

Malachi 2:17-3:12
(Luke 6:37-38; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15)
“Return to Me and I Will Return to You”

Introduction

We all do it: it may be a family crisis or a crucial project at work or an important exam or a big game. We determine to live the week in advance in a way that will please the Lord. We make sure to show up for worship and to put in an offering. We pray with particular zeal. In other words, we want the Lord to take notice of us, to be pleased with us, to reward us for our obedience. We revert to the ways and means of childhood when we wanted something from our parents.

This is what the people of Malachi’s day were doing. When times were hard, they said, Okay, let’s try doing what the Lord requires, and see if he’ll bless us. So, they went through the motions of obedience, pretending devotion to the Lord, when they were anything but devoted to him. And then, when God did not immediately respond by answering their every request, satisfying their every desire, they thought, Why bother? What is to be gained from obeying the Lord? They actually brought charges against God, and in our text, the prophet speaks up for God and answers their charges.

I wonder if some of us here this morning believe that God has been unjust toward us, that he cannot be trusted to keep the promises that we find in the Scriptures. I suspect that there are more than a few of us who have harbored resentment toward the Lord, and who need to hear Malachi’s words as the Lord calling us to return to him, not in a sort of two-minute drill because we are facing some crisis, but to return to him for good, as a whole new way of living.

Body

1. The accusation: There is no reason to believe in God’s justice or faithfulness.

Why do the wicked seem to be favored by God? (2:17b). What is the substance of that charge? Well, aren’t there times when the wicked seem to prosper and go unpunished (3:15)? What do we gain by obeying God’s commands and serving him (3:14)?

2. The defense: The problem is not with the Lord, but with his people.

The Lord is going to come and deal with injustice and wickedness (3:1). But, before you start celebrating, consider this: Who can endure the day of his coming? For judgment will begin with God’s own household (3:2-5). Only because of God’s unchanging faithfulness have his people survived to this day. His people have a continuing history of unfaithfulness, and if our salvation rested on our

faithfulness, we would have no hope (3:6,7a). Nevertheless, while he does not change in his character or purposes, God does grow weary of the disobedience and constant complaining of his people (2:17).

3. The invitation: God in his mercy says, “Return to me and I will return to you.”

But how are we to return to the Lord (3:7)? God’s answer: Give me your treasure (3:8). E.g., Jesus and the “Rich Young Ruler.” Tithe means one tenth of everything we earn and have. There were, in addition, all sorts of offerings that the people of Israel brought that pictured aspects of their relationship with the Lord. And they were to be faithful in giving alms to the poor whenever they encountered people begging. As Malachi has already reminded the people, they not only have failed to tithe faithfully. When they have given, it has not been their first and best, but their last and least. The whole tithe emphasizes all that the Lord desires of us as sign that we are his (3:10).

4. The promise: God says to those who return to him, “I will bless you, and through you the nations will be blessed.”

Test me, says the Lord, and see how I will bless you (3:10). The testimony of God’s people down through the ages who have given generously to his work is of a joy and spiritual prosperity that could not be experienced through any other strategy of investment. You will not necessarily, in spite of what some prosperity gospel preachers teach, become wealthy with the things of this world. But you will have all you need, and will enjoy it beyond the enjoyment of those who live for the things of this life, and so can never get enough.

And I will also bless the nations through you (3:12). When God blesses his people, and his people realize that they are blessed in order to be a blessing to the nations, then the nations rejoice, and have reason to believe the good news of God’s grace.

Conclusion

God invites us to put him to the test (3:10). But the invitation is only to those who return to him with all their heart. Are you willing to trust the Lord with the very things – your wealth, your talents, your time, your affection – upon which this world rests its hope and confidence? You’ve tried it the world’s way and it’s let you down every time. Half-hearted faith is an oxymoron. Give him your heart today. Don’t wait until it’s too late. “Return to me,” says our great God and King, “and I will return to you.”