart of their religion for the Israelites, those who have a passionate religion yet are disobedient to God.

Malachi has done this with a special pattern that continues right through the book where God makes a declaration, he makes a statement. The people, God declares what is in their hearts by a question about that statement.

How is it that such and such is the case? God makes it clear. He pinpoints what is the problem at their heart. He tells them what is their motivation and their thinking.

And then God gives an answer to their motivation. What is at the heart of their being? So if you open up your Bibles today to page 778 for Malachi, the passage that we're looking at, God makes a declaration here.

[3 : 57] He makes a statement. The statement is, We've just seen that God's judgment is going to come.

Malachi here gives the first of two reasons why we can know that this is going to happen. The first is, God does not change. He is changeless. He is dependable.

He is a rock. He is better than a Volvo. He is better than the blue chips on the stock market. He is an absolute guarantee. He does not change.

He is a God who keeps his promises. A God who is faithful. We see this in that verse that I just read, the first part of the verse. We see that the reason why we can see that God is faithful is because the children of Jacob, Israel, have not perished.

By rights, they should have been wiped out a long time ago. But God in his faithfulness upholds them, looks after them, cares for them.

[5 : 05] He is patient with them, providing for them for their repentance, loving them when they are unlovable. That's the first thing that we see, that God does not change.

But the second thing that does not change and the reason why God is going to bring about his judgment is that the people don't change. They are people, as verse 7 says, ever since the days of your ancestors, you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them.

Here is the second charge. They have not kept God's commands. They are a people, a race, throughout their history who were wayward.

People who continue to sin habitually, continually. They have people who have turned their backs on God time and time again. As we've worked through this book of Malachi, we've seen this in many cases.

The way that God, the way that they did not see God's love. They followed other idols. We saw the way that the priests gave second rate offerings, the leftover offerings, things that were just left over, damaged goods, instead of the pure offerings that God wants.

[6 : 21] We saw the way that they broke covenant with mixed marriages and divorce and the way that they were cynical of God judging. Here is a people that continue to be wayward, a people who turned their back on God.

It's interesting to note that last week the very hard words that God was bored, God was weary of them, that God's patience would come to an end.

These words that we had last week, that God's patience would come to an end and yet this very next chapter here we see God telling his people to return. Look there in the second part of verse 7. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. Return to me. Come and confess your sins. Recognise that you need help from me and I will give you repentance.

It's interesting isn't in light of last week where God said his patience would come to an end where he would bring about judgement and here again God offering repentance for them.

[7 : 32] Here we see what is at the heart of Israel's problem. A problem of broken relationships. The marriage relationship between God and his people lay in tatters on the floor. They no longer served God but themselves.

They were a selfish people. Well, as I was saying, there is the statement. The statement that we've been looking at and then here comes the question, the heart of where these people are at.

But you say, how shall we return? They ask the question, how shall we return God? Not asking which way, which method shall we come back to you? But it's a question of why should we return to you?

What have we done wrong? We're a passionate people, a people who serve you faithfully. But God has shown how they are disobedient in their lives.

Here is a people who are asking why should we return? For them, for them, the selfishness of their own lives, living lives that they wanted to live, stood in against the way that God wanted them to.

[8 : 42] There are people who turned up every Sabbath. There are probably a people that read the bold parts in their scrolls together. A people not unlike ourselves. Yet they are a self-seeking people.

A people who had no sense of the sin that was in their heart. How shall we return? Why should we return? We see God's answer in verses 8 through to 12.

How shall we return? Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me. There's an interesting statement. Robbing God. God, the creator of the universe who holds everything in his hand.

The one who owns everything. Robbing him? They ask the question, how are we robbing you?

Here is again their last little facade of trying to maintain their innocence.

How can we be robbing you, God? Look at us, we're innocent here. And God declares his answer in very stark terms. In the Hebrew, it's even starker than we have here.

[9 : 46] In verse 8, in your tithes and offerings. In the Hebrew, it's simply tithes and offerings. No verb.

No clarifying word. How are they robbing God? Tithes and offerings. In the Old Testament, the tithes were the 10% of what people had.

It was a mandatory payment that God's people was asked to bring. A tribute of many thanks for the blessings that God had poured out on them. It was brought to the temple or the tabernacle and it was there to provide for the welfare of his people.

Those who were disadvantaged or those who were dependent on others to provide for them. This 10% was something that God demanded of his people. A tribute of thanks.

The offerings that they were to bring were something that was voluntary. It was that giving above and beyond the tithe. Again, something that God told his people to do to bring their offerings.

[10 : 46] This provided for the needs of the clergy. Yet these people were robbing God of their tithes and offerings. They were withholding the gifts that God had given them.

They were probably a middle class people who didn't think that they should give up what they had to give to God. This was a covenant violation.

They were more interested in themselves and providing for themselves than for others. In verses 10 through to 12 we see the great promise that God declares that if they would only just fill up the warehouses, if they would only just bring their tithes and offerings in full, then God would bring about a great blessing.

A blessing that would be far-reaching. A blessing upon themselves more than they could imagine.

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house and thus put me to the test as the Lord of hosts.

See if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. I rebuke the locusts for you so that you will not destroy the produce of your soil and your wine in the field shall not be barren as the Lord of hosts.

[12 : 06] Then the nations will count you happy for you will be in the land of delights as the Lord of hosts. God says for them to bring in their full offerings, tithes into the storehouse.

They were to be a people who were to be generous. The opposite to the way they were, their selfishness. They were to be generous. God challenges them to this.

God challenges them to respond to his offer of forgiveness. He challenges them to take a risk on him. It's interesting the words that we have there that they are to put the Lord to the test.

As we look through the Bible it time and time again declares not to put the Lord your God to the test. But here God is saying put him to the test. We need to understand the different context in which these words are said.

People throughout history put God to the test by continually doing what is wrong in his eyes. By living the lives that they want to live. Testing his patience.

[13 : 10] Testing his judgment. This is not the testing that God has in mind here. The testing that God has in mind here is they are to put at risk the things that they own.

They are to put God to the test and see that he will not bring about great blessing. They are to take the risk of making themselves poor. Giving up of what they own that they may bring God much glory and honour.

in this great verse that we see here that if the people would do this put God to the test they would take a risk on God. He says in this wonderful verse see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.

here we see the picture that comes in many ways from the picture of Noah and the flood where God opens up the heavens and a great flood pours down. A huge flood, a deluge that covers the earth.

Here is the picture that God says I will pour out like a great flood my blessings upon the land. See if I will not bring about great spiritual blessing.

[14 : 21] See if I will not bring about rain for your crops that the land may produce and be fertile. See I will not stop the locusts bringing about their destruction.

Put your Lord to the test. God will not fail you. God's words are not empty promises. God tells his people to renew their relationship with him in this concrete manner.

They are to take a risk on him. They are to bring in the whole time. They are to be a people who are generous with God. In verses 13 through to 15 in this final section we see there the heart's response to this generous offer of God.

Here we see the people's response the way that they think about God's generosity to them. Look there in verse 13 You have spoken harsh words against me says the Lord.

That's the statement. Yet you say here is the question by them how have we spoken against you? And God's answer and this is part of their question as well you have said it is vain to serve God.

[15 : 40] What do we profit by keeping his command or going about as mourners before the Lord of hosts? Now we count the arrogant happy. Evil doers not only prosper but when they put God to the test they escape.

Here is the problem of their heart. Here is a people that say harsh things against God. They do not trust in the great promise of blessing that God offers.

They say it's futile. Why should we trust God? What do we gain by taking a risk on God? They look around and see that the arrogant are the ones who are blessed not God's people who take a risk. The evil doers are the ones who prosper. Here we see in this sense that they are putting God to the test these evil doers and they say when they put God to the test by doing the wrong thing they escape punishment.

These are harsh words. They are words that show their selfishness. They are words that show their heart as it truly is. They are people who doubt God's generosity.

[16 : 49] They doubt his ability to bring a great blessing and they think that God lets those who do evil escape. Next week we're going to have a look at God's response to these words.

In verses 16 through to the end of the chapter where God declares his judgment on these people again. But for now, notice the two ways that people take risks with God.

Those who take risks and are generous with God are those who take risks against God's judgment, who do evil, thinking that God will do nothing about it.

As we look through the Old Testament, we see the way that God brings his curses and his blessings. Moses was on the edge of the promised land with his people the second time.

The book of Deuteronomy is four sermons in which Moses brings to his people telling them that they are to trust in God, they are to be obedient to him and if they were then God would bring them into that promised land, a land flowing of milk and honey, a land of great blessing.

[17 : 57] In chapter 28 Moses brings these two charges that of blessing and cursing. In chapter 28 verse 1 If you will only obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth.

All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God. Then the next part of chapter 28 goes about talking about the great blessings, the blessings that would come from the land, very immediate blessings, a blessing where God's people would be in his land enjoying his produce, enjoying relationship with God.

In the second part of chapter 28, Moses also brings about a great warning. verse 1 But if you will not obey the Lord your God by diligently observing all his commandments and decrees which I am commanding you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake you.

And then Moses brings about a whole lot of the curses that would come upon them. As we work through the Old Testament, we see the way that God brings about his blessing, brings about his promises, the fulfilment of his promises to Abraham, that he would bring a great blessing, even though God's people let him down time and time again.

Towards the end of the Old Testament, we see that the blessings that would be seen immediately in the land actually point to a far greater blessing. It points to a great blessing where God's people would enjoy a perfect relationship with God, where they would enjoy a perfect land, where they would enjoy peace.

[19 : 45] where they would enjoy great blessing from God. Not the parliamentation that they saw in the land throughout the Old Testament.

As we come to the New Testament, we see that this great blessing, this blessing of friendship with God and land and all the things that the Old Testament talk about, is the field in Christ.

Paul in Ephesians says that every spiritual blessing comes in Christ. As we trust in Christ and what he has done for us, that we start to enjoy these blessings.

But these blessings we do not see until Christ returns. The blessing is not the here and now, but a blessing that is to come.

A blessing found in Christ. A universal blessing. We may enjoy some of God's good providence here and now on this earth as God's people, but that is nothing compared to what God is about to

bring.

[20 : 51] We live in a society where many churches are preaching a prosperity gospel. A gospel that says that if you give to God, God will give you generously here and now.

It's a gospel that says that we can enjoy heaven here and now. That we can enjoy great peace and blessing here and now.

They look at passages like today. If you bring about your tithes, then God's going to bless you here and now. My cousin goes to one of these churches and he, after hearing sermon after sermon, was convinced that he should take a risk on God, that he might have a great blessing for himself here and now.

He had a little van that he used to go and do work on cars and doing work as a mechanic. And so he took a risk, took a huge loan, got two new vans and set about trying to make a fortune and trying to get God's blessing here and now.

But it failed and he went bankrupt. God is not promising that we'll enjoy the great blessings here and now. The blessings are to come and are found in Christ.

[22 : 09] But see that God does not care for you. See that God does not care for you here and now, looking after you, upholding you in the midst of crisis. Things may seem like they're going wrong and pear-shaped.

But God is caring for you. The second thing we see there is the way that God's people put him to the test. Where they test God in disobedience.

But we see that great verse there in verse 10, that they were to take a risk on God. We are to be a people who take a risk on God also. It's interesting that when you look back in the Old Testament, God's people are told to take a risk and once a year go to Jerusalem to leave their homes open to attack.

To go and offer their sacrifices in Jerusalem. And they were to take that risk, knowing that God would bring about safety for them. Yet God's people time and time again did not take that risk. What about us? People who have a great blessing. Consider what Christ has done for you. What should we offer up as our tithes and offerings?

[23 : 28] Is it the 10% that are spoken in the Old Testament? In Romans chapter 12, we are told that we are to give our whole life. We are to be a living sacrifice.

We are to be people who take a risk on God and offer all that we have to him and his service. As I reflect back through history and think about people who have taken this risk, I'm reminded of C.T. Studd, a great cricketer, a man of much wealth, who gave it all so that he could become a missionary. I don't know that he enjoyed a great deal of material wealth as a missionary.

As we look back, we see that he gave up great things to become a missionary. As I think back through time, I think of Eric Liddell, that great runner.

I enjoy the movie, Chariots of Fire, so much. He was a man that gave up so much. He trusted God. He became a missionary also.

[24 : 32] As I look through time, I'm reading a book on those who are martyrs. I have a girl who, in a communist state, was raided by some soldiers.

The soldiers made that group, each one of them, go around and spit on the Bible and declare they wanted nothing to do with it. One by one, the group got up, spat on the Bible and their life was spared.

But there's one girl in that group who took a risk. She took a risk and she would not do it. And she lost her life for it. She took a risk and there wasn't a great deal of blessing.

I don't know what blessing will come from what she did. The promise is that God pours out his blessing on those who take a risk with him. I think about us and our congregation here and those who take a risk.

I see people bringing their food portions up to the front for St. Mark's. I was thinking about this last night as an illustration and noticed this morning that the food for St. Mark's, the food bank is almost bare and that it's time that we should be giving again there.

[25 : 51] This is only just a small way which we can take risks with God in offering up our blessings. We may not see great material benefit from it now but we know that we are bringing about God's blessing.

We are to take a risk on him. There are lots of small ways that we can do this in our lives. Taking a risk for him. It might be speaking to our next door neighbour.

It might be the way that we use our money. There are so many different ways that we can take a risk with God. But we are encouraged to do that.

We are encouraged not to rob God of the opportunity of pouring out his rich blessings. things. My mass teacher at school became house master of a house.

Was doing quite well in the school. Became head of department. And he gave it all up so they could work in an orphanage overseas. What a great example of someone who took a risk for God.

[26 : 57] May we be people who do that and bring honour and glory to our great God. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.