

Reading: Malachi 3:6-12

Theme: Proving God by obedient faith.

Last time we started looking at this passage and I said I had 7 points, all beginning with the letter C. We saw 4 of those Cs last week

1. Changeless (v6) - the Lord does not change one little bit. His holy standards and commands are in place still; He is still as awesome and holy as He ever was, but He is also still as faithful to His promises and that is why the fickle people of Jacob were not destroyed.

2. Confronting (v7a) - the Lord confronts the people with the fact they had wandered away from Him.

3. Calling (v7b) - He called them to return to Him and He would return to them - this is a call of mercy and kindness to a rebellious and undeserving people.

4. Charging (v8) - God then charged the nation with the awful crime of robbing Him. They had questioned how they were to return to God i.e. in what matters did they need to make amends, even though God had already listed many crimes they had committed against Him. God added to the list of charges this awful crime of robbing Him.

We saw how they were not giving gifts and offerings as they should have been. We applied this not so much to our own level of giving, but our attitude to giving to God and His work. It was a question of love that would affect our giving, yet we also saw it was not just about giving money, but our time, our concentration, our service to God, especially here in the local church.

I asked the question to us all, are we robbing God? It is so easy to do - not giving Him the love He deserves, the worship He should have. Perhaps we are selfishly wasting our finances, our time, our talents on only the things we want. Maybe we are not giving our

trust and lives to Him! Possibly we are robbing God by not bothering, through apathy or choice, to be involved actively in the life of the church.

If we do not honour God as God, do not live for Him as He has said, surely then we are open to the charge of robbing God! These Jews were charged with such and through Malachi the Lord speaks of:

5. Cursing. (v9)

This verse is bit of a shocker! Because the nation, those from all sorts of classes and backgrounds were robbing God in these half-hearted, playacting tithes and offerings, the Lord had placed the nation under a curse. Isn't that a bit severe and strong? Yet if you know the situation and think about it, it was the changeless God merely keeping His word about things that He had told His people of previously. They had been promised many blessings on them and their land if they obeyed God - incentives and encouragements were given. Yet they'd also been warned of the consequences if they disobeyed God, if they ignored and set to one side His standards and commands - realise God always keeps His word, both the promises and the warnings. Realise this God needs a warning sign "*Danger - God at work!*" God is not a God to be played around with and treated with contempt, or as a joke, or as insignificant.

From v10-12 it would appear that the curse of God upon the nation resulted in meagre harvests, as there had been disease and insect pests on the crops. Not only that, but Israel, as a nation, was a joke among other nations and they were the poor relation among the nations around them.

They wanted so many blessings, expected, even demanded it and yet did not want to obey God. All they wanted was prosperity along with an easy, cheap religion that acted as a good luck charm, as a means to being happy, healthy and prosperous. What about us today? Do we view Christianity, religion, as a means of gaining success, to get what we want, expect and demand of God? Many imagine that if they keep in with God, then things will go fine for them!

Christianity is not about using God as a prosperity genie, getting what we want in life and having a cushy number. That is a very selfish, greedy motive - we only love or serve God for what we get! The Lord God Almighty wants us to love Him for who He is, not for what He gives or can do for us. It is an insult, an offence to hypocritically pretend to love God, when really it is for our benefit. Sadly, many do that and we are to realise it is robbing God.

We are to understand that we, as those who profess to love God in the Lord Jesus Christ, we could be robbing Him and while not under **the curse**, we can experience on many levels the failure of so many things we work hard at, invest effort and energy into - our harvests have been blighted and spoiled. Not our garden harvest, the crops of the land, but a spiritual harvest.

If we rob God, what if God said *“Ok, you give your money, your time, your effort, your talents, your love in a tight-fisted way and then I’ll bless your harvests in the same way!”* We preach the gospel, it is spoken of, the church tries outreach, all in accordance with God’s word and revealed ways and yet nothing, zilch, zero effect on anything or anybody and seemingly no one is converted. Yes, the word is preached, people are witnessed to, prayed for, but it seems as if the work is cursed. If this is happening, we are to

question if it is because we the people of the church are robbing God - of gifts, money, time, prayer, love, right relationships and a right loving of God and our brothers and sisters. Yes, it will cost us to sort things out, to return as we should to our God, but do we realise the Lord is tenderly calling us to return, to forsake our wicked ways, our half-hearted love, our half-hearted tight-fisted giving of finances, time, talents and we are to work for Him. Thankfully He sends remedial judgements before a final one on His people.

In Revelation 2 the exalted Lord Jesus addresses the church at Ephesus, a church which had lost its first love and He called on it to repent and do the things they did it first. Our Saviour doesn't want fine talking or emotional knee-jerk responses, He wants deeds of true repentance which evidence a true love for Him and His unchanging ways. What about us as a church or as individuals? Malachi then continued His message from God and there is not only this solemn announcement about cursing, but here the Lord is also:

6. Challenging. (v10-11)

The Lord doesn't say "*You are rotten lot and you are cursed!*" For He tenderly, gently challenges the people to do something amazing - v10 "*Test me in this*" (NIV) "*Prove me now herewith*" (KJV). God invites, more than that, challenges the people to put Him to the test! It's as if He says that if they did this giving of tithes as they should, tithes of crops etc. as we saw last time, that even though reason would say that they would be short and not have enough produce, crops etc. yet God wants them to test Him and to see that they will have abundance and protection.

The bad harvests, the hard times meant that they were struggling and they gave only a little bit of the required OT offerings. Here

God says *“Give it all as you should!”* He would then show them how He can bless and give them abundance. Probably we all know the film Chariots of Fire - where real events are shown us - Eric Liddell refused to run the hundred yards in the 1924 Olympics in Paris because the heats were on a Sunday. He was put in to do the 400 yards (*which had seldom run before*) and we know he won it. As he ran, he had a piece of paper in his hand given to him by another athlete who quoted 1 Samuel 2:30 *“for them that honour me I will honour”*. This same principle is put on the line here in Malachi’s day – for the nation to put God first before their bellies, fears, bank balance and not fob God off with 2nd best.

It is a principle that stands good in our day - honour God and He will honour you. It’s not as some say *“Give and receive abundantly more; the more you give, then the more you will prosper.”* Some call it a *“sowing seed teaching!”* Yes, in using our gifts, talents, finances aright for God, the Lord may or can prosper us - for He sees we can be trusted and not ensnared by such wealth etc. Yet we are not to give for that reason, but we give because we love Him and give as we are able and moved by that love - whether it is of our gifts, talents, finances, time or our life’s service.

God must be served in the first place for who He is and served out of love. All else is robbing Him. We are to serve Him wholeheartedly as this is the right way. As we do so, we may find blessings in our life - physically yes, but most certainly spiritually. Matthew Henry wrote *“Those that will deal with God must deal upon trust; and we may all venture to do so, for, though many have been losers for him, never any were losers by him in the end.”* We may not have success, health, wealth and prosperity in this life, but God is no man’s debtor. We will have laid up treasures in

heaven which do not rot or decay, which cannot be stolen and does not depreciate or fall in value.

Are we as a church, as individuals willing to accept God's challenge to test and prove Him? Perhaps you are not a Christian, you have questions, have uncertainties about life, God, the universe and such. God challenges you to test, to prove Him! Perhaps it is a step of obedience to His guiding for your future - God challenges you to test, to prove Him, His guidance, care and provision. Perhaps it is a challenge to be walking aright with God and His people - God wants you to know His abundant care and provision.

Remarkably God challenges us to challenge Him, to see if His word will be kept! I'll let you into the answer now, that answer is "*Yes! His word will be kept!*" He will never let you down, all who trust Him wholly, find Him wholly true. It may have seemed such a big step to these people of Israel, but the Lord just doesn't go about graciously challenging them, but we see Him:

7. Comforting. (v12)

Here the Lord says words that are intended to be full of comfort and encouragement. If the promised blessings were not enough incentive, then God goes even further in pointing to promises He had previously made to the people. He may have made these promises a long time before, but God does not change and His promises still stood, as did His standards. God had warned the nation of the consequences of disobedience and told them of the blessings of obedience before they went into the Promised Land e.g. this first part of v12 is a summary of Deuteronomy 28: 1-14 where the Lord speaks of His blessings being known so much, that the nations would no longer mock and scoff, but they would own them as God's blessed people.

The 2nd part of v12 touches on a precious promise made to the Jews before the exile into Babylon, given through Isaiah, especially 62:4, where God would come and bless the land and it seem as if it was married to God and He delighted in her. This is what the Jews of Malachi's day wanted - blessing and God delighting in them and they could be comforted, encouraged by the Lord's words at the end of this challenge that it would be worth it in the end.

God was saying in so many words "*Look I will do amazing things for you if you trust Me.*" God still says that! Some people resist God, as they imagine He would spoil their lives, their fun and they'll become boring, lifeless people. Yet God basically says to that "*Rubbish! I will bless and delight you!*" One of the older men in Swindon church, when we were there, was challenged when a young man by the things of God and one lunchtime in the back store room as he had his sandwiches, he saw a little robin in the corner and he tried to give it some of his bread, but every time he went near to it, the robin flew away. He said to it that it was foolish, it didn't know the good he could do for it. At that moment he felt as if the Lord Jesus was saying the same to him and there in that room, he trusted the Lord Jesus as his Saviour.

Do we realise how much good the Lord Jesus offers to do for you and me in the gospel? He offers things we can't even begin to imagine at this moment - good, great, glorious things; blessings of and from heaven, God delighting in us and all through what He will do and achieve in us by the Saviour He has freely provided.

As a church, as church officers, as pastor, do we really believe it? Charles Spurgeon in writing to his students said this "*It is proven by all observations that success in the Lord's service is very*

generally in proportion to faith. It is certainly not in proportion to ability, nor does it always run parallel to a display of zeal, but it is invariably according to the measure of faith, for this is a law of the kingdom without exception 'According to your faith be it unto you.'" [All Round Ministry P.3]

As a church, are we ready and willing to be serious with God, to come to Him on His terms, to seek and obey Him wholeheartedly? If not, we will just fade away. Unless we repent and live aright, we will not know heaven's floodgates opened and His blessing poured out. Heaven's floodgates were opened in Noah's day in judgement, but we can be praying for a flood of blessings.

The people of Malachi's day gave no reaction to God's word, but some 4 centuries later there arose a group of 120 men and women who had met to wholeheartedly seek God and wait for the promise of the Father. On that day the floodgates of heaven were opened and the Holy Spirit came down on the day of Pentecost in His fulness. That opening of heaven still continues and blessings flow on the earth as people's lives are being transformed as they trust the Lord Jesus. We need to pray we will not be half-hearted and that the outpoured Spirit will flow over us and not just soak us, but spread into and through our lives and many be brought to know the Lord Jesus as their Saviour and it all be for His glory and honour.