

Malachi 3:7-12

A disciple is... One who knows and follows Christ, one who is being changed by Christ, and one who is committed to the mission of Christ.

We know Christ in a relationship with Him, and from the moment of the beginning of that relationship, we follow Him. In the course of following Him, there are times that we have to change. He is molding us, shaping us, making us to be like Christ. That is what repentance is all about. It is a lifelong process we go through to be more like Christ. We will be looking at a passage where God calls His people to repent. We will get there in a moment.

One year around Thanksgiving, Paul Harvey shared a true story of a woman and her frozen Thanksgiving Turkey.

The Butterball Turkey Company set up a telephone hotline to answer consumer questions about cooking the turkeys for the holidays. One woman called. She was asking about cooking a turkey that had been in the bottom of her freezer for 23 years. Is the turkey safe to eat? The Butterball spokesperson said, it would probably be safe if the turkey had been kept below zero for the entire 23 years. The rep warned. Even if the turkey is safe, the flavor would not be at a place where she would recommend eating it.

The woman's response: "Well, that's what I thought. We'll give the turkey to our church."

This is the attitude that the Jewish OT priests had after the second Jewish temple was rebuilt after the Babylonian captivity. It was one of many issues God addressed with the Israelites in the book of Malachi.

After the temple was rebuilt, the animal sacrifices resumed. The people and the priests were excited, anticipating the coming of the Messiah. Time had passed. Messiah had not come. The people are starting to be slack in their commitment to God. There were a number of things that were indicative of that slack.

One of the areas was that of worship. They began to worship their play, and play at their worship.

God uses Malachi to address them. The book is set up like a courtroom. God is the accuser and judge. Israel is the defendant. God gives an accusation. God accuses. The people answer in questions. The cynicism in the responses to God may be a reflection of how the people related to God. The responses are haughty, arrogant, boastful, disrespectful. Yet God was ready to prove Himself faithful to Israel in spite of how they treated Him.

I want us to go to chapter 3. Look at verse 7-12.

7 "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?'"

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, 'How have we robbed You?' In tithes and offerings.

9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you!

10 Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.

11 Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts.

12 "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

What does God say through the passage?

First, there is a call.

Actually it is more than a call. It is a command. It is a call, a command to return. We've lost the true meaning of being called by God to do things. We have made it to become an optional thing. You get a phone call. You look on caller ID. Oh, it's so and so. I don't want to talk to them. I'll let that go to voice mail. Sometime I think that is what we do to God. Oh, it's God calling. I don't have time for him right now. Let's continue to do what we are doing. Such mindset is the same as the Israelites in the days of Malachi. In scripture, calling is commanding. It is a summons. God summons the people of Israel to return to Him. If they return to Him, the condition would be made where He will return to them. Wait, does that mean God moved away? No. God stays where He is. He is faithful. He is true. He is the only constant thing there is in the universe. It is not God who moves, it is us as humans who move away from Him in disobedience.

A good illustration from scripture of this command and response of God is the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. When the younger son returns home, the father runs to meet him to welcome him home. That is our God in this passage as well.

In the response of the people, it is easy to catch the haughtiness that the people have. How shall we return? What have we done against you that we should return?

Second, there is a crime.

Will a man rob God? Think how profound that is. Will a man rob God? I mean, is that even remotely possible? Yet, that is the charge. So the people arrogantly respond. How have we robbed you? God responds, "In tithes and offerings."

God goes on in verse 9 with stinging words. *⁹You are cursed with a curse, for you are ^{ro}robbing Me, the whole nation of you!*

Remember what was said last week. Of your income, 90% is yours to do what you want. The 10% represented by the one red apple is the tithe. It is not your tithe, because it doesn't belong to you. Remember what Leviticus 27 says. The tithe is the Lord's. It is holy. This belongs to God. For us to cut into this and use it for ourselves is robbing God. It is sin.

Remember too that we talked about whether the tithe is a Mosaic Law issue alone. It is not. It predates the Law of Moses. Jesus never nullifies it. In fact, Jesus got on to the Pharisees of how they were misusing the tithe. Paul never mentions tithe, but does mention proportional giving. Why did he not say tithe? I think it is because as Christ followers, why should we give anything less than 10%? Why should we not give more. In fact, the tithe is the bare minimum. That's how the Jews looked at it. What do I have to give? What's the bare minimum? What do I need to give to keep God happy? The bare minimum in school is what you need to do to get the C. After what Jesus Christ has done for you, you want to only give Him the bare minimum.

So the people were robbing God of the tithe and the offering. The way God spoke it, that was expected. What is the offering? It is the portion of yours. The extra offerings in the book of Leviticus were not required, but again reflected the heart of man for God. The tithe is not the offering. It is the tithe. I admire other than church ministries that will tell you, "Don't give us your tithe. You give the tithe to the church."

Why would a man rob God of the tithe and the offering? It is a heart issue. You don't respect God, fear God to give Him what is His. You choose to not obey Him. Tithe is one of the points of following Christ as a disciple. How obedient are you? If you don't obey, don't call Him Lord.

Third, there is a correction

That's what God does. That's what His word does. He corrects us, sets us aright. He tells us what we need to do to return to Him. So the correction comes in verse 10. *¹⁰ Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this," says the LORD of hosts, "if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows.*

What God tells us is that not only are you robbing God by keeping the tithe, you are also robbing yourself. You are robbing yourself of the joy of giving. You are robbing yourself of the blessings that God gives because of your heart to give the tithe as an act of worship.

So, God's remedy of correction is simple. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. The storehouse for our day and time is the local church. Bring all the tithe into the church. That is what it will take for us to return.

Now how will God return to us? With the correction comes a promise. "Test me now in this, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows."

What that tells us is that this is a trust issue. The heart of a disciple obeys in trust in God. This is God we are talking about. Do you trust Him? See if He will pour out a blessing.

In our first church, we had a young couple join the church. They had not been married long. They had an elaborate wedding. She got I think four credit cards and maxed out on all four. So when the wedding was over, they found themselves with a massive debt hanging over their heads. God convicted them of the need to tithe. The husband took the lead on that. There was one point where they had a bill due that would cause them to cut into the tithe. The husband said, "We have no choice." He wrote the tithe check and gave it the next Sunday. The wife said, "What are we going to do with this bill?" I don't know. We'll just have to trust God in it. The next day, they found a check in the mailbox that was from an overpay on something they paid for. The bill that would have cut into the tithe was paid for in due time with some money left over.

Now, I am no health, wealth gospel preacher. I am not saying that if you give the tithe that God is going to give you a two story mansion with a fancy car to drive in. God knows we probably don't need either one of them. I am telling you that God will pour out a blessing in form of spiritual blessing or even monetary blessing.

Prove Him. Test Him.

Notice what else God says in this passage.

11 Then I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of the ground; nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes," says the LORD of hosts.

12 "All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land," says the LORD of hosts.

You will be a testimony to others not what you are doing in giving tithes and offerings. You will be a testimony of what God is doing in your church.

Prove the tithe day on May 6. In your bulletin this morning is a stewardship commitment card. This is your opportunity to trust God by making a commitment to tithe. Don't put your name on it. I am asking you pray about your commitment to tithe. How much will you tithe. Use that as a commitment to God, not me, and not the church. Let's prove the tithe. Let's ask God to show His faithfulness when we obey and give our tithes and offerings.