

## Return to God with all your Heart

AIM: to see that God will send Jesus to cleanse and to judge so that his people would return to him and worship him with all their heart, including with their tithes

### 1. Intro

- With just two weeks to Christmas, the countdown is on for undoubtedly the most popular day of the year
  - Of course, it's the day Christians around the world celebrate the coming of Jesus Christ into the world ...
    - first as a baby ...
    - then as a crucified saviour
- Throughout this Christmas period, most of us, Christian and non-Christian alike will attend a carols service and sing all the songs that speak of
  - the coming of Jesus
  - how he is the Messiah, the new born king, the saviour who reigns
  - we should come and adore him
- But as Christmas approaches ... and as we sing those carols ... do we fully understand the significance and the implications of what we are celebrating at Christmas time
- The passage we had read for us this morning has a very famous verse that is often included and read out as part of Advent calendars ... for its a verse that is clearly pointing to the coming of the Christ child
  - Malachi 3:1 – *"See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty.*"
- However, ... as we get into the Malachi 3 this morning ... we're going to see there is much more to Jesus coming than being a cute baby in a manger who gives us all warm fuzzy feelings
  - For he is the Christ who will cleanse and judge and who calls on us to return to him and worship him with all our heart

### PRAY

### 2. God's cleansing and righteous offerings

- In Malachi 3 ... God continues to rebuke his people over the ways they are demonstrating that they don't fully trust him
- One of those ways is they think God is unjust

- They accuse God of abandoning justice because they see evil and wickedness prevailing all around them
- And God's fed up with them saying he approves of evildoers and that he's abandoned them
- Have a look at 2:17 with me:
  - *You have wearied the LORD with your words. "How have we wearied him?" you ask. By saying, "All who do evil are good in the eyes of the LORD, and he is pleased with them" or "Where is the God of justice?"*
- Because they see evildoers prospering and getting away with it, the Israelites conclude that
  - either the God of justice they read about in the Scriptures has disappeared
  - or that he's changed his mind about whose side he's on and abandoned them
- However, God's answer to their accusations is to assure them that he's coming soon, as the God of justice
  - First he will send a messenger to prepare his way
  - And then he will come in temple, as a judge and bring the justice they cry out for
- But there's the problem
- Have a look at v2-3
  - *But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver;*
- Now a refiner's fire is a furnace
  - A furnace works to separate the impurities from precious metals
  - The heat makes it impossible for the gold and the dross to stay together
- Similarly, the launderer's soap was a strong cleanser that had a bleaching effect on clothes
  - It would strip out the filth and stains
- They're powerful images of judgment and cleansing that God promises to bring
- Now the Israelites want God to come as the judge and bring justice
  - And God promises that he'll do that
  - He says in v5
    - *"So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the*

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*fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty.*

- But in v2 God rightly points out to them the dilemma of what they're asking for
  - For if they want God to judge evil and bring justice ... then that means they will be judged!
    - For ... *who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?*
  - The implication is ... no-one!
- For the priests and people of Malachi's day are themselves part of the problem
  - God will not only refine, cleanse and judge the unrighteous ... but also his people!
  - He will purify the Levites (priests) ... the ones who had allowed the people to bring blemished sacrifices to the temple
  - Only then will the Lord have men who will worship him with all their heart and bring acceptable offerings and sacrifices to the Lord

### **Biblical Theology**

- But how is it possible for God to come as a refiner's fire and launderers soap to judge and cleanse ... and yet there be anyone left to make acceptable offerings to the Lord?
- The answer is in the way God fulfills this promise in Jesus Christ
- In Mark 1, at the very start of his gospel ... Mark quotes Malachi 3:1 and says that John the Baptist is the promised messenger who will prepare the way for the Lord
  - Now in Malachi, the messenger is preparing the way for the Lord
  - But in the gospels, John the Baptist is preparing the way for Jesus<sup>1</sup>
- And one of the first things Jesus does after he begins his public ministry is go to the temple at Passover festival (John 2)
  - And what does Jesus do when he gets there?
  - He turns over the money changing tables
  - Drives the sheep and cattle out of the temple precinct
- In effect, he cleanses the temple and purifies their corrupted worship
- Now the Jews knew their OT and they knew from Malachi to expect that the Christ, would come to the temple to cleanse and purify
- And so they ask Jesus for a sign to see if he is the Christ

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<sup>1</sup> Refer also Matt 11:10

- Jesus replies saying
  - *"Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days."*
- Jews took him literally and think Jesus is referring to Herod's temple
  - At this point they're thinking Jesus is a lunatic!
  - The Temple in Jerusalem was huge!
  - And Jesus says he can raise it up in three days!
  
- But with benefit of hindsight and indwelling of the HS the disciples were able to understand the significance of what he was saying
  - Jesus resurrection from the dead gave new perspective to these words
  - Jesus wasn't referring to Herod's temple
  - Jesus was referring to his body
    - Destruction of the temple was not a demolition of Herod's temple ... but his death on the cross
    - Raising of the temple in 3 days, is not the world's fastest renovation rescue ... but his resurrection from the dead

### Application

- And it would be through his death on the cross that Jesus would come as a refiner's fire and launderer's soap
- Through his death on the cross ... rather than putting us through the fire ... Jesus Christ himself went through the fire
  - He took the heat of God's wrath so that our sin could be dealt with
  - He took away the dross of our sin ... and cleansed us ... and made us pure and new
  
- Which frees those who've been refined and cleansed by Jesus to bring offerings in righteousness that Lord is seeking there in Malachi v3
- However the offerings
  - aren't animal sacrifices made to the Lord in the temple
  - they're the living sacrifices of our lives ... made to the Lord in every aspect of our life
  - This is the whole-hearted worship the Lord is seeking from his people
- And the offering of our lives are in no way righteous by anything we do
  - We're made righteous by only the refining and cleansing work of Jesus death on the cross
  
- And so who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears ... and bring righteous offerings?
  - It is those who have allowed Jesus cleanse them and purify them through the cross

### Judgment

- The Jews of Malachi's day expected that when the day of the Lord came the cleansing and judgment would happen simultaneously
- However, the New Testament teaches us that purification happened with Jesus first coming and judgment will occur when Jesus returns
- This is good news
  - Means not only have those who trust in Christ been spared the judgment through the cleansing work of Christ's death
  - But we can know for certain that Jesus will come a second time to judge all the wickedness and evil in this world
- We can be confident that God will not allow the atrocities we see around us to go unpunished
  - That there will be a day of reckoning ...
  - All will have to stand before their maker
  - Jesus will judge and condemn those who've chosen to reject and ignore the refining, cleansing work of his death on the cross
- Evil will no reign forever
  - We may look around the world and see success of the wicked and those who don't love God ...
  - But ultimately, they won't prosper ... they will face God's justice
- Of course, the challenge for all of us who want justice [and we all want justice] ... is "*who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears?*"
- None of us can stand with confidence before God
  - All of us would be condemned
  - For who of can say we are without sin?
- And so our only hope is to cling to Jesus knowing
  - He came 2000 years ago to purify and cleanse us through the cross ...
  - So when he comes again to judge ... we can stand and endure his coming

### **3. God's character and generous offerings**

- The whole purpose of God chastising his people is to get them to return to him with all their heart
  - v6-7 – "*I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,*"

- Despite them deserving to be cleansed, purified and judged ... God's character means there's hope for his people
- God is a God who does not change
  - He doesn't change his mind
  - he doesn't go back on his promises
  - His character is consistent
- Because of that ... Judah will not be destroyed
  
- And so he calls the people to repent and turn back
- He says in v7 "return to me"
  - Like a parent calling a wayward teenager who's run away from home
  - "Return to me!"
  
- And in response people ask "how are we to return?" (v7)
- God says ... start with your giving
  
- You see ... not only had the Israelites been offering blemished sacrifices in the temple as part of their worship
  - We see in v8-9 they were also robbing God of their tithes and offerings
- A tithe = a tenth
  - The OT law commanded the Israelites to give a tenth of their crops and flocks as an offering to the Lord<sup>2</sup>
  - This tithe was meant to pay for the up keep of the temple as well as provide for the priests who maintained the temple and took care of the temple worship
  - Israel's tithes and offerings were part of their worship of God
  - It's was part of the way they showed honour, love and devotion to God
  
- And clearly the Israelites were holding back
  - Either they weren't giving the full amount they should have
  - Or stopped giving altogether
  
- Despite the fact that God had given them everything they had in the first place, they keep it all for themselves
- Even though God was the one had
  - Given them the land
  - Sent the rains
  - Caused crops to grow
  - Blessed flocks with lambs
- They were so selfish ... they refused to even give a tenth back to support the priests and the temple

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<sup>2</sup> Lev 27:30, 32

- God says when you do this ... you are **robbing** me
  - And to make it really clear to them he uses the word 'rob' four times
  - You're ripping me off Israel
  - You're giving me my full due
- In reality ... God doesn't need the money
  - Its not like he's got a mortgage he needs to pay off or a pension plan to save for
- What he wants is for the people to 'return to him'
  - He wants their hearts
  - He wants their affection
  - He wants their devotion
- One of the ways this will show itself in their life is when they give joyfully and generously towards God and his temple
- Now all sin like this is a reflection of our hearts
  - The words we say
  - The way we act
  - The decisions we make ...
    - are all a reflection of our heart ... the things we love
- Israel's choice to rob God ... to fail to give joyfully and generously back to the one who has been so generous to them ... reveals their hearts
  - What it reveals is they don't love the Lord with all their heart
- God is saying ... "return to me with all your heart and show me so by being people who give joyfully and generously with the good things I give you"

### **Application**

- Friends, the Christian life is a life of worship
  - It's all of life
  - Romans 12:1 says "*In view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship.*"
- When you understand and experience the mercy of God in Jesus Christ who went through the refiner's fire for you ... then that ought to shape and mold your heart
  - And if Jesus offered himself as a sacrifice like that for you ... then surely the only thing we can do is offer ourselves as living sacrifices to him
  - Problem is ... we struggle to worship him and offer ourselves wholeheartedly as we should
- **Illustration – House with many rooms**
- Imagine your life is like a house with many rooms

- Each room represents an aspect of your life
  - Marriage
  - Work
  - Money
  - Time
  - Family
  - Leisure
  - Speech
  - Sex life
- Friends ... when you become a Christian ... you are basically saying
  - "Jesus, here's the keys to my life. I want you to come and totally renovate it"
  - "I'm going to allow you to take control, call the shots, set the direction ... and I'm going to follow your lead"
- Problem is ... too often we're reluctant to let Jesus do the renovation and make the changes he needs to
- We're unwilling to give him access to some of the rooms in our life ... because we like it as it is ... we want to keep like that
- It could be any of those areas of your life
- One of the rooms many people are reluctant to hand over control to Jesus ... is their money
  - We like it too much to give control of it over to Jesus
  - We like
    - the comfort it buys
    - the security it provides
    - the power it gives
  - It's often said that one of the last things that is converted is a person's wallet
- Like Israel we allow other things to take over the love and affection of our heart ... and we end up diverting our money towards those things instead of God and the gospel
- And the very blunt message of Malachi is giving is... when you and I do that we are robbing God
  - And not just of our money
  - But the love, devotion and honour that's due to him
- Like Israel, one of the specific ways you worship God is with your money
  - Because it's an outward expression of your heart
  - It's not a means of salvation
  - A Christian is saved by faith in Jesus
  - However, your giving is an expression of your faith



- Which is why one of the key principals the NT lays down for giving is not giving out of duty or legal requirement ... but to do so joyfully
- Paul says in 2 Corinthians 9:7
  - *Each of you should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

### How much?

- Invariably at this point we start thinking ...
  - "How much should I give?"
  - Is a tithe / 10% the required amount for Christians to give?
- The straight answer is "No"
  - Because there's nothing in the New Testament that commands that 10% should be the standard for Christian giving
  - The reference to 10% as a standard of giving belongs to the Old Testament Law
  - Christians are free from that > we're no longer under the Law
- However, you need to be careful you don't hear that and go "phew, I don't have to give 10%, I'm off the hook"
- Because I actually think the NT urges us to give more!
- For surely the Christian ...
  - who knows the gospel and knows the grace of God in Christ ...
  - and has experienced the forgiveness of God and the gift of the HS
- In that sense, the NT believer is more blessed than the OT saints
- How then can we expect a NT believer to be any less generous than an OT believer?
- I can't see how we can
- In the Sermon-on-the-Mount ... Jesus takes the OT Law and applies to the heart
- So he says in Matt 5 ...
  - OT says do not murder > I say to do not hate
  - OT says do not commit adultery > I say do not lust after a woman
- He magnifies the Law > expands it
  - The temptation with the Law is to think ... "what's the minimum I need to do?"
  - This is what Jesus is challenging in these verses in Matt 5
  - As long as I don't murder, commit adultery, give 10% I'm okay
- Our sinful nature and love of money and the power it has over our hearts, means we will by nature want to give the smallest amount we can

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- But Jesus point is ... it's not about doing the minimum ... it's about the heart that wants to do the maximum
  - As a principle ... 10% ought to be a starting point
  
  - But the reality is ... most Christians don't give 10%
    - In the latest NCLS > only 26% of people across the Sydney diocese say they give 10% or more of their income
  - Have to ask – “why is that?”
  - One writer said this ...
    - *"Have we used our freedom from the law of tithing as an excuse to shirk our responsibilities? Or do we provide so lavishly for ourselves and our families that there is nothing left to meet our other responsibilities?"*
  - But if the gospel is really working in your heart ... and you understand what Jesus Christ gave up to purchase you ... then 10% doesn't seem like much
    - After all what did Jesus tithe?
    - His blood > not just some of it ... but all of it!
  
  - 10% is not the point > 10% is a good starting point
  - The cross is actually the standard
  - Is there a cross in your life?
  - If there is, is there a cross in your giving?
    - Because it's the cross that will show you how to give
  
  - **Application - Generosity Ladder**
  - To help you make the appropriate step ... this generosity ladder might help you visualise what that looks like?
  - Maybe you're a regular member here are C@P and you're not yet giving
    - I want to encourage to become an **initial giver**
    - To commit to making your first gift to C@P
  - It could be that you do give to C@P but for whatever reason you're a bit irregular
    - Maybe the next step for you is to become a **consistent giver**
    - To set up a regular electronic payment to help you be more consistent in your giving
  - It could be that you do give regularly, but the HS is prompting you to be more generous with the good things God is giving you
    - Maybe your next step is to become a **sacrificial giver**
    - To think about how can I give more than I already do
    - To consider – “are there things about my lifestyle that are stopping me being more generous than I should be?”
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- If you're already giving sacrificially ... praise God ... maybe the next step for you is to consider how you can become a **legacy giver**
  - And through your radical giving ... of your business, your will, your investments ... your you start to create a legacy for the gospel with good things God has given you

#### 4. Conclusion

- At Christmas we celebrate the coming of the Christ
- Malachi makes it clear he came to cleanse and purify so that people might return to him and worship him with all their heart
- And God's character and his grace to you in cleansing and purifying you in Christ means he **deserves** your worship – your whole life
  - He wants whole-hearted worship
  - He deserves whole-hearted worship
  - That includes your giving
  - So don't rob him of the worship he deserves
  - Give to him the honour he is due

#### PRAY