

## **“MAJOR THEMES FROM THE MINOR PROPHETS: MALACHI.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**September 30, 2012, 6:00PM**

**Sermon Texts: Malachi 3:6-12**

**Malachi 3:6, I the Lord do not change.**

In our world people like to say death and taxes are unchangeable and inevitable.

If something is changeable, it's changeable in only two ways. Either it can get better or it can get worse. Normally we like to change things for the better.

This is why we can say that God is unchangeable. He can't get better because He's already perfect. And He can't get worse because then He would no longer be perfect. God is and must always remain perfect so He is therefore unchangeable.

The fancy theological word for this is immutable. Theologians like to talk about the immutability of God. It just means God is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Even death and taxes will one day change and go away, but God will remain the same forever.

The Israelites and we owe our very existence and survival to the unchangeable faithfulness of God. Remember last week we read that they were accusing God of being unjust and of winking at evil and calling evil good. They were accusing God of changing, but God doesn't change and that's a good thing for those who have tested and tried His patience and mercy and love.

**II Timothy 2:11-13** The saying is trustworthy, for:

If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

12 if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us;

13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful — for he cannot deny himself.

**Malachi 3:7, Return to me.**

Because of God's unchangeableness, He gives us a chance to change, and to change for the better.

If you had to sum up all the prophets in one word, that word might be “return.” Return to the Lord. Repent and turn back. Like the prodigal son who came to his senses and turned away from his folly and returned to his father.

***400 years before Malachi Joel pleaded with Israel:***

**Joel 2:12-13** “Yet even now,” declares the Lord, “return to me with all your heart, with fasting, with weeping, and with mourning;

13 and rend your hearts and not your garments.”

Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and merciful,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love; and he relents over disaster.

***300 years earlier Hosea pleaded with Israel:***

**Hosea 14:1, 4** Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God,  
for you have stumbled because of your iniquity.  
4 I will heal their apostasy; I will love them freely,  
for my anger has turned from them.

*100 years earlier Zechariah pleaded with Israel:*

**Zechariah 1:3-4** Return to me, says the Lord of hosts, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. 4 Do not be like your fathers, to whom the former prophets cried out, ‘Thus says the Lord of hosts, Return from your evil ways and from your evil deeds.’ But they did not hear or pay attention to me, declares the Lord.

God has not changed through the decades or centuries or millennia, He is the same yesterday, today and forever. His promises are true and everlasting. His steadfast love endures forever.

“Return to me and I will return to you,” says the Lord.

This is also Jesus’ gospel message to us. Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and return to the Lord.

But the people of Judah are dull. They are blind to how they have turned aside from God. “How shall we return?” What kind of a question is that? God had been saying it loudly and clearly through so many prophets for so many centuries. “Really, Judah, How shall we return?”

The people of Judah in Malachi’s time thought the problem was with God. He was unjust, He was inattentive, He wasn’t cursing their enemies and He wasn’t blessing them.

**Malachi 3:8-9, Stopping robbing me.**

How shall we return? Let me give you an example. Stop robbing me. Robbing you? How have we robbed you? In fact, how can finite human beings rob the infinite God who created all things and owns all things and controls all things?

He have already seen in Malachi how they robbed God of the honor due His name, they have robbed God of worship and of sacrifices, and by breaking His covenant. They robbed God by withholding what rightfully belonged to God.

But there was one more way that they had robbed God and God used the voice of His prophet to confront His people again. “You have robbed my in your tithes and offerings.”

Why was it robbing God to withhold tithes and offerings? Because God commanded that a tenth of everything be brought to the Temple and given to the Levites, the only tribe that received no inheritance in the land. They were to be set free from farming to tend to the Temple and the sacrifices. In turn the Levites were to give a tenth of everything they received to the priests (Numbers 18:20-28).

God needs nothing; He has all wealth and riches. God required the tenth that they might acknowledge Him as the owner and source of all they had and that they might show their faith and trust in Him for all they need and that they might receive back from Him even greater blessings.

By robbing God of His tithes and offerings, they were robbing themselves of His blessings and their land from an abundant harvest.

**Malachi 3:10, Bring the whole tithe into my storehouse.**

The storehouse was the rooms along the sides of the Temple where the tithes and offerings were kept. Sort of like our safe or bank today. From the storehouse the needs of the Levites and Priests were met. From the storehouse the widows and orphans and poor were served. From the storehouse the Lord's work was supported and advanced.

**Malachi 3:10-12, Test me in this and I will bless you.**

God actually challenged Judah to test Him, to try God's faithfulness. This is uncomfortable language to us. How dare we put God to any test? To test God really just means to learn firsthand from experience the truth of His promises. Obey me and see if obedience is rewarded with blessing.

God was saying to Judah, do what I have told you to do, and see if I am faithful and unchanging. Test and see if you return to me, that I will return to you. Test me and find out for yourself that though you give me a tenth of everything you have, I will provide all that you need.

In fact God promises far more than just what they need. He said He would open the windows of heaven and pour down blessings in four ways:

***Rain down prosperity.***

There is a connection between the spiritual and the temporal. The heavens water the earth. The ground can produce nothing unless the heavens grant the gift of rain.

**Deuteronomy 28:11-12** And the Lord will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you. 12 The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

**Matthew 6:33** Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

When God gives a gift it's out of proportion to the human gift. God promises to prosper the person who gives liberally. You can never out give God and what you give floods back to you many times over.

**Luke 6:38** Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you."

**I Corinthians 9:6, 10** Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. ... 10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness.

***Remove pestilence.***

Again, there's a connection between the spiritual and the temporal. Between the heaven and the earth.

God would hold back every impediment to fruitful success. There will be no devouring locusts or plague or drought.

God shows Himself to be the one who takes care of us. He provided exactly what we need; He protects us from evil and danger. He grants the growth and the increase. He both creates and sustains and nurtures. He does it all for us all the time. Every night while we sleep, He stays awake and is ever watch full over our bodies and our souls.

### ***Renew productivity.***

The harvest would be in due season, not too early, or ruined by weather. God would give the growth and the increase, thirty or sixty or hundredfold.

He orders all things; He sends the sun and rain, the seed time and the harvest. He provides for all His creation, feeding the sparrows and the lions, the deer and the ant.

He is the perfect father who always watches over His family and does whatever benefits and blesses them most. He longs to bless us.

### ***Restore prominence.***

**Deuteronomy 28:10** And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they shall be afraid of you.

**Isaiah 61:8-9** For I the Lord love justice; I hate robbery and wrong; I will faithfully give them their recompense, and I will make an everlasting covenant with them.  
9 Their offspring shall be known among the nations, and their descendants in the midst of the peoples; all who see them shall acknowledge them, that they are an offspring the Lord has blessed.

### **Application and conclusion.**

We all need to conduct a financial and spiritual audit from time to time. How it is with our soul? Are we robbing God? Have our hearts grown greedy or selfish or hard or just neglectful and complacent?

***Start by examining your obedience.*** If you are experiencing frustration or anxiety or depression or discouragement in your life, at least take time to do a spiritual inventory or audit and see if there is any area of disobedience in your life. It may not be that, but at least take time to ask God if there's any area and ask Him to show it to you and then show you how you can change.

Malachi was prophesying to a people who were frustrated in their spiritual lives because of numerous areas of disobedience. The reason they were in need and going without, was because they were disobedient, not because God had changed or been faithless. Their wickedness was the fault.

Start with the obedience test. See if this is the cause of your lack of blessings and see if by obedience God will open the floodgates of heaven in your life.

***Then do a heart test***, monitor your heart to see if you are holding back or holding on to any idol. Do you love God and money?

A person who wants to know what's the minimum requirement is missing the point and his heart is not right before God.

The whole tithe really means our gifts and our heart. And God always looks at our heart before He looks at the gift. If we bring our whole heart to God, our gift will reflect that and will be acceptable to God.

In the NT when Paul talks about giving, he talks about willingness. He encourages us to give from the heart.

**II Corinthians 9:7** Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

**Philemon 1:8-9, 14** Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, I prefer for love's sake I prefer to appeal to you. ... 14 ...in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion but of your own accord.

**II Corinthians 8:8** I say this not as a command, but to prove by the earnestness of others that your love also is genuine.

A seventh of our time and a tenth of our income have stood the test of time and have served us well and have been given for our blessing and benefit and to guard our hearts from thinking too highly of our own labor and of our own treasure. They are given to us to foster dependence and gratitude.

This principle is given for our highest good. God knows best what He needs, what's best for us. So this principle is not onerous, but good. He longs to bless and enrich us and the paradox is that we will thrive and prosper more on 90% than on 100% of our income. He who can multiply a few loaves and fish, can certainly multiply our blessings.

Many Christians think they cannot afford to give when Scripture teaches clearly that we truly cannot afford not to give. To rob God is to rob our families and our churches of our blessings from God.

For the rich young ruler, his wealth robbed him of eternal life, the greatest blessing of all.

Tithing blesses and benefits us in this life and in the life to come, according to the promises of God.

It's interesting to note in the OT that whenever revival broke out in the land, whenever the people returned to the Lord with love and zeal, the people gave spontaneously and joyful and fruitful blessings flowed from God to His people.

**Proverbs 3:9-10** Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

Our God does not change; He is faithful to all generations. Our God is a loving heavenly Father who knows what we need and provides all that we need, even the gift that we give.