

Malachi goes on to say that God will rebuke the locust so that it will not destroy the harvest again and the land will become a delight. What a difference. The people hoard their goods because it is a time of scarcity. God promises abundance. For Israel, God's blessing would be in terms of crops but it would be of such quantity that the only restriction on how much they received would be their ability to store it. It is not only about crops. God blesses his people in other ways. We can look, not only for material blessing, though we do ask God for those. We receive the blessing of good comfortable lives. God wants us to be comfortable, healthy and happy. Let us acknowledge all God's blessings and give him the glory.

Whatever good happens to us should be turned into a testimony to the goodness of our God. Then unbelievers will note our blessedness and be drawn to our God.

A young girl in an institution for the handicapped was approached by a well-meaning but tactless woman who wrote on her slate, "My dear, why are you deaf and dumb?" Tears came into the girl's eyes. Then, after a pause, taking the pencil and slate she wrote, "Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight." She could very well have asked in turn, "Why do you hear and speak?" Isn't it strange that we ask all our questions about life's sufferings and not about its blessings? Do we take it for granted we deserve them?

CONCLUSION

Return, shoulder your **Responsibility** and know your **Reward**.

Take my love, my Lord, I pour
at Thy feet its treasure store.

Take myself, and I will be
ever, only, all for Thee. (*Frances R. Havergal*)

DO NOT ROB GOD

Malachi 3:6-12

INTRODUCTION

A minister was talking to a man who professed conversion. "Have you united with a church?" he asked him. "No, the dying thief never united with a church and he went to heaven," was the answer. "Have you ever sat at the Lord's table?" "No, the dying thief never did and he was accepted." "Have you been baptized?" "No, the dying thief was never baptized and he went to heaven." "Have you given to missions?" "No, the dying thief did not, and he was not judged for it." "Well, my friend, the difference between you two seems to be that he was a dying thief and you are a living thief."

Will anyone rob God? It happened in Israel. It can happen in our churches. Let us think about it as, once again, we consider our stewardship and the pledge we make.

RETURNING

Come, let us to the Lord our God
With contrite hearts return;
Our God is gracious, nor will leave
The desolate to mourn. (*John Morrison*)

Words based on the message of Hosea to Israel in his day. This was the call of many of the prophets including Isaiah that Israel had gone astray and needed to return to the Lord. Jeremiah lamented that people would not return to the Lord. Nehemiah, governor of Judah after the return from Exile told the people they also needed to return to the Lord. Malachi adds his voice. Through him, God is saying, **Return to me**. If they do, God promises to **return** to them. Israel's story is one of disobedience and turning away from God. God does not change. **I the Lord do not change**. The Lord continues to love his people despite their disobedience and failure. It is because of that love they continue to exist. God reminds them of his love for Jacob, their ancestor. So great was God's love for Jacob, despite his failure and sin that anything else looked like hatred.

Mal 1:2 - 3 ²I have loved you, says the LORD. But you say, "How have you loved us?" Is not Esau Jacob's brother? says the LORD. Yet I have loved Jacob ³but I have hated Esau;

God has loved his people with an everlasting love. It is a love that continues and will continue. Malachi looks forward to the day when a forerunner will come to prepare the way for the Messiah. The prophecy was fulfilled in John the Baptist, another who called for a return to God. Because God loves his people he keeps on calling them to **return**.

¹ CCC Sunday November 6, 2011

Do we need to hear these words? In our School of Theology, as we have looked at heresies and cults we have seen how people have turned from the truth and devised their own schemes. Returning involves repenting and being converted. We may not go to the extent of setting up our own systems of religion, but we turn away from God. Instead of loving God with all of our hearts, souls and minds; instead of Christ having first place in our lives, our work, our careers, our homes, our possessions, our wealth become so important that our relationship with God, including worship, is low in our priorities. Do we need to return?

What peaceful hours I once enjoyed!
How sweet their memory still!
But they have left an aching void
The world can never fill.
Return, O holy Dove, return,
Sweet messenger of rest!
I hate the sins that made Thee mourn
And drove Thee from my breast. (W. Cowper)

RESPONSIBILITY

Malachi challenges Israel's responsibility as the people of God in terms of tithes and offerings. He has reminded the Israelites of God's love for Jacob. Jacob was the *supplanter*. Tricking his brother and his father, Jacob got the blessing for himself. He stole it! The word for *supplanter* and the word for *rob* has the same root in Hebrew. Malachi asks: **Will anyone rob God.** Stealing is not only taking what is not yours but keeping for yourself that which belongs to someone else. In Israel, a tenth of a person's income was due to God. There was no distinction between sacred and secular. The law of the land was the law of God. Tithes and offerings were not only to support the temple and the priesthood but also the needs of government. When *we* talk in terms of tithes and offerings it is about giving to God through the church for the support of God's work by the church.

Ananias and Saphira were members of the church in Jerusalem. In those early days, church members would sometimes sell property or land and give the proceeds to the church. Many, especially widows, had no means of income so they were cared for by the church. Ananias and Saphira sold property, but only gave part of the proceeds to the church, yet they said they had given it all. When Ananias was questioned by Peter, Ananias lied and said he had given the whole of the proceeds. Peter saw through the deceit. Not only had Ananias kept back part of the proceeds of the sale, but his heart had not been wholly

given to God. Deceiving the community was the same as deceiving God. When challenged about his actions, Ananias was so overcome that he dropped down dead. Saphira was challenged about what they had done, and she suffered the same fate.

As we come to the time of year when we consider our stewardship and make our pledges, I'm not suggesting that if you do not up your pledge you will be struck down dead like Ananias and Saphira! In the early days of the Jerusalem church, although there was a sharing of goods and holding things in common, it was never compulsory. Ananias and Saphira said they had given the whole of the proceeds of the sale, but only gave part. They deceived and lied. The times in which Malachi lived were difficult. A plague of locusts had devastated the harvest. Money was tight. Apart from the locusts, we can say the same thing. For many people, these are difficult days financially. We must not use this as an excuse for ducking our responsibility in giving to God. The principle behind the sharing and offerings in the early Jerusalem church was that those who could help those could not (N.B. "could not" not "would not"). A few years later the Jerusalem church was in financial difficulties. Maybe they had been too idealistic. There had been famine in the land. Whatever the reason they were in need. As Paul went round the Gentile churches of Greece and Asia Minor he took a collection to help the Jerusalem church. Those who could help those who could not.

There was a knock on the door of the hut occupied by a missionary in Africa. Answering, the missionary found one of the local boys holding a large fish in his hands. The boy said, "Reverend, you taught us what tithing is, so here—I've brought you my tithe." As the missionary gratefully took the fish, he questioned the young lad. "If this is your tithe, where are the other nine fish?" At this, the boy beamed and said, "Oh, they're still in the river. I'm going back to catch them now."

NT does not command a tithe, but a tithe gives a wonderful freedom. It frees from making calculations and economies in difficult times and allows for generosity in good times. Although we are not commanded to give a tithe, should we who have experienced the generosity of Christ who gave himself for us, do less than Israel of old who did not know Christ?

REWARDING

Mal 3:10 ¹⁰Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.