

## RETURN UNTO ME SAITH THE LORD

### TEXT: MALACHI 3:7-10

#### INTRODUCTION:

1. Malachi was the last of the prophets that ministered to the restored remnant after the 70 years of Babylonian captivity.
2. The Israelites (a remnant) had returned from the Babylonian exile; Jerusalem had been rebuilt, and the temple restored. But the people were careless, indifferent, disobedient, faithless, carnal and rebellious.
3. To these backslidden people, the LORD sent the prophet Malachi. His name means, "My messenger," and his first message was, "I have loved you, saith the LORD" (1:2).
4. Malachi preached the judgment of God (3:5), but the love of God comes first (1:2). This should be our emphasis as well.
5. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).
6. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).
7. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins" (I John 4:10).
8. God's love is seen in the way He graciously invites backsliders to return -- "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts" (3:7).
9. D.L. Moody had a point when he said, "The world does not understand theology or dogma, but it understands love and sympathy."
10. Here is another quote from Moody: "You ask me why God loves. You might as well ask me why the sun shines. It can't help shining, and neither can He help loving, because He is love Himself; and any one that says He is not love does not know anything about love. If we have got the true love of God shed abroad in our hearts we will show it in our lives. We will not have to go up and down the earth proclaiming it. We will show it in everything we say or do."
11. Years ago I read a great biography of Moody entitled, *Love Them In: The Life and Theology of D L Moody* by Stanley Gundry.
12. But this morning our focus will not be on the preaching of Moody the evangelist, but on Malachi the prophet.

## I. GOD'S GRACIOUS INVITATION (3:7).

1. Disobedience to God puts up a barrier between God and man. The prophet Isaiah preached, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:1, 2).
2. Sin puts a distance between the sinner and God. But God is gracious, and says, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" (Malachi 3:7).
3. Hosea 14:1 says, "O Israel, return unto the Lord thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity."
4. Hosea 14:4 says, "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him."

*The love of God is greater far  
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;  
It goes beyond the highest star,  
And reaches to the lowest hell;  
The guilty pair, bowed down with care,  
God gave His Son to win;  
His erring child He reconciled,  
And pardoned from his sin.*

*O love of God, how rich and pure!  
How measureless and strong!  
It shall forevermore endure  
The saints' and angels' song.*

*When years of time shall pass away,  
And earthly thrones and kingdoms fall,  
When men, who here refuse to pray,  
On rocks and hills and mountains call,  
God's love so sure, shall still endure,  
All measureless and strong;  
Redeeming grace to Adam's race —  
The saints' and angels' song.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made,  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above,*

*Would drain the ocean dry,  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

## **II. GOD'S SERIOUS ACCUSATION (3:7, 8).**

1. "Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances (laws and commandments), and have not kept them" (3:7a).
2. Sadly, children pick up the bad habits of their fathers. Fathers skip church, and their children skip church.
3. Fathers use bad language, and their children start using bad language.
4. Fathers listen to worldly music, and their children start listening to worldly music.
5. The fathers turn away from God's ordinances, and their children follow their example.
6. Turning away from God's ordinances indicates disobedience. Our Lord said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15).
7. The people in Malachi's day had turned away from God, but would not admit it. When God graciously told them, "Return unto me, and I will return unto you" (3:7), they replied, "Wherein shall we return?"
8. They were far from God but they thought they were fine. They were insensible to reproof.
9. The word "wherein" is found six times in the book of Malachi (1:2, 6, 7; 2:17; 3:7, 8). These obstinate backsliders demanded proof from God!
10. And so the LORD had to be specific (3:7-9).
11. God says it is robbery to withhold from Him anything that belongs to Him.
12. Malachi 3:8 refers specifically to "tithes and offerings," but everything belongs to God, and that includes you and me.
13. Tithes and offerings are the outward recognition that everything belongs to God.
14. In II Corinthians 8, the apostle Paul speaks of the generosity of the churches of Macedonia. Paul speaks of the abounding riches of their liberality.
15. They gave beyond their ability. The key to their good stewardship is found in II Corinthians 8:5 where Paul says, "but first (they) gave their own selves to the Lord."
16. Everything belongs to God, and once we get a hold of that, God can start to use us (cf. I Chronicles 29:10-14).

17. The key is surrender. Many Christians are as insensible as the Jews in Malachi's day because they are not surrendered. They are literally robbing God.
18. I suppose the most popular hymn dealing with this great theme was written by Frances Havergal, "Take My Life and Let It Be."
19. "Take my silver and my gold; not a mite would I withhold."
20. Their sin was so grievous that the LORD declared, "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation" (3:9).
21. I do not want God's curse. I want God's blessing.

*All to Jesus, I surrender;*

*Lord, I give myself to Thee;*

*Fill me with Thy love and power;*

***Let Thy blessing fall on me.*** -- Judson W. Van De Venter

22. God offers us a choice: His blessing or His curse. Deuteronomy 11:26-28 says, "Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse; A blessing, if ye obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day: And a curse, if ye will not obey the commandments of the LORD your God."
23. God's curse brings spiritual sterility, spiritual stagnation, fruitlessness, and barrenness.
24. Graham Scroggie said, "Spiritual enrichment cannot be present in the soul that is robbing God. We cannot enrich ourselves by robbing God."

### **III. GOD'S MARVELOUS CHALLENGE (3:10).**

1. God wants to bless us but there are conditions that must be met. For example, God promises to answer our prayers but there are conditions.
2. Our Lord said, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7).
3. Here we see a great blessing promised -- "Prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it" (3:10b).
4. But there is one condition -- "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house" (3:10a).
5. Someone put it this way: "If we get, it is that we might give, and only by giving can we keep what we get" (Scroggie).
6. This is an important Bible principle. "But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in

- his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (II Cor. 9:6, 7).
7. Proverbs 3:9 and 10 says, "Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine."
  8. Proverbs 11:24, 25 says, "There is that scattereth, and yet increaseth; and there is that withholdeth more than is meet, but it tendeth to poverty. The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself."
  9. Our Lord said, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matthew 10:8).
  10. Our Lord said, "Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again."
  11. R. G. LeTourneau built huge earth-moving machines. During World War II he produced 70% of all the army's earth-moving machinery. He said God was the Chairman of his Board. LeTourneau gave away 90% of his income to God's work, and lived on 10%.
  12. R. G. LeTourneau was a great inventor, and he was responsible for 299 inventions. These inventions included the bulldozer, scrapers of all sorts, dredgers, portable cranes, rollers, dump wagons, bridge spans, logging equipment, mobile sea platforms for oil exploration, the electric wheel and many others.
  13. His life's verse was Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."
  14. R.G. LeTourneau said that the money came in faster than he could give it away. He would often say "I shovel it out, and God shovels it back, but God has a bigger shovel."
  15. R.G. LeTourneau "proved" God (Malachi 3:10). He put God to the test and was convinced a man could never out-give God.
  16. King Hezekiah was convinced (II Chronicles 31:4-10).
  17. The widow woman in Zarephath was convinced (I Kings 17:9-16).
  18. Are *you* convinced?

## **CONCLUSION:**

1. I read an interesting story the other day. Many years ago, out in a rural farm area in the Midwest, a Christian man built a big expensive grain elevator. This big grain elevator scooped up the grain, the

- wheat, the corn, the oats, the rye, and the barley from the farmers and deposited for them.
2. In that little town was a Baptist church, and most of the farmers, including the man who owned the grain elevator, belonged to that church.
  3. But for a couple of years, the church was in debt. They built a beautiful building, but they hadn't paid their pastor, and they hadn't given any money to missions.
  4. So in a church business meeting, they turned to the man who owned the big grain elevator and asked him if he would be treasurer of the congregation.
  5. And the man said, "I will accept the place as treasurer of the congregation if you'll give me one year, and don't ask me any questions, and don't expect any report from me until the end of the year."
  6. They were in a tough spot and so they agreed. They elected him treasurer with the understanding they'd never ask him any questions during the year, and not to expect a report until the end of the year.
  7. When the end of the year came he stood up before that congregation and made his report. They had paid every dime of the big debt they had on the church.
  8. They had raised the pastor's salary, and they had increased their gifts two hundred percent to missions. Furthermore, they had thousands of dollars in the bank.
  9. The people gasped in amazement. Finally one man stood up and asked, "But how did you do it?"
  10. And the elevator man said, "Whenever you came into my elevator with the wheat, or the corn, or the barley, or the rye, or the oats, I took one-tenth of it and set it aside for God. You never missed it. You never knew it, but one-tenth of all that you brought me. I set aside for God. And out of those tithes that you unwittingly dedicated to the Lord I have paid off the church debt. I have raised the pastor's salary, and I increased our missions giving two hundred percent."
  11. Let us ask God to open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing (3:10).