

God's Invitations, Part Five
The Most Perplexing Invitation
Malachi 3:1 – 10
November 22, 2009

Today we will consider a perplexing invitation God issues to His people. This month, as different members of the church have given stewardship testimonies, Malachi 3: 10 has been quoted frequently. Now, as we prepare to participate in one of the annual traditions of our church – the First Fruits Offering – I want to point to the invitation God gives us relating to our giving habits. (Read)

I believe Malachi 3: 1 is a perplexing invitation because, while many Christians embrace it as a foundational principle for a committed relationship with Almighty God, just as many Christians have difficulty getting beyond what they perceive as a legalistic contract that implies if one gives his tithe to the Lord, then God is bound to repay that tithe with tangible prosperity. If you believe in the doctrine of Grace – and I believe in Grace wholeheartedly – then something seems out of sync in this offer by God. “Is God really saying, ‘If you scratch my back I’ll scratch yours?’”

I am convinced that if we only embrace the superficial application of this invitation by God to test Him – and His very character – then we will miss the true intention of God in issuing this invitation. As with all other quotes from scripture, God’s invitation in Verse Ten must be taken in the context of God’s intentions and character in order to gain the whole counsel of God.

Let’s spend a moment examining the setting of the situation of Israel during Malachi’s life and message. Through thick and thin, God had sent messengers to speak God’s word to His chosen people. Eventually God had taken the drastic step of allowing the nation to be overrun by invading armies and the land destroyed. After about 80 years of exile, God intervened and there was a partial repatriation home to the Promised Land. But the spiritual dysfunction of the people persisted. They found it difficult to completely put away the pagan gods they had been worshiping in exile.

And now comes on the scene the man who would prove to be the last of the great Old Testament prophets, Malachi. The time was about 400 years before the birth of Christ; Israel had many of the same concerns and ambitions typical of any modern community: greed and avarice; bad treatment of one’s neighbors; and most of all a corruption of worship. Malachi’s messages recorded in the Scripture probably were preached over no more than three months – not very surprising given the “in-your-face” quality of the words.

In summary, Malachi was dealing with a obstacle that was – and still is – in the way of the free outpouring of God’s blessings on His people. The issue was that Israel was unwilling to give complete and total obedience and commitment to God alone. The people were withholding their tithes and offerings. Why? Because they were also paying loyalty to other gods. Make no mistake, the problem then – and now – is there

was – and is – an alienation from God (they had a spiritual problem). And the only way back from this place of alienation was – and is – to come the right way, through repentance and correction.

And that is what God is talking about when He says, “*Bring your whole tithe into the storehouse, so that here may be food in my house, and test Me now in this,*” says the Lord of hosts, “*if I will not open the windows of heaven, and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows (NIV).*”

1. The intentions of God are to bless His people, and to build a relationship with them. This never changes; everything God does regarding His people reflects those intentions.

A. The greatest proof of God’s desire to bless His people is John 3: 16.

1. I know everything I need to know about God in that simple statement.

2. Further, God has perfectly designed His plan so every Christian can enjoy every blessing God has for them. Never doubt God’s intention to bless you!

3. The “blessing channel” is always open and operational.

B. Not only does God desire to bless us, He intends to build a relationship with us.

1. And the desired end of this relationship is to bring us to the point we can communicate with God and know His will.

C. How does He communicate with us:

a. Makes us joint-heirs with Christ (Romans 8: 17).

b. Puts His Holy Spirit within us so He can be in constant contact with us (John 14: 26).

c. Gives us the ability to trust His promises. Think on this: persons who were previously alienated and distrustful toward God, are now able to trust Him willingly and joyfully.

2. The invitation “test Me” is both a promise and a challenge (v. 10)..

A. Here is the essence of faith: it is always both a challenge and a blessing:

1. The blessing is the real focus of what God is saying: “I will open the windows of heaven, and pour our a blessing until it overflows.”

2. The challenge is, “Put Me to the test (remember this is God speaking!)” which invites us to verify/ confirm the accuracy of the pledge God makes.

B. Don’t let the greatness of the blessing make your faith stagger (Ephesians 3: 20: “*Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us*”).

1. What God has promised He is able to perform.

2. There are many places in the Bible where God has given us challenges to pray, to step out believing His promises, to exercise our faith.

3. But at each step, the limiting factor has been our lack of believing God.

3. What is God really saying? “Use your faith, and use it now!”

A. Faith will not work until you work your faith.

1. This is what God is really saying; He doesn't say it out of frustration. He says it in the context of His purposes to develop maturing, growing children. His goals for us are always in view.

2. Most Christians will live their entire life and never acquire all the blessings God has in store for them, because they never challenged God with their faith. "You have not because you ask not."

4. Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible (v. 10).

A. A "miracle" is something only God can do. So it follows that faith operates in the realm of what does not seem possible to the rational eye.

1. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible; faith begins where man's power ends.

2. So, the ball is in your court; what are you going to do in response to God's promised blessing?

3. Will you match God's promise to bless you as only He can by raising the level of your response of faith to a new level?

B. Failure to use your faith will keep you at the same level you have been all along.

1. Extended exercise of your faith will bring the realization God really does what He says He will do!

2. God seems to do nothing Himself which He can delegate to His children. But He always is ready to accomplish whatever is needed to bless His children.

3. The logical conclusion is that I am the primary obstacle to my experiencing God's blessings in my life.

The bottom line is this: Either I put God to the test or I will just stay where I am!

One night a house caught on fire and a young boy was forced to flee to the roof. The father stood on the ground below with outstretched arms, calling to his son, "Jump! I'll catch you!" But the son protested, "Daddy, I can't see you."

The father called back, "But I can see you, and that is all that matters." Do you believe the Father sees you in the midst of the fog, darkness, and storms of life? Then put Him to the test!

Let's pray!