

TRANSFORMING GOD'S PEOPLE

The prophet Malachi calls God's people to repentance and faith. His message uniquely consists of a series of rhetorical questions, as he presents common disputations between the people and God. In the first three, he asks, *how has God loved us? how have we despised God? and why are we faithless to one another?* In the next three, Malachi continues to call the people to God's transformation.

1- WHERE IS THE GOD OF JUSTICE? 2:17-3:5 says *"you have wearied the Lord with your words, calling evil good, asking, where is the God of justice."* The people are blindly cynical about God. They don't see His judgment, and don't want to be judged. They only see their problems, poverty, trials - and they blame God for it! This misrepresents God, blaming Him for evil in the world, which is actually the consequence of mankind's rebellion against God from the very beginning. But there is hope.

God says, *"behold, I will send My messenger and He will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to His temple; and the messenger of the covenant in Whom you delight, behold, He is coming, says the Lord of Hosts. But who can endure the day of His coming, and who can stand when He appears, for He is like a refiner's fire and like fuller's soap."*

The messenger preparing the way is John the Baptist, who comes 400 years later. The messenger of the covenant is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah. As 2Peter 3 says, people want God to come judge the nations around them, but He will come to judge His own people first - these same people who weary God with their words and their heartless worship, and their daily disobedience of His Word.

But God holds hope, *"for I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. Return to Me and I will return to you, says the Lord of Hosts."* You won't reach God by changing your approach to Him unless you use His approach in Scripture. His Son Jesus Christ is the only way.

2- HOW HAVE WE ROBBED GOD? In 3:6-12, the people begrudge their offerings. The people are poor, oppressed, and felt cursed. Not because God withheld blessings but because they withheld giving to God what belongs to Him. They aimed to give only the "minimum suggested requirement." But God said, *"you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you, and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."*

This was God's promise to His people who trust and obey. It echoes Haggai at the first return of the exiles, to get out of their paneled houses and rebuild the house of God which lay in ruins. In 2Corinthians 8-9 God calls His new covenant people to lay aside an offering on the first day of every week, to give to the Lord through your local church. That's the first step of giving. If you miss a Sunday, send it ahead or make it up the next Sunday. This is conscientious, not legalistic, and a common-sense approach.

You give back to God's work from what He has provided for you, week by week. The apostle says, *"whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly. For God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work."* God promises to meet all your needs, not all your desires. Put God and His kingdom first.

3- WHAT IS THE PROFIT OF SERVING GOD? This look into their pocketbook put them on defense. In 3:13-4:3 they ask, is it worth the effort and expense? *"Evildoers not only prosper, but they put God to the test and they escape."* Or so it seemed. Psalm 37 and James 4 counsel to not fret about such things. God writes the book of remembrance. He makes the distinction between good and evil. God has great plans for His treasured possession, His redeemed people! Jesus says, *"lay up treasures in heaven"* - because if you live for earthly rewards, you may well get them, but they will not be eternal.

God calls His people to transformation, as they trust and obey Him. It's an echo of 2Peter 3, because God's judgment day is coming and evil will be set ablaze. Malachi 4:2 says, *"but for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall."* In contrast to the scorching oven of the day of judgment, the rising of righteousness will bring healing - and joy, for all those who are faithful to God's commandments, by His power within.

And God says, *"behold I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the hearts of the children to their fathers."* Fulfilled through John the Baptist, this blessing will overturn the curse of broken relationships (chapter 2), by changing hearts and minds and wills. *"This is the Lord of Hosts speaking, the great God of heaven and earth"* so do not disrespect Him, but trust Him and obey Him.

4- ARE YOU CYNICAL ABOUT GOD? 1Peter 1-2 echoes Malachi. Believers are born again to be God's holy people, who have received God's mercy. Therefore as sojourners, abstain from passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul, and do good deeds. Philippians 1:6, *"God who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ."* Step by step in faith, do what God says, by His power within you. Trust that God will finish what He has started, just as He promises! ☐