

11/16/25

Return to Me – God’s Mercy

*Malachi 3:6-12 (NIV)***Pastor Joe Greemore, Brewster Baptist Church**Suggested Scripture Readings*Malachi 3:6-12 (NIV)**Matthew 9:13 (Hosea 6:6)**Mark 12:41-44**2 Corinthians 9:6-8**James 2:13*

“No language can express the power, and beauty, and heroism, and majesty of a mother's love. It shrinks not where man cowers, and grows stronger where man faints, and over wastes of worldly fortunes sends the radiance of its quenchless fidelity like a star.” – Edwin Hubbell Chapin

“A mother is a person who seeing there are only four pieces of pie for five people, promptly announces she never did care for pie.” – Tenneva Jordan

“The heart of a mother is a deep abyss at the bottom of which you will always find forgiveness.” – Honore de Balzac

An Amazing Conference in Green Lake, WI

This past week, I had the opportunity to attend the ICAP Global Conference in Green Lake, WI. I returned to a place I have loved being through the years (beginning with my time at the Fellowship of American Baptist Musicians). As an international body of Christ, we met as more than 200 attendees from 34 countries to partner in stemming the tide of human trafficking in our world (icapglobal.org). I enjoyed so much about the conference. ICAP’s five values are: Integrity, Encouragement, Relational Learning, Worship and Prayer, and Hospitality. Together, we learned so much, celebrated, and shared on the theme of how everyone is always welcome and at home with God through the theme “Welcome Home.”

Youthful Habits on Spending and Saving

Here at BBC, it has been such a blessing for Shelby and me to take the Financial Peace University by Dave Ramsey, offered by our church on Thursday nights these past two months, with our two daughters. We are learning important lessons about saving for the future, getting rid of debt, spending wisely, and managing well the resources God

has entrusted to us. When I was younger, I remember the formula 10-10-80; give your first 10% to God, save 10% of whatever you earn, and you can do the rest with the 80% that remains. That was helpful for me to establish an understanding, as a young person, of tithing, giving, and spending.

Mother's Merciful, Generous Love

In 1997, I took my trip overseas with the Kansas and Upper Kansas City Ambassadors of Music. We were more than 300 musicians, traveling on 7 color-coordinated charter buses from London, England, to Paris, France; Champéry, Switzerland; Seefeld, Austria; Lichtenstein; Venice, Italy; and Rothenberg, Germany. It was a trip to remember, one that greatly inspired my love for music and travel, and my appreciation of international cultures. All of this was due to the kindness and generosity of my mother, who knew I so desperately wanted to be part of this cross-cultural musical experience representing the great traditions of American music with an orchestra, choirs, and concert band.

*Have you ever been given a gift so special that it changed your life?
For me, this trip was such a gift.*

Grace is often defined as an “unmerited gift” or “undeserved favor.” In our scripture reading, the issues of giving generous gifts are at stake: God, in an act of divine mercy, has given God’s people great and precious gifts, and the people’s response is... in like fashion, to give it all away and share generously? No. Rather, they keep God’s blessings for themselves, from God and others, smothering their potential generosity with an instinctual need for self-preservation. Let’s hear the scripture reading. ***Malachi 3:6-12, Breaking Covenant by Withholding Tithes.***

“I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty. “But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ ‘Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. “But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’ “In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says

the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the Lord Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,” says the Lord Almighty.

What did you hear, or note, in that passage? A tug of war over priorities?

We’re Only Human

At times, our natural instinct is to take care of ourselves so we can take care of others. Such examples as, “You can’t pour out of an empty cup,” and, “Before helping others, make sure your oxygen mask is tightly secured,” abound and support this kind of thinking, reminding us to be *functional* so that we can help others. While this is true, God invites us into a deeper, greater truth, which is,

When we show love for God and others from our heart by sharing generously and giving freely, God blesses us with every spiritual gift in Christ.

Because of God’s grace in Jesus, in light of the gifts of our faith, we are free to give and share with others. Nowhere is this clearer than in the New Testament story of the widow’s mite. (Read *Mark 12:41-44*.) Now notice something about Jesus’ perspective: although the widow’s gift was insignificant in terms of monetary worth and value, as we see it, Jesus saw her gift as *great* and *precious*, of *great* value. That’s because she gave from the heart and in spite of her need. She gave out of her scarcity, while others gave from their abundance. This is not to say that giving from abundance isn’t a good thing. When he says that others gave out of their abundance, we are reminded by *Malach 3:6-12* that giving is a *good* thing. However, the widow’s generosity in the midst of scarcity was a better thing! In an act of selfless generosity, trusting in God’s grace, consider the young man who shared his lunch with Jesus and his disciples, and multitudes were fed! (*John 6:1-14*)

By comparison, we also see times when generosity, rather than resulting in gratitude, appreciation, and generous living, causes offense and is met with confusion and frustration.

In the Parable of the Vineyard Workers (*Matthew 20:1-16*, where the owner's generosity reflects God's) and the story of the Prodigal Son (*Luke 15:11-32*, where the father's reconciling love points to God's), generosity is met negatively. In the first parable, the workers who arrived first and worked all day were frustrated when they discovered that those who worked only an hour were paid the same, a day's wages (a *denarius*). The generosity and mercy of the vineyard owner disrupts their expectations and rankles them. In the story of the prodigal, the generosity of the father is met with confusion and frustration by the older brother, who had by contrast remained home, working faithfully, and when he discovered his father's generosity toward the wayward younger brother, he confronted their father with bewilderment.

We might be surprised when we see some of the characters in life who end up receiving God's mercy when we ourselves have been so faithful and committed, and then we remember that all of this is by God's grace and mercy.

Living out Our Thanksgiving

Later in the New Testament, the apostle Paul writes that "God loves a cheerful giver" (*2 Corinthians 9:7*). That means that God's focus is on the joy, the gratitude, and the open posture of our hands and our hearts when we give, as much as how we bring and share gifts. Jesus highlights the importance of making peace with others when we bring our offering to God, teaching us that God is looking for love, mercy and obedience (*Matthew 5:23-24*). If it is our ability and joy to bring and share much, God will bless it! If we can only bring a little with great joy, it is consecrated by our faith in God's provision.

So whether we give much or little, we are blessed if our heart is properly postured toward God.

Malachi also clarifies that the amount is important; in the Old Testament, the full tithe was an important part of Jewish culture. We recall that the tribe of Levi had no allotment of land as their inheritance among the tribes of Israel, no portion of the country to call their own, because the Lord was to be their inheritance (*Deuteronomy 10:9*). Their livelihood and ability to care for God's people was supplied by the faithful giving of God's people. The upkeep of God's holy dwelling place on earth depended on

the regular, faithful giving of God's people, 10% of all they received and then brought into God's house, as we hear about in today's scripture text.

Joyful, Generous Living and Giving

In the New Testament and beyond, we are not under the law of the tithe. I recently heard a well-respected Pastor say, "The tithe is the minimum. I want to give God more; I want to give God my best. It's not so much a question of how much I should give God, it's a question of how much I need." That is an attitude of appreciation and a posture of generosity! In a similar mindset, some people choose to give much more than 10% and use that figure as an entry into sharing their gratitude to God.

We experience true **JOY** when we a) put Jesus first, b) put the needs of others before our own, and c) care for ourselves as God's incredible children!

Jesus

Others

Yourself

Friends, whatever you are able to give and however you are able to give, we give thanks to God for the mercy that sustains us daily. God sees the disposition of our hearts and delights in our joyful, generous giving and sharing. Paula David is going to give us an update on the Holiday Fair funds raised (which turned out, after initial count of \$50,000, to amount to no less than \$63,000!!! Thanks be to God that we can share generously, blessing our community, meeting needs, and generously sustaining three local charities by way of a gift of \$21,000 each with what has come into God's house. I think this is a wonderful example of what God is looking for in *Malachi 3. Way to go, church!* You are a blessing to Cape Cod and the world, seeking God's kingdom on earth as it is in heaven).

So, as we hear the word, let us respond with glad and generous hearts, giving as God first gave to us. Let us rediscover the joy of our salvation when we first believed and return to God with all our hearts. I invite you into a spirit of prayer.

Loving, generous, faithful God, thank you for your presence this morning. Thank you that you, the Lord of creation, meet us where we are. We long to look at others the way you saw them, with admiration, wisdom, and kindness. As we think of the widow you saw in the act of giving, help us to be mindful of those around us who may have a variety of needs and also those who by their faithfulness have much to teach us. We come to learn, to be your students; we return to you to be taught how to live and give well.

As we come to you this morning in worship, let us return to you as we orient our hearts toward your word.

When we are at times disoriented by the priorities of daily living, by the stresses and the concerns,

Grant us your grace that we may be reoriented to your generous living.

Return to us and be with us, O God we pray, that you might be with us here and in the days to come, through Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is the greatest gift you've ever received? How did you respond, and what made that gift so special?
2. Thinking back on last week's message, how do you see God's unchanging mercy as being connected to God's unchanging justice?
3. What are two ways you can show appreciation this week? Is it possible to do these on a daily basis? How might it look to do those consistently beyond this week?
4. *Malachi 3:6* opens with a reminder about our series: "I the Lord do not change." In what ways can we see God's character unchanging from Old Testament to New Testament?
5. How do you respond to the voice of the people responding to God in the text (e.g. *Malachi 3:7-8*)? Do you see this as combative, confrontational, honest, or maybe something else?
6. *Malachi 3:10-12* is a powerful reminder of what important truth? How does God's unchanging nature relate to our appreciation and generosity?