

God is Faithful

Stewards and Squatters in the House of God

7.13.25

Message 5

Malachi 3:7–12 (CSB)

ROBBING GOD

⁷“Since the days of your ancestors, you have turned from my statutes; you have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of Armies.

Yet you ask, “How can we return?”

⁸“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!”

“How do we rob you?” you ask.

“By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions. ⁹You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing me.

¹⁰Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way,” says the LORD of Armies. “See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.

¹¹I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit,” says the LORD of Armies. ¹²“Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land,” says the LORD of Armies.

Malachi 3:6–12 (NLT)

A Call to Repentance

⁶“I am the LORD, and I do not change. That is why you descendants of Jacob are not already destroyed. ⁷Ever since the days of your ancestors, you have scorned my decrees and failed to obey them. Now return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD of Heaven’s Armies.

“But you ask, ‘How can we return when we have never gone away?’

⁸“Should people cheat God? Yet you have cheated me!

“But you ask, ‘What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?’

“You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. ⁹You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. ¹⁰Bring all the tithes

into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test! ¹¹ Your crops will be abundant, for I will guard them from insects and disease. Your grapes will not fall from the vine before they are ripe," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

¹² "Then all nations will call you blessed, for your land will be such a delight," says the LORD of Heaven's Armies.

Introduction:

A. There has been a progression throughout Malachi of the people's unfaithfulness.

1. They were unfaithful with their worship by bringing less than their best sacrifices.
2. They were unfaithful at home and rejecting their godly wives for the allure of worldly women.
3. They were unfaithful and ungrateful with the blessing of God, especially when it dealt with the Lord's tithes.

B. Bridging the 2500-year gap.

1. A lot has changed in 2500 years since God spoke through Malachi.
2. One of the important differences between us and them is that we are not under the Law, nor do we worship God like the Jews did.
3. God does not confine His presence only to the Temple.
4. We do not need priests to intercede for us or act as intermediaries between God and us.
5. Our tithes and offerings even look different:
 - a. We live in a very different financial world than they did, so our tithes are usually dollars.

b. Their tithes would have been the first of everything that grows and the firstborn of the flocks.

C. Preface: Not everyone in Christianity agrees on tithing.

1. Tithing does not save us.

2. If we treat tithing like a tax, we become like the Pharisees that Jesus dealt with who were tithing the smallest portions of their spices while ignoring the weightier things of the Gospel.

3. This morning, I want to open these Scriptures together and see that the picture of God in Malachi 3 contains far more than money.

a. What is in view is more than money, because God already owns everything.

c. What is pictured in Malachi has everything to do with worship and the Image of Jesus.

a. The image of Jesus was in the sacrifices and in the marriage.

b. Therefore, He must also be in the tithe.

1. Returning and Robbing?

A. God makes the accusation.

1. You have left me.

2. You have robbed or cheated me.

3. Again, the Israelites act like they have no idea they have done anything wrong.

4. How do we return, and how did we rob you?

B. It's possible they didn't know they were doing anything wrong.

1. Most likely, they knew they were doing wrong but didn't realize how their decisions were grieving God.

2. They thought what they were doing was no big deal, didn't make a difference, God wouldn't notice, or simply God doesn't care.
3. Why would God care about me not bringing the tithes?
4. God doesn't need my money or my sacrifice, so he won't miss mine.
5. **To put in modern language:** Maybe they looked around and saw that the Temple was being taken care of and thought my money would do better elsewhere.

C. But God took this personally.

1. God was offended.
2. God was grieved and angered.
3. God did notice, and He framed that in words that are personal.

D. Return to me...and I will return to you.

1. This is language of relationship and repentance.
 - a. **Disobedience is sin, and sin creates separation and distance.**
 - b. They thought they were close to God, but they weren't.
 - c. Notice the NLT: "But you ask, 'How can we return when we have never gone away?' Mal. 3:7
 - d. They thought God was within them, but God wasn't where they thought He was.
2. Sin leads us to view our relationship with God through distorted eyes.
 - a. Israel viewed God as unfaithful while justifying their own behavior.
 - b. Sin leads us to blame God instead of blaming ourselves.
 - c. **Sin tries to mimic the presence of God in hopes you won't notice that the one walking with you is not who you think it is.**

1. Sin presents a familiar spirit, but it isn't God

2. The enemy of your soul hopes you can't tell the difference.

3. The Good News, the Gospel in this verse, is that God wants to bridge the gap.

a. He has already bridged the gap between His holiness and our sin through the blood of Jesus.

b. He is still willing to welcome each of us with arms wide-open.

c. But it requires repentance.

d. God has nothing to repent of; we do.

E. Robbed and cheated me...

1. Again, God uses personal language that shows the sin is against Him.

2. He didn't say Israel robbed the priests because they were doing fine.

a. You know why they were doing fine?

b. Because the more the people sinned, the more they sacrificed.

c. The priests were eating well because the people were sinning well.

d. It's possible that the priests, who were not teaching true knowledge and wisdom of God's Word, and who were accepting standards far below what God expected, were profiting from the sinfulness of the people.

e. The priests were getting fat while God was being dishonored.

3. It would be like if I encouraged everyone in here to take your tithe money and go gamble it.

1. Sure, most of you would lose, but someone might strike it rich.

2. And when you did, you would bring a portion.

3. The Church would look like it was blessed when in reality, it was robbing God of real worship.
4. God was taking this cheating very personally.
 - a. The people have no idea why God was offended!
 - b. They could not grasp that **God takes sin personally.**
 - c. First and foremost, sin is always against God before it is against another.
 - d. Because of their sin, the whole nation was under God's curse.

2. My Statutes (vs. 7) and My House (Vs.10)

A. Two other examples of God taking this personally.

1. The people were violating God's statutes.
2. He was the one who, in Deuteronomy, established the tithe.
3. He was the one who set aside the firstborns of every flock.
4. He took the Levites in place of the firstborn of all of Israel's children.
5. Bringing tithe and offerings to the Temple was God's idea, not the priests'.

B. The theft was happening at the House of God.

1. Bring the tithe...so there may be food in "my house".
2. **Did the priests forget whose house it was?**
3. Did the people forget they weren't cheating the priests, the preacher, or the organization, but God Himself?

3. Steward or Squatter?

A. God made it clear to the priests and the people that this was His house.

1. The Temple was rebuilt because of the providence of God.

2. Their sin led to the destruction of the first one 85 years before.
3. Now, God has allowed them to build another Temple and to worship once again in Jerusalem.
4. Once again, they have the opportunity to do what is right according to the Lord.

B. The people of God were not honoring the House of God.

1. Stewardship is the care and management of something that belongs to another.
2. John Bevere said that "stewards carry what God wants others to have."¹
3. God wanted the nations to experience the presence and the splendor of God through the witness and ministry of Israel.
4. God had entrusted His fame, reputation, presence, and worship to Israel so they might witness to the nations and bring them in.
5. But they all were failing to steward the Presence and House of God.

C. Instead of stewarding God's house and His worship, they were squatting in it.

1. Squatters use a property without care or concern for who it belongs to or its final condition.
 - a. Have you ever heard of an example of people squatting in a house and leaving it in better condition than when they arrived?
 - b. Several years ago, a few of us went to Tulsa and worked at the Dream Center.
 - c. The director took me to a house in a challenging neighborhood that the Dream Center had bought and remodeled.
 - d. The dream was to have a nice home for someone in the community to have and steward

¹ John Bevere's book: "X"

e. Instead, we went to board up the windows because people were breaking in and squatting.

f. They were ripping out all of the copper from the walls, doing drugs in the house, and defecating in the corners.

g. That isn't isolated to the city, because the same happens around here.

2. Squatters spend it, consume it, destroy it, and deface it without any appreciation of who it belongs to or where it came from.

a. The priests were responsible for caring for the Lord's House.

b. It was to be ready for His presence and arrival. (He will return to His temple, suddenly).

c. God's house was to be treated with respect and honor.

d. The tithe and sacrifices brought into it were to accomplish their purposes: to bless God and to bless the people.

e. But the people's view of God was so diminished that the worship of the Lord had become something to consume instead of to steward.

f. The Lord was angry at the condition of His house.

1. When the Lord looked upon His house and His people, what should have delighted Him angered Him

2. The unfaithfulness towards the tithe demonstrated the people's low view of God.

4. Tithing and the Worship of God.

A. There are two passages in Deuteronomy that directed the giving of the tithe.

1. In Deuteronomy 14 and 26, instructions are given.

2. I'll do a full teaching on these passages in the near future.

3. If you will permit me, let me summarize.

B. God told Israel that when they came to the Promised Land, they were to take the first of the land and thank God for it.

1. They thanked God for it by gathering it in a basket and carrying it to where God's presence was.
2. They would take the basket to the priest and set it down before the altar of God: Deut 26:4.
3. Then they would make this confession:

Deuteronomy 26:5–11 (CSB)

⁵You are to respond by saying in the presence of the LORD your God:

My father was a wandering Aramean. He went down to Egypt with a few people and resided there as an alien. There he became a great, powerful, and populous nation. ⁶But the Egyptians mistreated and oppressed us, and forced us to do hard labor. ⁷So we called out to the LORD, the God of our ancestors, and the LORD heard our cry and saw our misery, hardship, and oppression. ⁸Then the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, with terrifying power, and with signs and wonders. ⁹He led us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. ¹⁰I have now brought the first of the land's produce that you, LORD, have given me.

You will then place the container before the LORD your God and bow down to him. ¹¹You, the Levites, and the resident aliens among you will rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given you and your household.

C. In the years after that, notice what the Israelites were told to do:

Deuteronomy 14:22–23 (ESV)

²²"You shall tithe all the yield of your seed that comes from the field year by year. ²³And before the LORD your God, in the place that he will choose, to make his name dwell there, you shall eat the tithe of your grain, of your wine, and of your oil, and the firstborn of your herd and flock, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.

1. The giving of tithes and offerings celebrated God's faithfulness.
2. When the Israelites refused to bring it to the Lord's house, they were robbing God of worship!
3. The tithes and offerings were meant to be given and enjoyed in God's presence.

5. Picture this:

A. You finally enter what God has promised you.

1. You go to the fields that are now yours to steward and enjoy, and you pick up some of the fruit and food that is present.
2. You put it in a basket and walk to where the Tabernacle of God is set up.
3. I'm walking with evidence of God's faithfulness in my basket.
 - a. Maybe the neighbors notice and they ask, "what is in the basket?"
 - b. And you declare, "Proof of God's faithfulness!"
4. When it is my turn to stand before the priest, I hand the basket to the priest who sets it before the altar.
 - a. Then I declare God's faithfulness through my story.
 - b. My fathers wandered and prospered in Egypt.
 - c. Egypt treated us harshly so God delivered us with a mighty hand and performed signs and wonders.
 - d. God has brought me to this land just as He promised.
 - e. So today I bring evidence of God's faithfulness.
 - f. Deuteronomy 26:11 (CSB)

"You, the Levites, and the resident aliens among you will rejoice in all the good things the LORD your God has given you and your household."

B. But wait, there's more!

1. Every year, as the land and flocks produce, according to Deut. 14, I would gather the tithe.
2. I would get the family and load them down with all of the tithes.
 - a. Everybody would be carrying something, from the oldest to the littles.
 - b. I would borrow carts and livestock if I had to.
3. As a family, we would walk to where God would make His presence dwell.
 - a. There we would go to the Temple, and we would feast on the tithe.
 - b. As a family, we would worship the Lord and celebrate His faithfulness.
 - c. Those walking by would see the evidence of His goodness on our lives.
 - d. **And the good news: The tithe means there is more at home!**

C. When the Israelites stopped bringing their tithes, they stopped bringing their gratitude.

1. They were robbing God of the public declarations of God's faithfulness.
2. They were cheating God of public glory.
3. They were ROBBING their family of opportunities to know God's goodness and faithfulness.

D. The family brought the tithe.

1. The liturgy and the confessions spoke of how God was faithful to their ancestors.
2. In the presence of the family, they ate of the physical signs of God's faithfulness.

- a. Because God was faithful to our ancestors, we are in this land.
- b. Because God is faithful to us, we eat of the land.
- c. Because God is faithful to you, we will continue to eat off the land.

E. The principle of the tithe applies to all of us:

- 1. Everything comes from God and our proper response to His faithfulness is to steward it, share it, and enjoy it.
- 2. If we are faithful and thankful, God will open the storehouses of heaven and grant more than we can carry.

6. The Rebuke.

A. There are two rebukes in Malachi.

1. The first rebuke was in 2:3, where God told the Levites that He was going to rebuke their descendants because they were unfaithful to the Altar.

2. *Malachi 2:1–3 (CSB) "Therefore, this decree is for you priests: ²If you don't listen, and if you don't take it to heart to honor my name," says the LORD of Armies, "I will send a curse among you, and I will curse your blessings. In fact, I have already begun to curse them because you are not taking it to heart.*

³"Look, I am going to rebuke your descendants, and I will spread animal waste over your faces, the waste from your festival sacrifices, and you will be taken away with it.

3. This was a negative for Israel:

- 1. If they continued in this path, even the children of the Levites would walk under God's disfavor and curse.
- 2. It wasn't inevitable if they would take it to heart and change their ways.

B. Now, God gives another opportunity:

Malachi 3:11 (CSB)

¹¹"I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not ruin the produce of your land and your vine in your field will not fail to produce fruit," says the LORD of Armies.

1. He offers to rebuke the devourer.
2. It's possible that locusts were eating the crops.
3. It's possible that local enemies, fires, and other plagues had come upon the Land.
4. Maybe the devourer is seen as the absence of God's favor and is a spiritual agent actively working against God's people.

C. Either way, there is a choice: Do you want God to rebuke you or want Him to rebuke the curse?

1. Israel's unfaithfulness, disobedience, and rebellion put them in a position of being devoured.
2. Instead of being a blessing to the nations, they were an example of God's displeasure.
3. But God offered to bless them again, if they would repent and return to Him.

7. Return to God

A. The message of Malachi revolves around this proclamation:

1. RETURN TO ME!
 - a. It is the opportunity to be in relationship with the King of the Universe.
 - b. The other nations that surrounded Israel brought gifts to their gods in hope of some kind of favor and blessing. That's what we call magic.
 - c. But the true God offered relationship and provision to those who sought Him and obeyed.

2. When we tithe and give offerings, it is a reminder that we are in relationship with the Lord of Heaven's Armies.

a. I don't tithe to get, I tithe because I have.

b. I don't tithe to receive more, I tithe because God has already provided and continues to provide.

c. I don't tithe to earn salvation, I tithe because I'm already in relationship with Jesus.

B. When I tithe and give, I'm celebrating what it still yet to come.

1. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul said that Jesus was the first fruits from the dead.

1 Corinthians 15:20–23

²⁰ But as it is, Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹ For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. ²² For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.

²³ But each in his own order: Christ, the firstfruits; afterward, at his coming, those who belong to Christ.

2. This is the same language we read about in Deuteronomy and the same thing Israel was ignoring in Malachi.

C. What if our tithing was another way for us to proclaim and remember that Jesus is still coming for us?

1. What if when your family tithes, you are reminded: Jesus went first and He's coming back for me!

2. What if tithing becomes a regular reminder of faith: I give because I know there is still more!

3. We don't tithe to be saved, to keep our church membership, or to unlock a heavenly slot machine.

4. We tithe as a proclamation: God is faithful!

D. If I give 10% but my heart isn't toward the Lord, it doesn't matter.

1. If I sacrifice, but my heart isn't toward the Lord, it doesn't matter.
2. If I stay married, but my heart isn't toward the Lord, then I'm missing out.
3. The Apostle Paul said something similar: If I speak with the tongues of men and of Angels, if I don't have love, then it's empty.
 - a. Tithing, in of itself, is not a magical thing.
 - b. Tithing does not twist the arm of God.
 - c. But when we return to God with all of our heart, mind and soul, and we hold nothing back INCLUDING finances, THEN He pours out from heaven blessings without measure.
 - d. He pours out more than I can carry.

Apply:

A. When I tithe, I am proclaiming that Jesus has gone ahead.

1. When I tithe, I proclaim that Jesus already owns it all.
2. When I tithe, I declare what Jesus has done for me.
3. When I tithe, I see God's perfect faithfulness in the day-to-day.

B. Return to Me...

1. The most important question for all people: Is my heart right with God?
2. A question for the believer: How can we be stingy when God has been so faithful?
3. A question for the Church: Why would we withhold from the community of God the material evidence of God's faithfulness?