

Offerings in Righteousness

Malachi 3

Introduction:

At the end of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi gives the mission of John the Baptist, foretells Christ's first coming, and strongly encourages Israel to return to God.

Those who deny God His part of their possessions and blessings may rightly expect a curse upon their part.

Those who rob God rob themselves of His benefits and protection.

While anticipating the second coming of Christ and His judgment of our offerings, we should see to it that we serve God with the right attitude and make our offerings in righteousness.

I. The Purifier Wants Our Offerings in Righteousness.

Though the Israelites had wandered far away from God and even questioned at the end of chapter 2 "Where is the God of justice," Malachi chapter three opens with God telling through His prophet what He will do for His people. God said, (v. 1).

The messenger God was going to send would clear/prepare the way before Him.

Isaiah 40:3-5 prophesied, "A voice is calling, 'Clear the way for the Lord in the wilderness; Make smooth in the desert a highway for our God. Let every valley be lifted up, And every mountain and hill be made low; And let the rough ground become a plain, And the rugged terrain a broad valley; Then the glory of the Lord will be revealed, And all flesh will see it together; For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.'"

This prophecy was fulfilled as Jesus pointed out when His disciples asked Him (Matthew 17:10), "Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"

"[Jesus] answered and said, 'Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say to you that Elijah already came, and they did not recognize him, but did to him whatever they wished. So also the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands.' Then the disciples understood that He had spoken to them about John the Baptist" (Matthew 17:11-13).

In Matthew 11:10 Jesus identified John the Baptist, in talking to the crowds about John, as "This is the one about whom it is written, 'Behold, I send My messenger ahead of You, Who will prepare Your way before You.'"

Unexpectedly, on the part of the people, the Lord, the messenger of the covenant was coming; Jesus was coming for His first advent.

God asks, in verse two, concerning the Lord's coming, "But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears?" The expected response is "Nobody."

The Lord is like a refiner's fire—a fire applied to a substance to evaluate the purity of the substance and simultaneously remove unwanted matter from something that is wanted, either burning it off or bringing it to the surface for removal.

John the Baptist expressed the same idea of this metaphor when he described Jesus, saying, "His winnowing fork is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clear His threshing floor; and He will gather His wheat into the barn, but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire" (Matthew 3:11).

The Lord is also like fullers' or laundrymen's soap which removes greasy and oily stains and causes the fibers to swell and fit together evenly.

The Lord will conduct a searching and painful purifying process like fire and soap.

The Lord “will sit as a smelter (a person who refines metal) and purifier of silver (v. 3a) to purify...and refine [the sons of Levi] like gold and silver.

God purifies through the Lord “so that they (the sons of Levi) may present to the LORD offerings in righteousness” (v. 3c).

Once the priests are performing their duties with reverence and correctness, then the offerings of the people will be acceptable to the Lord (v. 4).

The covenant with Levi and his descendants is no more, but for Christians in Christ, purifying is done “so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 1:7) because “you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Peter 2:5).

God purifies us so our offerings, given with reverence for God, will be pleasing to the LORD.

Then...comes...judgment (Malachi 3:5).

Are our offerings in righteousness; Do we bring proper offerings to God?

He will judge the religious sin of sorcery, condemned in Deuteronomy 18:9-11.

He will judge the social sins of adultery (Exodus 20:14), those who swear falsely (Exodus 20:16), those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, not paying them fully and punctually (Deuteronomy 24:14 and 15), those who oppress widows and orphans (Exodus 22:22), those who deprive resident foreigners of their rights (Exodus 22:21), and those who do not fear Me (the LORD of hosts).

The last item in the list sums up the wrong attitude that was the root of Israel’s problems, all the aforementioned.

What decides offerings in righteousness?

The receiver does not change (v. 6a).

How does God not change?

He spells it out in the latter part of verse six.

“Therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed.”

God is faithful; His eternal purpose of redemption was preserving the descendants of Jacob.

We know what our offerings must consist of in order to be given in righteousness.

Our spiritual sacrifices consist of...

Our faith being genuine (Philippians 2:17).

Our love for God being “much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices (Mark 12:33).

Our words of confession and repentance (Hosea 14:2).

Our praise to God, giving of thanks, doing good, and sharing (Hebrews 13:15 and 16).

Our presenting of our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God

(Romans 12:1).

Our contributions (Philippians 4:18).

Our songs (Colossians 3:16).

Our prayers (Revelation 5:8).

Our entire lives as Christians (2 Timothy 2:4).

II. The Purifier Calls Us to Return to Him.

How can we return?

Acknowledge that we are away.

Those who turned aside considered themselves righteous and in need of no repentance (Malachi 3:7).

Sin separates us from God, so when we are away, we should consider how we are away (vv. 8 and 9).

How are we robbing God?

For them, it was in tithes—a tenth part of possessions in produce and livestock—and offerings—voluntary gifts, special portions.

Anything we promise to God and then withhold is robbing God. Anything He gives to us, but we do not return to Him in useful service is robbing God.

“As he may prosper” (1 Corinthians 16:2) goes beyond the money, it includes all God lets us use to brighten our lives.

The whole nation was judged as robbing God because of the conduct of its people (v. 9).

Are we conducting ourselves as people belonging to God?

Bring full or whole offerings, any voluntary contributions—money, service, or ideas—in righteousness to God (v. 10a).

Then, receive God’s promises (vv. 10b-12).

God sends a blessing until there is no longer room to receive it.

God says He will rebuke the devourer—something like locust that would reduce or eliminate their crops, and God would increase their grapes.

“All the nations will call you blessed” because of the happiness enjoyed through the pursuit of righteousness and peace with God.

When we are away from God, we must acknowledge we are away, bring our full offering to God, and then receive God’s promises.

We must act in faith first.

People who do not act in faith are led away from God.

Our own thinking and self-talk lead us away (vv. 13-15).

If we think and talk like they were, our minds become darkened, and our hearts hardened.

We trust in ourselves rather than returning to God.

Open rejection of God follows, but success in riches may still come.

Wrongful testing of God seems to go unpunished.

What the people of verse fifteen did not realize and the people of verse sixteen came to know is that God remembers.

The metaphor of God keeping His records in a book occurs several times in the Old Testament (God told Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book” Exodus 32:32 and 33; David requested concerning his enemies “May they be blotted out of the book of life And may they not be recorded with the righteous” Psalm 69:28).

The New Testament also includes the metaphor of God keeping a book of records including those “whose names are in the book of life” (Philippians 4:3) and at least three books are used to judge the dead “according to their deeds” in Revelation 20:12.

Although the nation was judged earlier in verse nine as a whole nation cursed with a curse, it is now revealed in verse sixteen that there were still some faithful followers of God.

They drew close to one another; they talked with one another, to maintain faith and confidence.

People who act in faith draw closer to God (v. 16).

Talk to those who fear the LORD.

People who fear the LORD provide support, fellowship, and encouragement during the difficult trials of life.

III. The Purifier Purifies Us and Our Offerings When We Return to Him.

God claims the faithful no matter how small their number (v. 17).

He will spare them and have compassion toward them because they belong to Him.

Those who belong to God serve Him; They are righteous and give offerings in righteousness (v. 18).

Only where knowledge and worship of the true God exists can social justice be enjoyed and maintained.

Application:

Are we morally and religiously ready for the Lord's second coming? If not, we must shun the wrong, do the right, and worship God as He designed.

Are we spiritually ready for the Lord to come? If not, we must repent of sin, confess Christ, be baptized for the forgiveness of sins, and faithfully live and serve God.

Conclusion:

If you do not belong to the Lord, allow Him to purify you, receive His judgment of your offerings, and answer His call to return to Him.

If you belong to the Lord, you have returned to the One who does not change, who blesses the good, who rebukes the wicked, and who purifies the person and offering of those who come to Him, therefore, present to God offerings in righteousness.