

***I AM GOD—YES, I AM. I HAVEN'T CHANGED***  
**Malachi 2:17-3:18**

**(Read Malachi 2:17-3:18)**

**Intro:** When I lived at Navajo Brethren in Christ Mission in Northwestern New Mexico I could go out on any given day about 360 days a year and look north and see the mesa we called Huerfano. I never grew tired of it. We took frequent trips to it. We could drive or hike to the top. We even climbed in it but that was dangerous and I still cringe at how crazy that was in retrospect. We probably should have been a bit more respectful in our adventures since it was a sacred mountain (one of four) to the Navajos who called it Dzilth-na-o-dith-hle which means, roughly, “The mountain that never changes”. It really seemed the truth since I had approached from every direction and it looked like what you see up on the screen. But looking at it from an aerial perspective shows that it does change. Things look different from above.

What, or better, WHO never changes, no matter what perspective, is God. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow and he’s always good, always merciful, always all powerful, and all knowing. He is God. He doesn’t change.

Let’s look at that further as we continue our series from Malachi by picking up at Malachi 2:17, where we left off two weeks ago and learn more about his amazing, unchanging God.

First, in Malachi 2:17, the peoples’ complaining question is . . .

**Where is the God of justice in this unjust world?**

- We know what it’s like to be frustrated with what’s going on in the world, so that’s nothing new. It was happening in Malachi’s day and 500 some years later Jesus would tell his listeners on the mountainside, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. Matthew 5:43-45.*
- It’s good to be reminded of this – but it’s not good to accuse God of ignoring it or blessing sinful activity. In fact he’s tired of it. Peterson renders the verse like this, *You make God tired with all your talk. “How do we tire him out?” you ask. By saying, “God loves sinners and sin alike. God loves all.” And also by saying, “Judgment? God’s too nice to judge.” Malachi 2:17 (The Message)* That’s going too far – the implication is that God doesn’t do anything about unrighteousness because he can’t do anything about it.
- Fortunately God is wearied only since he would be completely justified in being angry and acting accordingly as his people resist his truth and his activity. But he doesn’t – instead he makes a promise with...

**You just wait!**

- I’m going to set things right with my Messiah, and before him will come my messenger. The exact words are *Behold, I send my messenger, and he will prepare the way before me.* Malachi 3:1a. The Lord himself is coming! And his people better be ready.
- It’s going to be a cleansing arrival – like a refiner’s fire that burns off the impurities and a launderer’s soap that gets things cleanest of clean. The priests who have fallen so far short of the standard Levi had set will be scrubbed clean. Peterson gives this vivid picture, *He’ll be like white-hot fire from the smelter’s furnace. He’ll be like the strongest lye soap at the laundry. He’ll take his place as a refiner of silver, as a cleanser of dirty clothes. He’ll scrub the Levite priests clean, refine them like gold and silver, until they’re fit for God, fit to present offerings of righteousness.* Malachi 2b-4 (The Message).
- This is what God does with his people. Yes, he was speaking to the people of Israel in 500 BC but this is the cleansing he does for us today. The priests he will scrub clean are you and I. Yes – we are priests, Peter tells us, *But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.* 1 Peter 2:9. He will come with judgement but it is a purifying judgment. James Gailey writes, *The purification of*

*fire and of the laundry soap, is referring to a time when the proper worship of God will be central and offered by people who fear the Lord and who do not disobey his commands. This is the equivalent of a Christian community where worship is central and vital and where social relationships are animated by the high ethics of the Sermon on the Mount.*

- This is us, ABC! This is why our gatherings here on Sunday morning and on Wednesday night for corporate worship are essential. This is why your Worship Design Team strives to lead us into throne room of the Almighty in music and the Word as we gather. This is why we need to be in the word and worshipping between Sundays. This is why we need to be alert to where we can administer holy compassion to a hurting world. This is us ABC. God is intent upon his work on us as he cleans and buffs and burnishes his workmanship. Let's be open to it.
- This was his message then and it's his message now and that's why he tells us in verse 6...

#### **For I the Lord do not change!**

- Or better, as Peterson puts it and what I used for the title of this talk, *I am God—yes, I Am. I haven't changed.* Malachi 3:6a (The Message). And because he has not changed, his people have not been destroyed. They deserve to be destroyed, but in his mercy and he has refrained from that. The history of the chosen people has been to ignore God – that time is over!
- It's a simple call to repentance. *Return to Me, and I will return to you* Malachi 3:7. How often has someone you know (maybe you have too) complained that God has abandoned them? Well here's what we need to ask: Who moved? Who left God? God is still where he has always been. He doesn't change. He has not moved. Come back to God.
- The question and answer comes up, *'How shall we return?'* *Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?'* *In your tithes and contributions.* Malachi 3:7b-8. It comes down to this...

#### **It's not about the money, it's about obedience**

- David Guzik writes this, *"Will a man rob God? It seems strange to think that a man could rob God. What could someone possibly steal from God? The LORD explained how it could happen – they robbed God by withholding their tithes and offerings. It was an expression of astonishment: Will a man rob God? Astonishing because it is such a daring thing to do. Astonishing because it is shamefully ungrateful. Astonishing because it is senselessly self-destructive. Astonishing because it will certainly be punished."*
- It's robbery because they had unlawful possession of what belonged to God. It wasn't because only the tithes and offerings belonged to God, in fact, everything we have belongs to God. I mean that's what *The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein*, Psalm 24:1 means right?
- And the response invariably comes up that the idea of a tithe, or the giving of 10% of our increase, is an Old Testament idea that is not found in the New Testament. And that's true, because what the New Testament teaches what we just saw from Psalm 24 – ALL we have and all we are is God's We are to be living sacrifices. All we have is to be offered to God.
- In the entire Bible this is the only time God does this – he dares his people to test him in this – listen to it again, but this time from the Message, *Bring your full tithe to the Temple treasury so there will be ample provisions in my Temple. Test me in this and see if I don't open up heaven itself to you and pour out blessings beyond your wildest dreams. For my part, I will defend you against marauders, protect your wheat fields and vegetable gardens against plunderers."* *The Message of God-of-the-Angel-Armies.* Malachi 3:10-11 (The Message). This is not a bribe – it's a promise. It's not about money – God doesn't need our money – it's about believing his promise. God is saying, *"I dare you to outgive me! See if you can give to me and be poorer for it."* Here's the promise, YOU WON'T!
- I know times are hard. I know we are in a recession. I know inflation is higher than it's been in 40 years. I know fuel is high and driving and heating our house with winter coming on is daunting – but God's got this. No matter how much or little we have – is all God's because we are all God's. Don't hold back on

your giving to the kingdom because times are hard, our God is greater than hard times, and he will provide as we are obedient. Just test him on it.

- And finally, it's because it's...

### **The cost of following God**

- We began this talk with the wearying complaint of the people of God – that God is too soft, even nicer to evildoers. And here we have it again – they are saying, *'It is vain to serve God. What is the profit of our keeping his charge or of walking as in mourning before the Lord of hosts? And now we call the arrogant blessed. Evildoers not only prosper but they put God to the test and they escape.'* Malachi 3:14-15. And God says again, "You just wait." This is now. The people who are obedient to me and don't give up hope will experience deliverance. *"They shall be mine, says the Lord of hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession, and I will spare them as a man spares his son who serves him. Then once more you shall see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.* Malachi 3:17-18.
- Let God's fact be greater than our feelings. Rather than be fearful that we are losing, be strong and courageous knowing that God and his Church are not and never will be defeated. No matter what "wins" or "losses" we saw this past week God is on the throne and he calls us to reach out to a world that has rejected him and love it with the love of the Lord!
- In 500 BC he told the harried people of God, *For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.* Malachi 3:6. That is still the truth for his harried people in 2022 – hear his truth, I am God—yes, I Am. I haven't changed. He's got your name written in a book of remembrance. (Malachi 3:16b) – live and enjoy the victory and peace that brings. Amen.