

Harvest Thanksgiving & Our Devotion to God

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[0 : 00] Let's turn together now to the book of Malachi, chapter 3, and we can read at verse number 6. Malachi 3, at verse number 6.

For I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore, 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. And so on down into the following verses. Now, I guess in many ways it's difficult for us to think of a people who lived sometime around 450 BC and to understand the circumstances in which they lived.

But it was a strange and difficult time in the lives of the people of God. The history shows to us that they were taken away to Babylon because they rebelled against God.

That was the first great separation between God and His people. And after 70 years, they came back to Jerusalem according to the purpose and promise of God.

[1 : 15] And they had rebuilt the temple, and they were expecting great things to happen because they were back where they belonged. But despite the fact that the temple was finished, there was no sign of the blessing that they expected.

And in many ways, the people themselves had not changed in any great way. That's something of the situation they found themselves in.

We are self-souverness. We can be on a journey away from God to learn a lesson from God because of our disobedience to Him.

And He can bring us back to where we are today, perhaps, and bring us back to that same place.

And yet, the blessing of God may still be absent in our hearts and our lives.

And we need to think seriously about that. Because when we examine this book and the circumstances of the people in this day, what we do understand is that the people were estranged from God, and they didn't appreciate that themselves.

[2 : 25] And there are five disputes in the book that show to us God is saying to them, I love you. And they're saying, how do you love us? They couldn't see God working.

And they were blaming God that He had changed. And down through the whole of the book, God is saying things to them, this is what you are. And they're surprised and they're saying, how is that through of us?

They did not understand that their relationship with God was still wrong. And that's something that needed to happen to restore that relationship. And when we think of harvest thanksgiving, that's at the very center of this message.

And it's at the center of this message because the harvest had failed. And the harvest had failed because of the people's disobedience. And the verses down from here, they're cursed with a curse. They're talking about restoring the harvest to them. The harvest wasn't great because they rebelled against God.

[3 : 30] And they failed to understand the basic thing that our behavior does affect our relationship with God. And when we have a behavior that is rebellion against God, then God is displeased with us.

And we will know and experience that in some way. There is that failure. And so today, when we think of harvest thanksgiving, we want to think of harvest thanksgiving and our devotion to God. I want to think, first of all, of thanksgiving and reflecting. And reflecting, first of all, upon the God whom we worship.

The God who is the God of the harvest. In verse number 6, I, the Lord. The Savior God of the children of Israel, of the people of God.

He is their covenant God. He has committed Himself to their salvation. He is the unchangeable God. He is the I am that I am.

[4 : 40] And when we come into the New Testament, that Lord who speaks to the people of God becomes the Son of God, the Lord Jesus, who says things like, I am the light of the world.

I am the way, the truth, and the life. He is identifying Himself as the Lord who is the Lord of the covenant of His people. He is speaking here to the people in the days of Malachi.

And today He is speaking through the Lord Jesus Christ, through His Word, to you and to me. And when He is doing so, He wants us to reflect on this key characteristic about this Lord who is our God and our Savior.

I, the Lord, do not change. He is the unchangeable God. There is no shadow of turning.

There is no hint that He is going to go in a different direction. There is no hint that He is going to change His plans. It is a basic truth about the Lord God that He is free from any kind of change forever.

[5 : 51] What God is, is what God was and what God will be. It is the unchangeableness of God. And in our changeable world, and in our changeable circumstances, and in our changeable providence, we are so thankful today that God is unchangeable.

That Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So whatever happened to me yesterday, whatever happens to me today, whatever happens to me tomorrow, that will bring about great change, perhaps.

God is the constant, the unchangeable presence in my life, reflecting on the unchangeableness of God.

And the unchangeableness of God, they are to reflect upon it in the context of their relationship with Him. It's great to think about the unchangeableness of God, but the Bible wants us to think about our personal relationship with God, and how that unchangeableness of God impacts and affects our lives.

And how does it affect their lives? Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, the covenant people of God, the chosen people of God, the people that God took out from the land of Egypt, and said to Ephraim, Let my people go.

[7 : 22] Israel is my firstborn son. Let them go, that they may come and sacrifice to me on my mountain, that I may become their God, and they will become my people. You, the children of Jacob, God is speaking to us today as those who belong to the church of Jesus Christ.

And He wants us to understand the significance of the unchangeableness of God on our lives and our relationship with God as those who belong to His church.

And what is the impact? Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. You are not burnt up in my wrath.

You are not taken away from my presence. They understood clearly what that said. At the very beginning of their story, when they had just come to Mount Sinai, and Moses was up on the mountain, and he heard this noise coming down from the mountain, and the people of God, the covenant people of God, they had created an idol, and they were worshiping this idol.

Moments, we could say, after God had established His relationship with them, they created an idol because Moses had taken so long speaking with God. They created an idol.

[8 : 52] And in that moment, God says to Moses, let me go out and let me consume this people out of my sight because of their rebellion against their God and against their Savior.

And Moses pleaded with God. He pleaded with God that He would not do that because of His promise to Abraham, because of His purpose to save this people.

Don't destroy them. Let Your presence go with us. Take us up from here. And God goes on in chapter 34 of Exodus to show His character.

But the key thing here is that they will not be consumed. In other words, that's what they deserve. They deserve to be consumed because of their rebellion.

They haven't, since, from the days of Your fathers, You have turned aside from My statutes and have not kept them. They have a history. They have form.

[9 : 56] They have repeatedly turned away from the statutes, the law, and the covenant of God. And they deserve that God will consume them. But because God is unchangeable, and because God has promised in His covenant relationship with them to bring them to the promised land and to bring them into the enjoyment of the fullness of His inheritance, because He has promised that, His

promises will not fail.

And Jeremiah in Lamentations in chapter 3, He highlights the very thing that made Him rejoice, that He wasn't consumed, that the people of Israel weren't consumed.

What did He say? The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases. His measures never come to an end.

They are new every morning. The steadfast love. And the steadfast love of the unchangeable God is what keeps His relationship between Himself and us, keeps our relationship going.

He is the unchangeable one who is committed to our salvation. We are the changeable ones. We float around from obedience to disobedience.

[11 : 20] We sin daily. We rebel against God. We have the inclination in our hearts to turn away from God and deserve that God will disown us and abandon us and leave us to follow our own paths.

But instead, because of His steadfast and failing love, which in the Hebrews, the word chesed, and we could think about the word chesed and steadfast love as the superglue that ensures that this relationship with God will never fail.

And sometimes we think when we sin against God that the relationship is gone. We feel it's broken. But God ensures that it will never break and that it's the pain of rebellion against Him or realizing that we have sinned against Him.

But the relationship will never fail. thanksgiving and reflecting on the unchangeableness of God, on our own changeableness and how we blow hot and cold in our relationship with God and how despite that, the unchangeable God is unchangeable in His relationship with us, that He ensures that our faith will never fail and that He will bring us safely at last to the haven that He has prepared and designed for His people.

Thanksgiving and reflecting. Secondly, I want to think of thanksgiving and reconnecting. If things are broken, they need to be reconnected.

[13 : 08] If my relationship with God today has broken, there has to be a reconnection. And that's exactly what God is wanting to do here with His people.

They are where they are in their harvest. The harvest has failed. Their relationship with God is all wrong. And God wants to reconnect with them.

And that's what we see in verse number 7. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

The picture is clear. The image there. They are going that way and God is going that way. They have turned their backs upon God and because of that, God has turned His back upon them.

That's a serious breakdown in their relationship. And it is what can happen so quickly in your life and mine that in a moment, my face-to-face relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ, where I find joy and gladness and satisfaction, in a moment, that can change a thought, a distraction, a word from somewhere else, a voice in my head.

[14 : 35] And my head goes one way and I leave God behind. And I set off on this journey away from God and in His displeasure, God turns His back upon me.

The blessing is lost. There's a vacuum in my life and that vacuum waits to be filled and unless God does bring me back to Himself, then that vacuum is going to be filled with things other than God. And time after time in life, we have to recognize that, realize where we are, that we are not where we should be with God.

But because God is unchangeable, He sends out this reconnecting message to those who are His people, return to me and I will return to you.

And it's interesting that the initiative rests with them. We understand, of course, that when we come to believe in the Lord Jesus, we believe through faith.

[15 : 48] It's a gift of God. It's not of ourselves. But in relational terms, as it is in a relationship with other people, in relational terms, the initiative, in this case, rests with them.

You return to me. Look at your circumstances. Look at your questions. Look at the things, look at the way in which you're questioning even the faithfulness of God.

Return to me. There's a call for an about turn in the direction that they're taking, which includes an about turn in the way that they're thinking and coming back to God.

And the New Testament calls that very thing godly sorrow, which was repentance not to be repented of. It's a whole change of mind, a whole change of heart, a whole change of direction, a

hatred from the direction that I was traveling in, and a love for the direction that takes me back to God.

And in that moment of turning around, realizing that God at the same time is turning around to face me. And Jeremiah says, with regard to Ephraim in Jeremiah chapter 31, Ephraim is away from God. [17:15] Turn me around that I may return to you. There's that whole mystery of irresponsibility and the grace of God until we need to sense that the responsibility rests with ourselves today that wherever we have turned our backs from God, that from there we have to hear what God the Lord is saying.

The reconnecting. I will return to you. It's a whole context and message in itself the returning of God.

He's not returning because he's absent. And in our thanksgiving today we want to think of the way in which these words search our hearts and ask us where is God in our thanksgiving.

Is he calling out for us to return? That he may return to us and fill this void that we have created because of our rebellion against him.

But the staggering thing is that they are completely unaware that anything has gone wrong. What is their response?

[18:46] You see, how shall we return? It's as if they're saying to God, what on earth are you talking about? We haven't gone anywhere so there is no need for us to return.

It's staggering that you and I can be here today far away from God and completely oblivious to the fact that there is that distance. and when God sends his word out to us as he does today return to me in our hearts we're saying what does God mean?

I'm still where I was yesterday last week I'm here I'm listening to God's word I'm still here what's changed? you see, we can be so blinded by where we've gone to that we have no sense of our distance from God and that's the staggering thing about this people they did not realize that they had gone wrong and that they had separated from God and to to drive home the point to them he uses a practical example that was a symptom of what was wrong in their lives but you see how he shall return will a man rob God?

Imagine God saying to us today that we are robbing him that we are by forekeeping or taking away from God what belongs to God will a man rob God but you are robbing me yet you are saying how have we robbed you?

and here is the answer in tithes and contributions the two practical things at the very center of the worship of the children of God of the Old Testament the tithes was the tenth of the product of the land which they would bring to the house of God as part of their worship and as part of their praise for what God had given to them a tenth of the product goes back to God as part of their worship it was commanded by God in his law that that's what they must do and along with that there are the contributions the voluntary gifts that they brought to the house of God as they did when they were building the tabernacle in Exodus 25 voluntary gifts both part of their commitment to God and their worship of God required by God's commandment and voluntarily given by them as part of their commitment to him and now God is saying to them you are robbing me in the worship of my name you're keeping from me what I commanded that you should give to me and along with that the voluntary aspect of your worship which reflects your love for me is also missing you're robbing me of the things that belong to me and the things that you should be giving to me and showing to me to reflect your relationship with me reconnecting the tithes and the contributions were marks of their heart relationship with God if we jump to the New

[22:31] Testament and hear Paul in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 speaking about contributions and money given to the cause of the Lord he's encouraging the contents to excel in this grace also of giving to show the genuineness of their love the practical visible thing is there but it's a gateway or a window into what's in their hearts and that's what God is saying to us here today return to him how shall we return will a man rob God you have robbed me God's desire to reconnect today he wants to examine your heart and mine and to see how devoted you are in his heart to him to show the genuineness of your love and what you're giving to him in worship as well as the practical things that you give and in reflecting on harvest thanksgiving to come with a sense of openness to God and say to God as the psalm said in Psalm 24 who is the man that shall ascend to the hill of God who is the person whose hands are clean and whose heart is pure and whose soul has not turned to vanity what's in your heart today and your thankfulness are you withholding your life from committing yourself to

God are you withholding from God your heart in a living relationship of faith in Jesus Christ is your life lived with that distance and with that vacuum and no matter what appearances may convey or communicate that actually in your heart you're in another world where God is not working and where the love of God is not moving and where your heart is not responding reconnecting perhaps for you today that's where you find yourself in a distant land and perhaps for you today this voice of God on this day of thanksgiving is reaching out to reconnect with your heart and to span the chasm and to bring you back to the enjoyment and the presence of God thanksgiving realizing a wrong the wrong that we can be oblivious to and welcoming the word of God that comes to connect with us there is thanksgiving and reflecting there is thanksgiving and reconnecting and finally there is thanksgiving and restoring relationships

God is in the business of forming relationships of maintaining relationships of restoring relationships and that's what he's doing here with his people in verse number 10 bring the full tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house give me that heart that is genuinely fixed upon me that genuinely desires to know me that genuinely desires to worship me and give me the life that corresponds to the words of Paul to the church in Rome in chapter 12 that we give our lives as a living sacrifice to God which is our spiritual worship God is inviting us is pleading us is reaching out to us today and saying to us and returning to him to reconnect in the sense of giving our whole hearts in worship our whole hearts in life service our whole hearts in following the

Lord Jesus in every step that we take bring the full tithe into the store house and God is inviting them to do that with a particular aim and view and as far as I'm aware this is the only time that God approves of us testing him what does he say to to the people bring the full tithe into the stores and thereby put me to the test says the Lord of hosts he wants them to test him when he is testing us he is putting us through a process through which we are purified and cleansed and through which the genuineness of our faith and of our love shines forth that's how he tests us now he is saying to the people of

God here you bring the tithe to the storehouse and test me prove my heart prove my character prove my love prove my commitment prove everything that I have said I will do for you put me to the test here is the God who promised to Abraham that he would bless him that Abraham would be a blessing here is the God that said to Abraham and you all the families of the earth will be blessed here is the God who ultimately blessed the world with his promises being amen and Christ Jesus whom he sent into the world to be our Savior test God what a marvelous opportunity to come back to God with his invitation to do the unthinkable thing and to come with our hearts and to put him to the test to see how he will respond and how is he going to respond what does he promise to do for them if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need

[29 : 34] I will rebuke the devourer for you so it will not destroy the fruits of your soil and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear says the Lord of hosts I will open the windows of heaven it's a marvelous picture skylight the heavens that are closed and the ground is now producing fruit God has withdrawn the rain which is a sign of his blessing the sign that he is pleased with his people and he pulls back the shutters and he opens the windows and he opens a channel through which all of his covenant blessing that he has stored for us in Jesus Christ his son he opens the flood gates and he rains down on the ground around them to bless them and wherever we have

God's blessing it's the empowering word of God that enables the ground itself that enables ourselves as those who are created by that enables the ground and people to be what they ought to be to produce what they ought to produce to be the true children of God and for the ground to produce the harvest it's this formative empowering word through which life begins to flourish what a promise that today in Barvis community in the church here that we have the opportunity to put God to the test and see if we will open the heavens and pour down this blessing a blessing that certainly speaks of harvest there was an encouragement to them that the harvest would be restored that the devourer that what devoured the plants and the vines would be taken away and that the ground would once more produce its fruit but along with that the blessing of

God upon his people and as we think of that test of that promise of God we close with an image that comes from Isaiah chapter 45 that speaks of similar things and it goes like this shower oh heavens from above let clouds rain down righteousness what is righteousness it is God's salvation Isaiah saw does kneeling to come and here is a prayer rain down righteousness let the earth open that salvation and righteousness may bear fruit the openness of the welcome of creation itself that the

ground opens to receive the rain and that our hearts open to receive the blessing of God that's where we are actively engaged in this test when our hearts open when perhaps the rusty hinges on the door of our hearts when they creak as the door opens and as we put God to the test and wait for him to shower down the blessings of the righteousness and of the grace that we have in Christ Jesus and then how far does God go until there is no more need complete satisfaction or we could say until the supply runs out and that's never going to happen and that's the beauty of the blessing of God that in our restoring today this is what he promises the absolute fullness of his own endless blessing that will fill our hearts with the sense of flourishing as the children of God that we will see in life around us in our thanksgiving on harvest thanksgiving and that will be reflected in our daily living for God and reflected in the worship of God's name on the Lord's day and reflected in the way that we give ourselves practically and wholeheartedly to the service of God's house let's not today forget that our behavior does bring God's displeasure let's think of his unchangeableness and let's think of the way in which he wants to reconnect with us all and let's put him to the test that we may know the enriching of his blessing may God bless his word to us let us pray most gracious God we are thankful to you that you will never leave us alone we are thankful that no one can pluck us out of your hand and we are thankful that your love will never let us go we bless our hearts today so we may hear your word receive it with power be ready and willing with that openness of heart to welcome you into our lives and give ourselves to you not only in the worship of your name but in our daily lives seeking to honor you in all that we do hear our prayer and accept our thanks we pray for

[35 : 22] Jesus sake Amen Psalm is Psalm number 65 and Psalm is on page 82 it's another Psalm that suggests to us something of the blessing of God at harvest time Psalm 65 on page 82 and we're singing at verse 9 you tend the land and water it you make it rich and good as you ordained your streams are full to give the people food we stand the same from verse 9 to the end of the psalm to God's praise you tend the land and water it you make it rich and good as you as you ordained your streams are full to give the people food you drench the furrows of land you level of the crowd you soften it with showers of rain and make its crop abound new crown new crown the year with fruitfulness your harvest overflow the cross land flour flour rations again the hills with gladness glow the pastures green with the star clothed the meadows cover in the valley deck themselves with corn they shout for joy and sing in the grace of the

Lord Jesus Christ the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forever more Amen