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Everywhere we look, our world is changing. Everything is on the move. Nothing is staying the same. Life is in a constant state of flux. Crises come and go. Technology is moving at a rapid pace. And challenges that we face today as families, as a nation and as a world seem to be getting bigger and bigger. And that causes us a great deal of stress. How am I ever going to keep up with all the changes? How are my kids and grandkids ever going to navigate such a world? How is the church going to keep pace in such an everchanging environment?

And yet at the heart of our passage today we read the truth that everyone of us needs to cling onto. Malachi 3, Verse 6 *"I the Lord do not change."* The world might change. Our family will change. Our nation is in the midst of great change. Climate may change. But God doesn't change. He is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

You see God's nature doesn't change. He will always be one God made up of three persons Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God's character doesn't change. God is and always will be holy, just, wise, gracious and merciful. God's expectations don't change. God's promises don't change. God's word doesn't change. God doesn't change.

When US astronaut Alan Shepherd was getting ready to go up into space for the very first time, a reporter asked him, "What are you depending on in this flight?" His answer was a classic: "I'm depending upon the fact that God's laws will not change." And that is something we can all depend upon as well. In the midst of an everchanging world we have a God who doesn't change. A God who remains rock solid. Reliable. Dependable. Trustworthy. God doesn't change.

And his word to us doesn't change. Which is why we can pick up the book of Malachi, written some 2400 years ago and still learn something more about Him. For he wants to also teach us something about ourselves as well. And in our passage today we are being told because God doesn't change, we are not to weary God.

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1. Don't weary God. (Malachi 2:17-3:7)

Yes, apparently, we can weary God. We can tire him out. How did the Israelites in Malachi's time do that? ¹⁷*"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?"*

They wearied God by their words. By their constant questioning of God and his character. And they have done it again and again throughout this book haven't they? Malachi 1:2, "How have you loved us?" What a thing to ask God hey? Malachi 1:6 "How have we shown contempt for your name?" Malachi 1:8 "How have we defiled you?" Again, and again God's people answer

God back. They question God and his nature. And here at the end of chapter 2 they are questioning God's justice. Where are you God when those who do evil seem to triumph!

Notice here that God is not wearied by our prayers. He is not wearied when we ask him questions. But He is wearied when we keep pushing back against him. When we question him. When we think we know everything and God knows nothing. And God is wearied when we talk to others rather than talk to him. "Where is the God of justice?" God's people are saying to one another when they should be humbling themselves and talking to God Himself about justice.

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I sometimes make the same mistake, don't you? I complain to the people around me about the state of God's world and rarely talk to God about it. I look for answers all around me and rarely seek God's mind on a subject. I claim that God isn't just and never ever see my own lack of justice! Because if I did, I wouldn't be asking God for justice I would be seeking His mercy!

So, God's people have wearied their God, so what does God do? Well, he doesn't do what I often do. I come home after a big day of work, I do the bare minimum around the house and then I sit in front of the TV and unwind. I disengage. I switch off. But God doesn't do that. He responds. He engages. He reaches out to those who are questioning him by doing three things. He sends them a messenger, then a refiner and then a judge. Here is God's three step plan.

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Firstly, *"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.*"

God firstly sends his people a messenger and in this case the messenger is Malachi himself. To warn his people. To prepare his people. To get his people ready. In the same way that when Scott Morrison visits an overseas leader, he sends a number of diplomats there first to make sure everything is in order, so God sent prophet after prophet, priest after priest, king after king to prepare his people. To warn his people. To get his people ready. Because one day he will step into human history himself. As a man. The Lord would be there at his temple. But would he come and give the people the justice that they were seeking? No not yet.

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A messenger then a refiner. *"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. ³ He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴ and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years."*

God sends someone to his people that will clean them up. Get rid of their impurities. Do something about their sin. He has not come to destroy them but to purify them. To change them. To make them acceptable in his sight. Which is what Jesus did when he first came to this earth. After sending us a messenger, John the Baptist, Jesus came & in the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:25-27 Christ *"loved the Church and gave himself up for her to make her holy,*

cleansing her by the washing with water through the word and to present her to himself as a radiant church without stain or wrinkle of any other blemish but holy & blameless."

When Jesus first came to our world he didn't come as our judge but as our Saviour. To lead us to the cross where His work of sanctification would change us. Refine us. Purify us. Jesus fulfils this prophecy because he does the work of a silver smith.

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A group of women were studying the book of Malachi and coming to this passage they were intrigued about what it meant. So, one of the women offered to look into the process of refining silver, she contacted a silver smith and made an appointment to meet him and to watch him at work. As she watched the silver smith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up.

He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were the hottest so to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a way over the fire that when we suffered, he was still in control and was using that suffering to purify us and our faith. The woman then asked the silver smith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy - when I see my image in it."

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And that is the message of the refiner's fire - not just the idea that God is getting rid of impurities in us. But much more than that, God is transforming us into the image of Christ. He wants to see his own nature in those whom he has purified. He wants us to be more and more like Jesus. So that we are ready for the last part of his three-step process, where God will again come amongst this people but this time not as a messenger or as a refiner but as a judge.

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⁵ "So I will come to put you on trial. 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 fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty."

All those who have participated in satanic sin like being a sorcerer will get the justice they deserve. All those who have participated in sexual sin like adultery will receive the punishment they deserve. All those who have participated in social sin like lying and cheating and oppression and lack of care and compassion will have to one day face a just judge. And you know what? That means you and I are all in big, big trouble.

So, can I ask you are you ready for that day? Because just as certain as the coming of the prophets and the coming of the Son of God into this world is the coming of this day of judgement.

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Martin Luther once said "There are only two days on my calendar, today and that day." And we too need to live in the light of that day. For if we haven't been warned by God's messengers. If

we haven't been refined by God's son, then we will all face the full judgement of God on that final day.

Remember God hasn't changed. And neither has mankind. We still weary God and tire him out but he doesn't respond firstly with justice but with mercy and grace. He sends us messengers maybe even sending us another one today, saying seek God. Get ready for God to do his work. He has sent us his son who wants to purify us and make us more like himself. And he is warning us again today that he will send Jesus again to judge us. So, before he does that, he makes the way for us to avoid that judgement. He cleans up the mess in our lives and he opens the door to eternal life for us. And while we wait, he asks us to fear him.

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So often we fear failure, we fear getting COVID, we fear a breakdown in our health, or in our relationships or we fear rejection. But above all this we should fear God. A God who doesn't change. Friends we should all fear God. And that fear shouldn't make us run away from him, it should make us run to him.

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⁶ "I the LORD do not change. So, you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. ⁷ Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees & have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the LORD Almighty."

Don't weary him, instead return to Him. Don't tire him out but take your tired self to Him. For God doesn't change. He holds out his promise to Malachi as well as to us. Don't talk about God to others instead talk to God. Don't try and clean yourself up, let him scrub you clean. Don't curse as the heat around you rises, see it as God getting rid of the impurities in your lives. Remember God wants to make you more like his son Jesus. Do not weary God &

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2. Do not rob God (Malachi 3:8-12)

"But you ask, 'How are we to return?'"⁸ "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. ⁹ You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me."

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The early nineteenth century preacher Charles Simeon once began a sermon on this text in this way: *"Will a man rob God? Yet you have all robbed him. You! And You! And You!"* So how are you and I robbing God? When we don't give God what we owe him. So, what do we owe him? Well as our creator we owe him our trust, our love, our service, our obedience, our worship. Actually, we owe him ourselves. For not only did he make us but if we are Christians, he also saved us. He bought us back. So, we are twice owned. And so, everything we own is not really ours, it has been given to us by God in trust. Everything.

It used to be said that for blokes the last part to be converted was their wallet and their right foot when driving. And so here in Malachi's day God puts his fingers on the pulse of the OT follower of God and says you can tell if their heart is right by what they do or don't give to God.

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Now in the OT it was expected that those who were part of God's people would give their tithes & offerings. They firstly would a tithe or 10% of their income to God & on top of that they would offer their first & best fruits to God. All out of thankfulness for what God had given them.

It was a tax. A tax that meant that the worship of God was put in the very centre of the nation's life. For the tithe went towards the employment of the Levites who were there to teach God's word and to lead the religious life of the people of God. And the Levites would tithe as well to support the work of the priests to ensure that sacrifices for sin were for all the people. And the tithe was also a safety net that meant the widow, the refugee and the poor were cared for. So, the tithes were there so that God's values were reflected amongst God's people. Worship of God was at the centre, forgiveness of sin, teaching of God's word & care for all of God's people.

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It was a tax that showed God's people, God's priorities. And yet God's people didn't like paying it. There was nothing in it for them, they thought. How strange! God had given them 100% of what they owned and they couldn't see the need to give 10% for those who had nothing or for those who were set apart to serve God on their behalf! So, they loved the gifts more than the giver. They thought they owned everything rather than they were stewards of everything.

Now we wouldn't make that same mistake today, would we? We wouldn't think that we owned our homes and our cars and our bank accounts, would we? We wouldn't think that we earned our money by our own hard work and so we are the ones that determine what we spend that money on? We wouldn't say there is no such thing as a tithe anymore. That was an OT law & because I don't live under law anymore but under grace it doesn't apply to me, would we?

Well in a way that is true, we don't live under law. Tithes don't apply anymore. You are not expected to give 10% of your money to the Church to ensure that worship is put at the centre of our communities' lives. But if God has refined his people. If God has prepared his people. And if now God's people reflect God's nature, then God shouldn't have to enact a L-A-W, Law. For instead our hearts should want to be givers because we follow the God of grace.

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Which is why Paul when he talks to the Church about giving in the book of 2 Corinthians doesn't say anything about tithes. Instead, he says "Excel in the grace of giving." He says give cheerfully, generously, sacrificially. You see if you can't give a portion of what you have received, how will you ever give the whole lot? If you have been forced to give to others, how do you really reflect your father in heaven? Or his son who gave his whole life to you. Who even though he was rich became poor for our sake so that you through his poverty might become rich?

You get it? If you are not generous in your giving you are actually robbing both God & yourself! Your family will lose out because you are relying on your riches rather than on your faith in a God of riches. Your church community will miss out because there will not be the resources needed to put the worship of God into the very centre of everything we do as a people of God? And our nation will be poorer because the light of the world has had its light dimmed and the salt needed to keep this nation different to every other nation has lost much of its saltiness!

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So, Malachi continues, ¹⁰“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 flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. ¹¹I will prevent pests from devouring your crops & the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,” says the LORD Almighty. ¹²“Then all the nations will call you blessed”

Don't rob God Malachi is saying because you are really robbing yourself of the reward that God wants to give you. Materially yes but spiritually as well. As Jesus once said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And so, God issues his people a challenge, test me on this. Try it out. Give it a go. For this is the way, the only way, that I will pour open the floodgates of heaven.

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One day a man said to his minister: "Pastor, I just don't see how I can give 10 percent of my income to the church when I can't even keep on top of our bills." The pastor replied, "John, if I promise to make up the difference in your bills if you should come up short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?" After a moment's pause, John responded, "Sure, if you promise to make up any shortage, I guess I could try tithing for one month."

"Now, think about what you have just done" the pastor continued, "You say you'd be willing to put your trust in a mere man like myself, who possesses so little, but you couldn't trust your Heavenly Father who owns the whole universe!" Friends do we trust God? Really trust Him? Then offer yourself as a living sacrifice wholly pleasing to you. Offer your time, your skills, your wallet. Offer yourself. And see what God does in return. God doesn't change. God can be taken at his word. One thing I have learnt in my Christian walk is that I will never outgive God.

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Let me end with a story. A grandma wants to give her grandson a special treat so she asks him what would you like me to do for you? Take me to Maccas and give me some fries, which she is more than happy to do. But she doesn't give him a regular size fries but 2 extra large portions. What a treat. The grandson digs in and the grandmother enjoys the gift that she has given him.

But after a while she reaches over the table and takes a couple of the fries for herself. But the grandson refuses to let her. No these are mine he says back to her. But the grandmother explains, I bought those fries. I gave you more than what you asked for. And I could go to the counter and buy 100 more packets. But the boy refuses to give his grandma any of the fries.

Now isn't that a picture of us and God? God takes us to McDonald's on a regular basis in our lives. God blesses us. He's given us all French fries. Some regular, some large, some super large. And yet God wants to have fellowship with us. God wants us to be more like him. And so, at times he encourages us to give some of what we have away, so that he can give us even more. Sometimes he even takes some of our fries away from us so that we can trust in him more. So how do we respond to that? How do we feel when he asks us to be generous to others? How do we feel when some of what we have been given is now taken away?

Remember God does not need our French fries. Remember it is an honour and privilege to share our fries with God. Remember that God wants us to be more like him in the way that we deal with what we have. Remember that God doesn't change. But he is calling us to change. So don't question God. Don't weary God. Don't rob God. Instead return back to God and let him teach you, let him refine you and let him change you. So that one day he will look at what he is doing in our lives and he will see in us, his Son Jesus Christ. Won't that be all worth it?