THE SCROLLS

Openhanded: Releasing Our Grip On What Grips Us | Malachi 3:6-12

Life Lesson

God calls us to examine our hearts by looking closely at our hands. Are they clenched around our resources out of fear, or open in surrendered trust? How we manage our finances, time, and talents directly reflects our belief in God's goodness and provision. Malachi challenges us to stop holding back from the Lord because of spiritual apathy or self-reliance and instead to take up His divine dare to trust Him completely. Recognizing that God did not withhold His most precious treasure, His only Son, we are freed from fear and selfishness. We can confidently open our hands and surrender our whole lives to Him, knowing that our ultimate security and greatest blessing are found in His unchanging grace.

Examine Scripture

Read Malachi 3:6-12

As you read Scripture, slow down and ask these three questions to move from information to transformation:

1. What does this passage reveal about who God is?

2. How is God calling you to grow or change?

3. What is God leading you to do or who is He calling you to be in your everyday life?

Stewardship: It's Not Mine!

A subtle, silent killer stalks the aisles of our churches and the depths of our hearts. It is not always a blatant, fist-shaking rebellion against God. Rather, it is the slow, numbing creep of spiritual apathy. It is the dangerous habit of going through the motions, singing the songs, attending the services, and saying the prayers, while our hearts remain a million miles from the Savior. We slowly trade a vibrant, transformational relationship with God for a dead, transactional religion. We come to see obedience as a burden and God as a distant taskmaster.

The Israelites faced this spiritual crisis in the final pages of the Old Testament. As the prophet Malachi enters the scene, he addresses a people who have settled into a dangerous rut. They are not engaging in the rampant pagan idolatry of their ancestors; instead, their rebellion is more "respectable." The temple has been rebuilt, and sacrifices have resumed, yet their worship is a hollow shell. They bring blind and diseased animals for sacrifice (2:8). They question God's love (1:2) and His justice (2:17). It is a complete distortion of the relationship God intended! They have grown cynical, believing that obedience is not profitable and that God is indifferent to their everyday lives.

Then God speaks! He confronts this spiritual lethargy head-on. But He does not merely point to their empty rituals; He targets their greatest rival for their affections: their wallets. Why? Because how we handle our earthly resources directly reflects our heavenly reality. Before we dive into the text, we must understand that Malachi 3 is not a divine fundraising scheme; it is a profound revelation of God's character and a gracious, urgent invitation to return to Him. It is a battle for the heart. Without a proper understanding of God's unchanging nature and our absolute dependence on Him, we have no hope of experiencing true peace and are left trusting in our own failing efforts.

Vs. 6-7

In the midst of discipline and judgment, God reveals His nature. We see both His immutability and His grace. First, God reveals His immutability: "Because I, the Lord, have not changed, you

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descendants of Jacob have not been destroyed" (v. 6). Immutability is the changelessness of God's nature and being. It is an incommunicable attribute, meaning only God possesses it. Man can change, but God never does! Why is this important? God's immutability assures us that His promises will remain true and be fulfilled. God does not change, so He cannot revoke His promises. Charles Spurgeon masterfully preached on this very truth, stating, "There is nothing in God that changes. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. His love never fluctuates, His justice never bends, and His grace never fails." Because God does not change, His covenant with His people remains intact, even when they are entirely unfaithful. The only reason Israel was not completely wiped out by God's holy wrath is His unchanging faithfulness to the promises He made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, our salvation rests not on our consistency, but on His.

Because of God's immutability, we can be assured of His grace. Notice what God says next in (v. 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." Despite generations of rebellion, God's arms remain open. He initiates the call to reconciliation. Thomas Watson wrote, "God is an ocean of blessedness... His grace is a fountain that is never emptied." God pleads with His people to return to Him. Yet instead of brokenness and repentance, the people respond with cynical defensiveness: "Yet you ask, 'How can we return?'" (v. 7). They are utterly blind to their own sin and do not even recognize that they have left Him. Sin always blinds us to our true spiritual condition, leading us to justify our rebellion rather than confess it.

Vs. 8-9

These verses underscore the depth of their spiritual blindness and the audacity of their sin. God answers their defensive question with a shocking indictment: "'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'" (v. 8). The Hebrew word for "rob" is "qābaʿ" (קָבַע), meaning to defraud, cheat, or take by force. It is a stunning accusation. How can a finite, mortal man steal from the sovereign, omniscient Creator of the universe? By withholding their payments of the tenth (the required tithe of their produce and livestock) and contributions (the offerings that supported the priests and the temple system), they were essentially committing treason against God. As one commentator writes, "Stealing means not only taking what is not yours but also keeping back for yourself what belongs to someone else."

In other words, this was not merely a liturgical issue; it was a heart issue. Timothy Keller notes, "If Jesus is Lord of your life, He must

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be Lord of your wallet. Your money is a direct indicator of what your heart truly worships." By keeping what belonged to God, the Israelites declared their independence from Him. They were saying, "We know better than You how to manage our lives and our resources." Consequently, God declares, "You are suffering under a curse, yet you—the whole nation—are still robbing me" (v. 9). The curse was not a vindictive lashing out by God; it was the natural, covenantal consequence of their disobedience. When we withhold from God, we cut ourselves off from the very source of our life and blessing. We choose the barrenness of our self-reliance over the abundance of God's provision.

V. 10

This verse deserves to be set apart and examined on its own. Yet it contains more truth than grains of sand on the beach: "'Bring 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'" (v. 10). Here, God issues a profound challenge and an extraordinary promise. The storehouse was the temple treasury where grain and resources were kept to feed the Levites, the widows, the orphans, and the poor. God calls for total obedience, not a partial, leftover offering. God demands the firstfruits, not our leftovers. He demands that we recognize His preeminence over every facet of our lives.

Then God does something unique in all of Scripture. He says, "Test me" (v. 10). Elsewhere in the Bible, we are commanded not to test the Lord (Deut. 6:16; Matt. 4:7). Yet here, regarding our finances and our trust in His provision, God issues a divine dare. He invites us to step out in faith and see whether He is faithful. Through our complete trust in Him, we experience His full blessing: "See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure" (v. 10). The phrase "floodgates of heaven" echoes the imagery of the worldwide flood (Gen. 7:11-12). Just as God opened the heavens to pour out a flood of judgment, He now promises to open them to pour out an overwhelming flood of blessing upon those who trust Him. Matthew Henry notes, "God will not be behindhand with any of His people in the returns of mercy; those who honor Him with their substance shall be honored by Him with His blessing."

Vs. 11-12

God's blessing is not merely about receiving; it is also about protection. Just as Christ sustains all things and holds the universe together, God is the ultimate Protector of our labor. God promises, "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

Personal Reflection

1. In what specific areas of your life has your walk with God begun to feel more like a dead, transactional religion than a vibrant, transformational relationship?

2. How does the truth of God's immutability bring you comfort and assurance, especially in seasons when your faithfulness feels weak or inconsistent?

3. Are you currently holding back from God in your finances, time, or talents? What underlying fears or lack of trust might keep you from offering Him your firstfruits?

4. What is one specific area in your life right now where you need to stop relying on your own efforts and step out in faith to trust His sovereign provision?

5. How does meditating on the lavish, sacrificial grace of Christ at the cross completely transform your motivation for giving and obedience?

Commentaries

ESV Expository Commentary: Daniel–Malachi (Volume 7) by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., and Jay Sklar

Expositor's Bible Commentary (Abridged Edition): Old Testament Edited by Kenneth Barker

Matthew Henry's Commentary by Matthew Henry

Mt. Zion's Mission

Mt. Zion Baptist Church exists to ***MAKE***, ***MATURE***, *and* ***MULTIPLY*** *disciples of Jesus Christ.*

the Lord of Armies" (v. 11). In an agricultural society, the "devourer" meant locusts, pests, or drought. With the stories of the plagues of Egypt passed down, the Israelites were keenly aware of the dangers of such a "devourer." No amount of human effort could stop a locust swarm. Yet God shows them that their security does not come from hoarding their resources; it comes from His sovereign protection. When we surrender our finances to God, we place our lives under His protective hand.

Finally, what is the ultimate purpose of this blessing? It is not merely for our own comfort. God says, "Then all the nations will consider you fortunate, for you will be a delightful land, says the Lord of Armies" (v. 12). The ultimate goal of God's blessing is His glory among the nations. The Church is meant to be a radiant witness to a watching world. When the world sees a people who hold their wealth loosely, who give generously, and who trust deeply in a God who abundantly provides, they see a reflection of the Gospel.

As we step back to examine our hearts today, we face the same piercing question God asked the Israelites: Are we holding out on the Lord? Are we offering Him the mere leftovers of our time, affections, and treasures, all while desperately seeking the floodgates of His blessing? Malachi reminds us that a heart that truly grasps the immutability of God's grace cannot remain stingy. Our apathy and tight-fistedness stem from a deeper issue: a failure to trust the unchanging goodness of our God.

But the story does not end with our failure! When we look to the cross, we see the ultimate cure for our spiritual apathy. Jesus did not just bring the full tenth; He offered His life! He did not just hold back the devourer; He utterly defeated sin, death, and the grave! He willingly became the curse for us (Gal. 3:13) so that we could inherit the boundless, immeasurable riches of His grace. God did not withhold His most precious possession from us but freely gave His only Son.

Therefore, let us stop robbing God of the glory, honor, and surrender He is due. Let us return to Him not just with our wallets but with our whole, undivided hearts. Let us take up His divine dare and test Him by throwing ourselves entirely upon His grace and provision. When we finally let go of our failing efforts and surrender completely to the One who gave Himself for us, we will discover a beautiful truth. The floodgates of heaven are already open, and the greatest blessing pouring out is not just what He gives but who He is. He is our prize! He is our ultimate treasure! This is hope! This is peace! This is the Gospel!