

Minor League Announcers
The Final Word
Malachi 3:1-10; 4:1-6

Intro: The end of a book is very important. Sometimes I will read the conclusion before I read anything else just to see what the author is truly concerned about.

We come today to the end of the Old Testament, the book of Malachi the prophet. A period of prophetic silence in Israel will follow this man's oracles. The silence will not be broken until John the Baptist comes out of the wilderness dressed in camel skins and eating wild honey. This inter-testamental period—from the post-exilic prophets to the time of Jesus—endures for 400 years.

Most of the book of Malachi is about the offerings we bring to God. It is about what kind of offerings God expects, how he responds to offerings that reflect idolatry in our hearts, and how he responds to offerings that truly honor him. Malachi delivers a message that is relevant to the people in his time—and in ours.

The Old Testament ends with a promise from God both of his blessing and his judgment. We want to be in the blessing place, and we know how to get there.

I. HONOR GOD WITH YOUR OFFERINGS: If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the presect due me? says the Lord Almighty (Malachi 1:6).

A. God says, "Return to me, and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:7). The return begins in a very practical and surprising way—stop robbing God. The greed of the people comes out in a number of ways in regard to their worship. Malachi begins his pronouncements by talking at length about the pitiful offerings that the Israelites are bringing to the Lord. They look around their flocks. They find the animal that is lame, blind, or sick and about to die. And they bring this offering, this animal to the Lord.

God says, "Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" (Malachi 1:8).

B. They bring offerings which cost them nothing. King David once commented on such a thing: But King David replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying the full price. I will not take for the Lord what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt offering that costs me nothing" (1 Chronicles 21:24).

C. God wants it all from us. God is not looking for the change in our pockets, for the leftovers. Jesus told the disciples that he was going to suffer and die. They protested. Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me (Luke 9:23-25).

God expects from us the utter abandonment of our own will to his will so that we can say, "Not my will, but thine be done."

D. Our offerings demonstrate our heart, Malachi says. We are robbing God when we give him the leftovers.

1. God has a simple instruction for all people in all generations: "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse" (3:10). As everyone in Israel knew, a tithe is a tenth, one tenth of your earnings or income or increase for that week of work completed.

2. I see the tithe as a guideline for we who live in the New Covenant. I would suggest to you that it is a minimum for most of us if we are going to give anything significant to God.

***Rick Warren asked the presidential candidates, "How much do you have to have to be considered rich?" Obama said \$250,000 income per year. McCain said \$5 million in the bank.

I don't know what rich is, but I know that GREED will always tell us we do not have enough, no matter how much it is.

II. MATCH YOUR OFFERINGS WITH YOUR LIFE: Malachi 2:10 is the key verse: Have we not all one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our fathers by breaking faith with one another?

Family members, widows, orphans, and aliens are of special concern to God. When the day of judgment comes, declares Malachi, the judgment of God will surely come upon sorcerers, adulterers, and perjurers. It will also come upon those who oppress the helpless and deprive aliens of justice (see Malachi 3:5).

Why should the people of God worry about these powerless ones? Because they themselves were powerless, trapped in the mudpits of Egypt, when God heard their cries and saved them. They were foreigners then, a strange people in a strange land.

God has extended his grace to us, and we should extend grace to others to show God that we love him and are grateful for his mercy.

A. In chapter 2 Malachi tells them that their offerings to God are undercut by their immoral lives.

B. ADULTERY: THE VIOLATION OF FAMILY

***John McCain identified the failure of his first marriage as his greatest moral failure. Why would identify this as the chief blight on his soul? Because we are not to "break faith with the wife of your youth" (3:15).

1. Adultery, the breaking of the marriage vows, along with divorce as men are unfaithful to the wives of their youth (2:14-16).

C. ORPHANS & WIDOWS being neglected (3:5).

***Pastor Rick asked each candidate if they would take emergency measures to help the 140 million orphans in the world. "They need families," he said, "not orphanages."

What responsibility do we bear as the people of God in New Orleans? What can we do to address this need in our own city?

D. Hearts of fathers turned away from their children, and hearts of children turned away from fathers (4:6).

E. The theft from LABORERS (3:5). Employers are to act as Christians, not depriving those under them of their just rewards.

F. ALIENS deprived of justice (3:5). God cares about how we treat people who are not citizens of our country. It is one of the horrors of our day that laborers from Latin America are victimized so frequently with robberies and assaults.

***When I was a preschooler we lived with a couple who made soap. I don't remember much about those early days, but I do have in my mind a snapshot of them stirring huge pots of bubbling lye in the basement. It is an eerie picture. And the soap they made was powerful soap that would eat away at things.

God will cleanse his people with LAUNDERER'S SOAP.

III. BRING THE WHOLE TITHE INTO THE STOREHOUSE (Malachi 3:10).

A. The Doctrine of Giving to the Lord—generously, proportionately, and regularly—is a liberating spiritual discipline that rejoices the heart and restores the spirit. Nothing will so close you off from the blessings of God as a stingy, greedy spirit.

***I received a very precious offering to place last Sunday—a significant amount of money from a couple who struggle every day to just make ends meet. When they gave it to me my first impulse was to say, “No. You need this to pay your bills.”

But had I done so, I would have stolen the smiles from their faces. I would have disappointed them. They wanted to participate in the joy of giving. They were delighted to give.

B. Honestly, this is a small step that every person can do—a renewal of heart that is prompted and manifested by a renewal of giving to God. Restore the tithe, God says, and I will restore you.

C. God invites us, “Test me in this.” He challenges every person in the sound of my voice to give it a try. Make the tithe a regular part of your worship.

D. The “storehouse” mentioned here is the house of worship. These are gifts which sustain the house of worship in Israel. And the storehouse in our day is your local church, the place where you worship the Lord. You bring your needs. You bring your prayers. You bring your songs. You bring your family. You should also bring your tithes and offerings to the Lord as part of worship.

E. Bring your tithes and offerings to the Lord, not the preacher. They should be laid at the feet of the leaders in your church, as is recorded in Acts 4:37. This is a beautiful way to give because it expresses trust in the people who lead your church.

F. Your gifts are received by the people you select—the finance team. They go to support the entire work of your family of faith. Your gift helps to maintain the house of worship. For our church, those costs are about \$700,000 each year. This campus is used daily for the ministry of the gospel, the ministry of hope for the hurting, and the ministry encouragement to the faithful.

CONCLUSION: The BLESSING OF GIVING is here explicit: I will “throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it” (Malachi 3:10).

***The last time I remember preaching on this subject I gave \$60 to someone in need the day before. The sermon was on my mind, and I wondered what God would do with that gift.

After I mentioned the \$60 gift in the sermon, I concluded and gave the invitation. A man in our church came forward, literally trembling, and gave me an envelope he had prepared before worship. He told me that he was prompted by the Holy Spirit to give this special offering on this particular day.

You know the amount of his check that day? It was \$6,000, one hundred times the amount of my benevolence offering. I cannot remember a special offering of that exact size before or since.

I don't think that was coincidence. I think God was speaking to me and to our congregation. He was promising, as he did in this passage, to open the windows of heaven in response to our faithfulness and generosity to those around us.