



HOPE LOOKS UP

Bible Study
with Pastor Tom Haney

HOW DOES GOD GET OUR ATTENTION?

The Book of Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament lays it out very clearly—God has very specific ways that He uses to get our attention. The great theme of this small book of Malachi is: “The Great King—King Jesus—will come not only to judge people but more importantly to bless and reward the faithful.” Malachi assures His readers that God will never forsake His people and that one day, “All the nations will call you blessed, for you shall be a delightful land.”

By Dr. Thomas Haney

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“HOW DOES GOD GET OUR ATTENTION?” A Study of Malachi

Malachi 1:1-9 GOD REMINDS US OF HIS BLESSINGS

[Malachi 1:1-9 NIV] 1 A prophecy: The word of the LORD to Israel through Malachi. 2 "I have loved you," says the LORD. "But you ask, 'How have you loved us?' "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" declares the LORD. "Yet I have loved Jacob, 3 but Esau I have hated, and I have turned his hill country into a wasteland and left his inheritance to the desert jackals." 4 Edom may say, "Though we have been crushed, we will rebuild the ruins." But this is what the LORD Almighty says: "They may build, but I will demolish. They will be called the Wicked Land, a people always under the wrath of the LORD. 5 You will see it with your own eyes and say, 'Great is the LORD—even beyond the borders of Israel!' 6 "A son honors his father, and a slave his master. If I am a father, where is the honor due me? If I am a master, where is the respect due me?" says the LORD Almighty. "It is you priests who show contempt for my name. "But you ask, 'How have we shown contempt for your name?' 7 "By offering defiled food on my altar. "But you ask, 'How have we defiled you?' "By saying that the LORD's table is contemptible. 8 When you offer blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice lame or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?" says the LORD Almighty. 9 "Now plead with God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?"--says the LORD Almighty.

Welcome to Hope Looks Up Bible Study with Dr. Tom Haney. We are studying the Book of Malachi, a minor prophet and the last book of the Old Testament. Malachi was written to warn the people of Judah that the Great King—we now know that is King Jesus will return to judge the unrighteous but more importantly, to bless and reward those who have remained faithful and followed His directions. God stays when all else leave. His faithful are never alone, because He is always there to guide them. However, we see that when we reject His covenants, we either create our own or make a covenant with someone else other than God Jehovah. That is disastrous for us and hurtful for God. We cannot change the rules He has given and expect Him to consider us still faithful to Him.

I have great concern for the person who says they never hear from God. I know that can be based on expectations—I have only heard God speak to me verbally two times in all of my years as a Pastor—but I have felt the tug of God on my heart thousands of time; I have been convicted by reading Scripture, being in prayer or in service thousands of times; and I have felt the leading of God to do something that He wants me to do hundreds of thousands of times. So, I worry when someone says, “I never hear from God—I don’t know what He wants me to do?”

The Book of Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament lays it out very clearly—God has very specific ways that He uses to get our attention. I hope and pray as this study unfolds- you will hear God more than you have ever heard Him before; and that you will follow His direction to receive the blessings He has for those who hear Him and then put that information from God into action.

The great theme of this small book of Malachi is:

“The Great King—King Jesus—will come not only to judge people but more importantly to bless and reward the faithful.”

Malachi assures His readers that God will never forsake His people and that one day:

“All the Nations Will Call You Blessed, For You Shall Be A Delightful Land.”

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This is a message that I feel we need today in the United States—Jesus will not come and bless this nation not because of wealth, technology, inventions, intelligence, or power—He will bless this nation and especially the true Christians within it because they have served Him.

We do not ever have to worry about the faithfulness of God—God never lies and He never changes—He will always keep His Word and reward the faithful.

God has a lot of reasons to get our attention.

1. We may be doing something dangerous and foolish. (Like the country boy who yelled, ‘Hey, Bubba watch this one!’)
2. We may be so discouraged and depressed that God is trying to lift our spirits and restore our hope.
3. We may be so exuberant over something good in our life that God needs us to moderate and put everything into perspective.
4. Or like American Christians today and Judean Believers in Malachi’s day—God may issue a warning for the nation while still reassuring His children—yes, He will judge those who have strayed off-track, but His faithful followers will be blessed and restored to a position of JOY!!

Let’s set the tone for Malachi’s book. Why is this a book of the Minor Prophets? It all has to do with the size of the book. Minor Prophets were shorter books and Major Prophets were longer books. The excuses for skipping these Minor Prophet books are plentiful.

1. Starters—the Minor Prophets writings are short, merely a brief few chapters or just a chapter, so the designation ‘minor’. The Old Testament has 39 books, and the combined 12 books of the Minor Prophets comprise less than 7% of the Old Testament. Because of their short length, these books are often deemed of little value, and so are easily overlooked.
2. Then popularity. They are ‘fringe’ books by almost any definition of the word, trapped at the back of the Old Testament and written by a dozen guy who by today’s standards would be considered strange and unpopular.
3. Yes, we all learned about the runaway Jonah in Sunday School who was swallowed by the ‘big fish’; but we can hardly pronounce most of the other 11: Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They are so ‘fringe’ and hard to connect to that you almost never hear any of their names from the pulpits of our Churches.
4. Additionally, while other well-known Bible heroes have compelling stories, a number of the Minor Prophets seem to have missed the memo about having a compelling personal story. They seem like just men who served a role and were not interesting individuals in their own right.

It would be good for us to remember the role of the Prophet as God called them into action. God used them; He called them ‘nabi’ in Hebrew, to make clear His intentions and plans through the words of these hand-picked Prophets. He has them tell the people His motivations, His blessings, His curses, His concept of Justice, His views of forgiveness, and His lament at having to finally judge those who refuse to change. Through these hand-picked men we have a window sized view into the heart of our God.

They were called to share the most important messages of God to Israel, Judah, and surrounding countries, as well as the coming of the Messiah and the events of the end of times—from the Tribulation to the New Heaven and the New Earth.

When we examine these 12 men in detail, we will see that they were not minor, strange, little, unimportant, unusable, or nonrelational, but the stories of 12 men who were put into very perilous situations and often

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given an unpopular message to speak. They were everyday people like us: farmers, construction workers, clergy or Temple workers and even a couple of aristocrats. They ranged in age when they wrote their books from teens to senior citizens. Malachi, was a worker in the Temple core---we would say today a librarian or document worker-copying and filing the needed documents for the priests and their workers. He had a very unpopular message because Judah had fallen into times of unfaithfulness that were worse than when God allowed them to be conquered by the Babylonians. But he was resolute in what he spoke. God had given him a prophetic message and He delivered it.

His key message was faith—return to your faith like the planets revolve around the sun, so his message kept coming back again to the idea that they needed to restore their faith. Faith that was so strong it became an unshakable belief in something, especially with little or no proof of evidence. Sounds a lot like the Bible definition of faith in **Hebrews 11:1**; *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”*

Confidence—Reliance—Belief—Trust—Covenant Keepers. We could all use an extra dose of that in our relationships with God. So did Malachi! Malachi had to have a healthy dose of faith in God, for despite his position of honor in being chosen to relay the Word of God—he had a message that was unpopular and irritating to his listeners. Because of how he was treated, like many prophets, he grew in his faith and that makes him very relevant to us today. If you feel you are under pressure in any way to live a more faithful life in God, then I would tell you that God is trying to get your attention with this study of Malachi.

Let me give you the setting for the times. When Israel and Judah split into two countries after the death of Solomon, it did not take long for Israel, the 10 northern tribes to fall to Assyria and they were never a part of Israel again until the 20th Century when the 10 lost tribes came to Israel as well as the Jews from Judah. After Israel fell, Judah went through a series of good and bad kings and finally the wickedness of the country was so bad that God allowed them to be conquered by the Babylonians. The Babylonians ravaged their county, destroyed and looted their temple and took the finest people of the land as war booty to be a part of the Babylonian Empire.

Then Cyrus King of the Medes and Persians allowed a group of exiles to return to Judah to build the Temple led by Zerubbabel and finished the Temple in 516 BC. The group that returned totaled 49,187. The worship did not go well and the group did not have adequate priests to lead the nation, so the next Cyrus, King of Persia in his first year encouraged all the exiles who wanted to go to Judah and help institute the proper worship of the Temple, to go. There were 1,758 of them and they were led by the priest Ezra who took over and organized the Temple Worship in 458 BC.

Then 20 years later, Nehemiah heard that the walls and gates of Jerusalem were in disrepair while he was the cupbearer for King Artaxerxes of the Medes and Persians. He asked to go and put the walls and gates back up. The King let him go, the number of exiles that went with Nehemiah was not counted, but he became the governor and in 444 BC rebuilt the walls and restored the gates of Jerusalem. These were the best days for Judah since they had been conquered but Nehemiah was called back to Persia to serve King Artaxerxes and the nation returned to their sinful ways and practices and the life and spiritually went out of their worship. Worship became forms and rituals and worst of all, the minimum they thought they could get by with.

It was at this point that Malachi was called to lead the nation back to God. I see real parallels to this in our nation. We have endorsed open morality in many ways in the United States and none of that can be pleasing to God. The same-sex marriage laws, the laws encouraging even teens to transgender; the full-term abortion practices in some states, the euthanasia of our elderly in two states; and the legalization of pornography; gambling; marijuana, and no-fault divorce have all deviated from the teachings of the Bible. Even the social

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changes are frightening: non-present dads in many homes; the willingness to live together without marriage; and the businesses that cater to sexual deviation and anonymous hook-ups all show the moral abyss that has become the norm in our country. Malachi is clearly speaking to some of us in His book and asking those who know better to return to the path that the Lord has given.

How does God get our attention—well in the Book of Malachi—and often in our life—it starts with a reminder of how He has blessed each one of us.

The book starts with the assertion from Malachi who got it direct from God that God has loved them. Instead of responding to God with an affirmation—yes, you have Lord, or we thank you for that—the people respond with a question, “How have you loved us?” This is not a question that is asking for an answer, this is a question of disbelief. Literally, the people are saying, our life is crummy—we have bad crops, we have enemies that threaten us all the time, we have a lack of prosperity, and we are tired of this no-name little hole in the middle of “Nothingsville”—that you call your gift to us!!

Is that ever your response to God when He tries to point out blessings that He has given you? You say, “That is so yesterday—what have you done for me now?” God--Have you solved the COVID problem yet? God--Have you stopped our racial problems and solved the things that make me real unhappy? I am afraid that even when God is trying to get our attention—we often turn it around and criticize God for not getting more blessings into our life right now. We don't want to hear about past blessings—we want more, and more, and more blessings right now and we really do want them “RIGHT NOW!”

So, God goes back to their heritage to show them how He chose Jacob—or Israel as their father and passed on Esau as the one He chose to lead the nation of His Son's heritage. It would be like God going back to our accepting Christ as our Savior and being baptized into Him and starting our life as a Christian. Where God could very correctly say, “I chose you Tom, or Bill, or Susan—I chose you to be saved and receive my Holy Spirit into your heart.”

Let's take a moment and look at what God is telling the readers of Malachi. He is saying that I bypassed the oldest brother Esau and chose Jacob; I bypassed the man's man, the hunter, the outdoorsman, the stronger of the two and chose a man that I felt could develop a people that would be right for me. So, just as God knew, He has hated the descendants of Esau because of their choice of idols over the worship of God; and He has loved the descendants of Jacob because they are the chosen people from which God would raise a Redeemer, Jesus Christ His Son. The Edomites, Esau's family had been destroyed by Babylon, Egypt, Ammon, Moab, and the Nabateans and yet they had not returned to worship God Jehovah. The Jews had returned to their land, had rebuilt the Temple, had restored some level of worship, had fortified the city of Jerusalem and God had protected them through all of that time.

It would be good for us to see that what God told Malachi to speak to the people has been lived out by God all the way through the Bible. Let's look at the history of the Arabs in the Bible. The Arabs originated with Ishmael, the son of Abraham and Hagar, the hand maiden of Sarah, because Abraham and especially Sarah became very impatient with the lack of a son for Abraham. God made it clear that Ishmael would not be the child of promise that would bless the entire world, **Genesis 17:20**, He did give Ishmael and his twelve sons the land east of Canaan, **Genesis 16:12**. God said they would be fruitful and they have been: today there are 21 Arab nations with a combined population of 175 million people. They occupy a total area of 5.3 million square miles of oil rich land. By contrast, there is only one Jewish state with a population of 5 million people who are squeezed into only 8,000 square miles of space, the population of the Arabs are 43 times more and land ratio is 662 times more. The Arabs have been blessed.

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The majority of the Arabs were descendants of Ishmael, but also Abraham had six sons with this second wife Keturah, whom he married after Sarah died; as well as the descendants of Esau, the grandson of Abraham. The Lord prophesied that they would be volatile and impulsive when He told Hagar the mother of Ishmael, that he would be *“a wild donkey of a man and his hand will be against everybody.”* **Genesis 16:12.**

The Bible has several very important prophecies about the Arabs. First, Ezekiel says that they will claim the land of the Jews in the end times: **Ezekiel 35:5, 10** and **36:2, 5**. **Ezekiel 36:2** says, *“This is what the Sovereign Lord says: The enemy (Edom) said of you, “Aha!” The ancient heights have become our possession.”* God goes ahead and says, because they tried to take all of Israel as an Arab possession, to get your pastureland, (prosperous cities and countryside), I will make sure that they also suffer scorn. This is right before Ezekiel prophecies about the *“Valley of Dry Bones”* where Israel will be restored as a nation in **Ezekiel 37**.

Joel 3:19 says that *“Egypt will become a waste and Edom (representing all Arab nations) will become a desolate wilderness because of the violence done to the sons of Judah, in whose land they have shed innocent blood.”* Finally, the book of Obadiah, a pronouncement against Edom—the Arab nation—says that *“Just as you drank on my holy hill, so all nations will drink continually; they will drink and drink and be as if they had never been. But on Mount Zion will be deliverance, it will be holy, and Jacob will possess his inheritance. Jacob will be a fire and Joseph a flame; Esau will be stubble, and they will set him on fire and destroy him. There will be no survivors from Esau.”* **Obadiah 1:16-18**. That is the fate of Arab nations as they continue the mission to destroy Israel and take the land for themselves.

But there are several positive promises for the Arabs who become Christians: A remnant will be saved, **Jeremiah 12:14-17**; many in Egypt and Assyria will convert and Egypt, Assyrian and Israelis will live in peace; and in the Millennium all the Arabs who lived in Israel will be allotted an inheritance with the twelve tribes of Israel.

Like the Jewish readers of the book of Malachi, it is so easy to focus on the negatives in our life and forget the great things that God has done for us; but one of the first ways He will get our attention is to remind us of all that He has done for us.

Let me share a personal testimony of how the Lord put basketball in my life—then helped me choose the Bible College I would attend, and in turn helped put Sharon in my life, and therefore shaped my entire adult life. It is good for us to also stop and recount our blessings. It will put us in touch with God again and allow Him to speak to our hearts and minds.

The second item that Malachi brought up to the readers in **Malachi 1:6** was the fact that they no longer considered it important to do things the way that God had asked them to do it.

Leviticus 22 and **Deuteronomy 15** were very clear about what animals were proper to offer on the altar of sacrifice—table of God here—and what ones were not. They held God in contempt and insulted God because they were offering animals that were blind, lame and diseased. Malachi tells them to try and pass those kinds of animals off as a proper payment for taxes to the governing Persians. They had more fear and respect for the secular governor of an occupying foreign power than they had for their own God Jehovah.

But this is where I feel we as Christians must stand for what is right in our nation. We also have many important people who at best give lip service to God and a very small percentage gives lip service to Jesus Christ. I was appalled to see a guest on an Emmy winning talk show mock winning a country music award. She said I have been practicing and I think I have it down---went into a strained Southern draw and began, “I want to thank my Personal Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for this award”—Laughter from the audience and talk show

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leaders---and then went ahead with her mocking tribute. And what are we offering God at this time in this nation?

We plead for science to cure COVID—I hope they can; but in every other pandemic, including the Spanish Flu, we pleaded with God to cure the plague, because we did not have antibiotics until 1927. Do we see our nation encouraging closeness to God at this time—I have not and the weekly attendance at Worship Services in the United States has continued to decline, even through COVID.

The final answer from the offenders was a sarcastic plea for God to give them grace, although they were not going to change the very things that offended God.

If we are arrogant enough as a nation to ask God to heal something without us changing anything, then we are in for a lot of everything (bad). God does not extend grace to those who insult Him with ungodly behavior. He cannot bless sin and He will not tolerate wrong.

Personally, I want to encourage each of us to give and do what God has asked us to give and do. We must make sure our worship is more than form and ritual, that we are giving our entire self to praise of God, and we are seeking Him at every point in our life.

A God who gives us everything and reminds us to remember that He loves us--deserves more than scraps, leftovers, and Good Will donations—He deserves our hearts, our lives, and our worship.

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Malachi 1:10-12 GOD REMINDS US THAT SILENCE IS BETTER THAN HYPOCRISY

[Malachi 1:10-12 NIV] 10 "Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the LORD Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. 11 My name will be great among the nations, from where the sun rises to where it sets. In every place incense and pure offerings will be brought to me, because my name will be great among the nations," says the LORD Almighty. 12 "But you profane it by saying, 'The Lord's table is defiled,' and, 'Its food is contemptible.'

People often say, I do not know what God wants me to do and I do not hear from God! The Book of Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament lays it out very clearly—God has very specific ways that He uses to get our attention. I pray that as you listen tonight, you will hear the voice of God very clearly as He speaks to you about your service for Him!

I learned very quickly in my study of the Scriptures that too many words were usually not good when God tries to get your attention.

Parable of The Talents

The story Jesus told about the three men given money to manage sums it up very well. We commonly call this the parable of the talents—but talents in the New Testament were very valuable coins and not a list of your abilities. It is found in **Matthew 25** and starts with a man going on a journey who gave very generous amounts to his servants to manage. NIV says he gave one 5 bags of gold, another 2 bags of gold, and a third 1 bag of gold. Now the Master was a very wise man so he gave an amount of money to manage that fit each man's abilities. No one was asked to manage more than they were capable of handling.

When the Master left, the first two men on Monday morning at 8:30 AM—as soon as the bank opened, were at the door of The First Bank of Jerusalem asking to speak to the manager. When the manager came, the first man had his appointment and made a deal with the banker that would allow him to earn 5 additional bags of gold as quickly as possible. Then the second man had his appointment and he made a deal with the banker that would allow him to earn 2 additional bags of gold as quickly as possible. But the third man, had a different plan—he got up even earlier than the others and went to a spot that he knew while it was still dark and buried the bag of gold when no one could see what he was doing. He got up earlier, he worked harder—digging the hole and covering it up while not being observed, and he felt very satisfied in what he had done. But he did not do what the owner of the gold had wanted—he did not invest in anything that could make more money.

I'm sure you remember the next part of the story—after a long time the master of the gold bags returned and called the three men in to settle their accounts. The first one in a brief 14 words told the master—I did what you asked me to do and the Master rewarded him with the promise that he would have even more to manage.

The second servant in a brief 15 words told the master---I did what you asked me to do and the Master rewarded him with the promise to have even more to manage.

The third servant in a lengthy 34 words told the master—I did not do what you asked because I was afraid of you—but here is the bag that I was given. The Master said—if you really knew that I wanted to reap a harvest—then why would you go bury this bag of gold and do the exact opposite of what I

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wanted. Here give me the bag of gold—I intend to give it to the servant who has 10 bags of gold and this unfaithful servant will be removed from my sight.

One lesson I think we all can learn from this parable is—God wants action on our part, obedient action and not some excuse that we have invented to tell why we did not do what God asked. Words, even many words, will never correct wrong deeds.

Jesus told us to pray like this—and taught us the Model Prayer—and said do not keep on babbling like the pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. *“But do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him.”* **Matthew 6:8-13**

Malachi teaches us that incorrect actions, **Malachi 1:10**—especially those that oppose what God has asked us to do are offensive to God. He wants us to be genuine, true, and follow His word when we worship and serve Him.

God often tries to get our attention to tell us to stop what we are doing—it is the exact opposite of what he wants us to do. How do you know when God is trying to get your attention to stop something that you are doing hypocritically and not genuinely?

First, you remember that God created each of us for fellowship, and if what you are doing does not put you in greater fellowship with God—then it probably has a level of falseness to it. It is not right and we need to quit it and wait for directions from God.

You see the priests in the day of Malachi were going to the Temple every day that they were supposed to go. They were offering sacrifices every day they went to the Temple. They came home tired and exhausted from slaying animals, cutting them up into the proper portions and offering the sacrificial parts of the animals on the altar every day—but that really made no difference. They were offering the wrong animals and therefore no matter how much they did or how tired they were—it was offensive to God and He wanted it to stop.

He wanted it to stop so badly that He asked someone—anyone—just lock the Temple and keep these offensive sacrifices from being offered to me. Do you think God ever says that to us? I think God has said to me:

“You’ve fallen asleep three times already in your prayer—you are too tired to lay there in bed and pray—either get up and sit or kneel so you can stay awake or just go to sleep. Hardly anything you have said the last three minutes even makes sense.”

To others God says:

“You are pleased with yourself because you are going to church today but you are so mad at some of the people in your car and some of the people in your church that you will not have another thought about me the rest of the morning. You will just sit there and steam over how mad you are at all these ‘dumbbells’ that dominate your life. Why not just set in a room or a prayer chapel and read scripture and pray that you have a big change in your attitude.”

“You do not try to get anything out of the Pastor’s sermon, but just fill a chair and mentally criticize his efforts—why not go somewhere you can be blessed and be a blessing.”

“You’re forcing yourself to speed read four more chapters of the Bible before you leave for work—so you won’t get behind on your “Through the Bible in a Year”— why not put your Bible in the car and when you have breaks or lunch---then read those Scriptures and find out what I really have to say to you today.”

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“Yes, I know it is a new song and you hate to sing new songs at Church, but why not stop and just listen to the words and see why I had the Worship Leader pick out that song for this service.”

I think one of the reasons Christians have so much trouble with Fellowship today is that it is so easy to buy into the “Me Syndrome”. It needs to be something that I want to do; it needs to be enjoyable for me; and it needs to be about me—or I won’t call it fellowship. God created us for fellowship but often we have a desire to define what that fellowship should be. Sounds to me a lot like the servant that went out and buried the bag of gold instead of investing it.

God desires and longs for our fellowship and He wants to have our sincere heart. You know we often speak of how excellently Solomon responded when God said that he could have anything that he desired and he asked for wisdom. But we often forget that when God asked his father, David, the same question, David said he wanted more intimacy with God and to have a heart like God’s. Need I remind you which man ended his life in good graces with God?

We hear a lot in our world about “Fake it until you make it!” It is even used in counseling and some addiction therapies; but that statement is profane to God. It really makes Him cringe to hear such craziness when it comes to worship and fellowship with God. God says if it is fake—just don’t do it. Close and lock the doors to the Temple, close down the Church; lock all the prayer closets around—I do not want or like fake—I want genuine worship and genuine fellowship all the time.

God is so intent on our being genuine, that the next verse, **Malachi 1:11**, says—*“there will come a time when all the nations on this earth will worship me with a genuineness that blesses me.”* Every place that incense—also stands for prayer—and sacrifices are offered they will only be genuine and pure and all nations will praise me. Now that time has not happened yet but it will. It will not be a time that is reserved for heaven, but it will be that 1,000-year period when Jesus rules the earth in the Millennial Kingdom. The entire earth will worship Christ and the sacrifices at the new Temple will be only pure and right.

It takes three things to be a part of this time of genuine worship.

1. We need to order our priorities: The starting point is to review your present priorities and make certain that God is first in your life. We have to be honest with ourselves. Quit playing games with our faith and don’t kid ourselves. It is so easy to have our priorities mixed up. Easy to put job or career first, family second and God at best third—unless you have a sports addiction or a shopping addiction—and then God drops even lower. Maybe like David we need to ask for intimacy with God as our top priority and we would also be called *“a person after God’s own heart.”* **Acts 13:22**
2. We must stand on the Word. The Bible says that the end times will be an age of deception, **Matthew 22:24, I Timothy 4:1; II Timothy 4:3-4**. It will be a time when other religious systems will seem more intelligent and very alluring; because since we have adopted an amoral lifestyle in the United States (an absence of Biblical morality)—many things in the Bible are labeled as hate talk or prejudiced thought today in the United States. It is easy for those who are substitute sugar Christians—(Christians light)—to be very unsure because the average Christian does not even know what they believe. Anyone can be deceived. If we want to guard ourselves against deception, we have to know the Word and be in it every day. We need to test everything by the Word of God, **John 4:1**—not just accept what we have heard or ask—*“What does our Church believe about that?”*
3. But most important—we have to believe in the power of God. I really feel that many professing Christians are deists. They believe in an impersonal god who never intervenes in human affairs. They believe we are supposed to cope with our god given reason, our talents, and the wisdom of the

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Scriptures. Basically, they think that at the end of the First Century, God retired from intervening personally, the supernatural ceased, and the age of miracles came to an end.

But the Bible teaches that God never changes, **Malachi 3:6** and that “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and yes, forever.*” **Hebrews 13:8** There is no way we can cope with the evil that comes at the end of the age by our own strength. Anyone who tries to do so will be defeated. Our only hope is to turn to a God who is alive and well, who is still on the throne, who hears our prayer and answers our prayer, and who still performs miracles.

We must realize that the Bible teaches that we can limit God by our unbelief. This is an unbelievable paradox—God is all-powerful, **Luke 1:37**, we are powerless in comparison, but our unbelief limits what God can do, **Mark 6:1-6**. God does not force His miracles on anyone, He does not force himself into a situation that we say we can handle. If we want to try to cope on our own in these days, God will let us. He responds when we reach out to Him in faith and genuine worship, **James 1:6**.

It may seem rather strange that we must prepare for something that we have always heard will be automatic for every Christian—the New Kingdom and the New Heaven and New Earth; but if we do not prepare—we may fall prey to all the deception that will be a part of these end times.

Finally, the Scripture for tonight tells us that genuine worship and fellowship cannot be just pretend. Genuine fellowship is not going through the motions. **Malachi 1:12**

The priests of the time of Malachi were tired of the exacting requirements. When they enforced them, it made them unpopular with the people and it made their job more difficult in their mind. So, they relaxed the rules and took all animals that were brought to be sacrificed—even if they were blind, lame, or diseased. So, they profaned the table of the Lord and ruined the food that was still given to the Levites, the Priests, and the people who brought the sacrifice and God said that food is contemptible.

Are we looking the other way in America today without realizing that God could say that about America as well? We have churches that are served by openly homosexual pastors and many Churches that accept practicing homosexuals as fine just as they are—no need to change, and many Churches that perform homosexual weddings and usually the Church has some doctrinal statement that says not only is that fine but the Church adopts an open and accepting attitude toward homosexuals and welcomes all of them into the fellowship as bona-fide members. They have often taken the Scriptures that speak against homosexuality and interpreted them in a way that either makes homosexuality acceptable or say those verses just do not apply to today.

I wonder if what happens at the Table of the Lord in those Churches is still fine with the Lord. Does He not think that they have changed His laws and rules just as the priests did in the days of Malachi and therefore the Table is profaned and the food that is offered is contemptible. When we change the Word of God to say what we want it to say—do we still have the Word of God—or has it become the word of whoever is changing the texts? It is a small step from changing Scripture to ignoring Scripture. Maybe that is why we only hear the most basic and accepted Scriptures today, like the presidential commercial that quotes in the words of Pope John Paul—not in the words of Jesus, “Be not afraid.”

We need to stop and ask ourselves what does it mean if at least one-half of the American denominations have changed their view on how to interpret the Word of God. I realize that it is not 50 % of the Christians in this nation, because the liberal Bible-changing churches are not growing but are shriveling. But that surely makes them even more intent on accepting something different as the direction they need to go. If these are some of

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the latter days, then we need to stop and think about what we need to do to make sure that we stay firm and grounded in our fellowship with God.

Several years ago, I studied the teaching and doctrines of the Church of Satan. We were seeing a rising popularity of Satan among the struggling people of our community after many in the arts—rock-n-roll musicians and cinema stars came out and openly spoke of the agreements they had made with the Devil and credited that relationship with the reason for their success. Also, DCF had reached into a part of Sunnyslope evangelistically that had strong ties with a rather large witch coven based in Sunnyslope and one thing I immediately learned.

Satan does not originate anything new and the followers of Satan, even in the Church of Satan do not write new books and new material but take the key elements of the Christian faith and pervert them.

The Satanic Bible is originally the real Bible but Satanists go through and make Satan the hero of good and God the villain. They rewrite Scripture to make it appear that Satan has really been the one who protects, helps, and blesses his followers and that God really chastises and harms His followers. It is so engrained in the Church of Satan that they do not write any new music. They merely take the most popular hymns and songs of the Christian faith and they rewrite the words. Once again, they make Satan the author of good and God the author of bad things in our lives. The same is true for Satanic prayers, studies, and other religious material.

It was very apparent to me that when the Bible calls Satan the master deceiver—they were so right. We need to remember as it says in Pastor Tom 3:1, “Leopards do not change their spots.” The Devil still uses deception as his main way to draw converts and move people away from Christ.

God does not want something that is deceptive or fake. He wants the genuine worship and fellowship that we all can offer Him. Christians often worry a lot about the Anti-Christ in the last days, but if you remain faithful you will have no worries about the Anti-Christ—God will take care of you and protect you against all of His schemes and Rapture you away before he is able to implement all the things he really wants to do.

I want to quote you a strong passage of I John that talks about the real concern that the Bible warns about those who live in the last days—it is the need for them to remain faithful in the Lord.

I John 2: 20-27 says: “*But you have an anointing from the Holy One, and all of you know the truth. I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth. Who is the liar? It is whoever denies that Jesus is the Christ. Such a person is the antichrist—denying the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father; whoever acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*”

As for you, see that what you have heard from the beginning remains in you. If it does, you also will remain in the Son and in the Father. And this is what he promised us—eternal life.

“I am writing these things to you about those who are trying to lead you astray. . .”

So, John pokes a needle in the hot-air balloon that only the Anti-Christ is to be feared and says that anyone who denies that ‘Jesus is the Christ’ is an anti-christ and a deceiver. It will be like the priests in the time of Malachi—were they the only ones who wanted to offer wrong sacrifices—hardly, the people who brought the animals wanted to offer wrong sacrifices and the priests obliged them. We live in a day and age when the manipulation of the Bible has only started. It will continue by those who intend to deceive until they have a bible that says what they want it to say. And as each immoral act, condemned by the Bible, is changed they will desire to change the scripture to match the new accepted norm—especially if it has become law.

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This is why God would rather we just be silent and follow Him than participate in hypocritical acts of worship and fellowship. The choices will become more blatant and to many the fact that the new bible matches the new laws—will make sense and they will be deceived.

The only question left to answer tonight is how can I prepare myself and my family for a time of increasing deception? How can I be able to sort through all that is said and define what is truth and what are lies. How can I always do what is genuine and never what is fake?

1. Have a Power-Packed-Prayer Life:

One of the greatest blessings God has given believers is supernatural communication. God cares for us personally, **1 Peter 5:7** says, “Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.” He desires to communicate with us, **James 4:8** says, “Come near to God and he will come near to you.” He loves us and wants our fellowship, **John 4:23** says, “Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”

The tragedy is that many professing Christians wait to turn to prayer as a last resort—only when all else has failed and the situation has become desperate. Some of this reluctance to seek God in prayer is due to pride, so the Word of God continually tells us to humble ourselves. Others fail to depend on prayer because of their unbelief, they think God doesn’t care or they believe that He no longer does miracles in our lives.

But the Bible says, “we do not have because we do not ask.” **James 4:2**. How many blessings of God have you left on the table because you tried to handle all your problems yourself? The Bible also says that “the prayers of a righteous man can accomplish much”, **James 5:16**. This does not mean you have to be righteousness for your prayers to have power, but what it does mean is—that if you are truly a born-again person, you are a righteous person because you are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, **Isaiah 61:10** and therefore your prayers are powerful.

2. Rely on the Holy Spirit

Many professing Christians seem to be afraid of the Holy Spirit. This is usually due to a lack of knowledge about how the Holy Spirit intends to help a Christian personally. Many seem to view the Holy Spirit as an impersonal power source that the Father uses—like “the Force” in Star Wars.

We need to see that the Holy Spirit is a being—a person! He is the supernatural presence of God in the world today. For the unbeliever, He is the Evangelist who works on human hearts to draw them in repentance to Jesus. No one is ever saved apart from the testimony of the Spirit—**John 6:44, 65**

For the believer, the Holy Spirit is the indwelling presence of God that provides us with guidance and power. He is our Enabler. He is also God’s Potter as He shapes daily the believers into a more complete image of Jesus. The Word calls us to be filled with the Spirit, **Ephesians 5:18**. Why, because we are to effectively serve God and that only happens as the Spirit directs our lives.

This is an election year, but when it comes to the Holy Spirit a lot of Christians sit that election out. They are content to let the Holy Spirit be a resident but He has been put into our lives to be the president. Is the Holy Spirit on the throne of your life or is He ignored as an unwanted guest? We will not be able to withstand the pressures of the end times without the power of God’s Spirit.

3. Practice Tough Faith

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It is easy to have a full-tank of faith when all are healthy and you are prosperous. The test of faith comes when all around us is not good and our life has turned sour. God did not promise a rose-strewn life as a believer. We live in a fallen world with many fallen people making decisions that affect the quality of our life. It rains on the just and the unjust and wicked people prosper. Justice can be squelched.

It is easy for the believer to grow discouraged. We have to practice tough faith—the kind of faith that is not dependent on circumstances. It is the kind of faith that hangs in there when the going is hard because of a confident belief that *“all things work together for good for those who love the Lord”* **Romans 8:8**.

God does not promise that any of us will be immune to suffering. What He does promise us that He will be there to walk through the trials with us. He promises to be beside us when we *“pass through the water”* and *“walk through the fire”*—**Isaiah 43**. And He will be there when we *“walk through the valley of the shadow of death”*, **Psalm 23:4**.

When life turns sour—we must turn to God. That is when we turn to the promises of God’s Word like Philippians 4, that we just studied and claim them as we confront the challenges of life.

I do believe that the ultimate key to giving only genuine worship and fellowship to God—depends on our willingness to keep an eternal perspective about this life. C.S. Lewis once wrote, *“We are to live like commandos behind the enemy lines, preparing the way for the coming Commander-in-Chief.”* We are to live yearning for the day when Jesus will burst from the heavens to bring peace, righteousness and justice to the earth.

God created us for meaningful fellowship and worship of Him—He would rather we are silent and wait on Him to lead and guide us than that we give him ‘fake it until you make it’ worship or fellowship on our terms. The Bible has the harshest words possible for those who are hypocrites.

The next lesson is about God getting our attention when it comes to Godly salvation—the idea that becoming a Christian is all about what a person can get out of it—is offensive to God. God gets our attention to remind us—We must acknowledge His greatness before we can have a relationship with Him. Acknowledge His greatness and the blessings will flow. **Malachi 1:13-14**

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Malachi 1:13-14 GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION IN SALVATION

[Malachi 1:13-14 NIV] 13 And you say, 'What a burden!' and you sniff at it contemptuously," says the LORD Almighty. "When you bring injured, lame or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD. 14 "Cursed is the cheat who has an acceptable male in his flock and vows to give it, but then sacrifices a blemished animal to the Lord. For I am a great king," says the LORD Almighty, "and my name is to be feared among the nations.

It is possible for Christians to feel they never hear from God. It adds so much stress to their life because they often feel, “I do not know what God wants me to do?” This book of Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament, lays it out very clearly—God has very specific ways that He uses to get our attention. I hope and pray as the study tonight unfolds you will hear God clearly and you will be able to follow His direction and receive the blessings, He has for those who hear Him.

The theme of this small book of Malachi is: “The Great King—King Jesus—will come not only to judge people but more importantly, to bless and reward those who have remained faithful.”

No one is more determined to stay and work with His children and His followers than God. As the modern contemporary worship song says, “*He is the God who stays.*” Nothing will force God to leave us—however, we can walk away from God and lose His blessings. Nothing will do that more quickly than forgetting what our salvation was all about and acting like we were the ones who pulled the trigger and got ourselves saved.

I have had some people tell me some very personalized things about their salvation but the ones that made me the most uncomfortable were the people who told me how hard it was for them to make their decision—held onto the pew until their knuckles became white, sweat profusely, began to shake, began to feel faint—now there is nothing wrong with a description of some of the physical effects that happened while you were being convicted to accept Christ—if what follows is “But then Christ or the Holy Spirit took hold of me and I stepped out into the aisle and went forward to receive the Lord.” But when the person says, “But then I finally overcame this pressure and suffering and staggered down the aisle on my own to receive Jesus. It was so hard but I did it.” They worry me, that a person thinks they worked that hard and they got their salvation. I have found that many of those people continue all their spiritual life thinking salvation is all about them.

God gets our attention in salvation not for us to describe accepting Christ as this great ordeal that we underwent, but to tell us that He has chosen us to be a part of His great family and all we need to do is recognize His greatness and power and let that change our life.

Your salvation may have been hard in your mind—but I want to share tonight two salvation stories in the Bible that were definitely hard because they totally endangered the two men who accepted Jesus as their Savior, but neither man focused on what he had to do, but rejoiced a what Jesus did for them! God got their attention in salvation.

The first was a very prominent man in Israel during the time of Jesus Christ. This man served on the Sanhedrin, the Council of 72, that later gave their blessing and approval to the crucifixion of Jesus. He was a Godly man who had a keen mind and a discerning spirit. He came to Jesus one night, when no one else could see who he was and what he was doing and immediately spoke to Jesus about why he would undertake such a dangerous mission.

Basically, he said, “*No one could do what you are doing Jesus unless God was in Him. You must be of God—because I have seen you do things that have to be miracles from God.*”

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Now as flattering as that might have been for Jesus to have one of the leaders of the nation speak so highly of Him—Jesus moved to something that would allow the man to have a much bigger blessing than just speaking to Jesus. He challenged the man, we know him as Nicodemus, by telling him that no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again. In other words, you are able to see the miracles and great deeds that I am doing, but if you accept salvation you will be a part of the Kingdom of God and God will show you so much more.

Nicodemus focused on only one part of what Jesus had just told him. It was not the blessing of being in the kingdom of God---it was the logistics of getting there. If someone had to be born again—how could that happen? It is not possible for adults to reenter the womb of their mothers—so how can you be born again. He was not diverting the answer of Jesus—but he was asking Jesus to explain how this could happen. Jesus had gotten his attention in salvation—Nicodemus wondered how it could work.

Jesus explained two things about God getting our attention through salvation that applies to every one of us:

1. **You must be born of water**—I believe that Jesus was talking about submitting to immersion and being baptized into the Lord Jesus Christ.
2. **Born of the Spirit** -- This is as different as possible from natural birth—one through the body and birth canal of a woman and the other through the power and indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit—but the effect is the same. You are not in the same environment anymore. You are changed and you will never be the same. No one asks to go back into the womb after being born—that is ridiculous--- and no one asks to go back into the world who has truly been born of the water and of the Spirit.

We still see Nicodemus trying to get the logistics straight and asking Jesus another question, “How can this be?” Jesus then personalizes salvation for Nicodemus. It is something that comes from heaven, the vessel of salvation is the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who can explain what happens in this world and what will happen in the spiritual world we all are a part of. Then Jesus tells Nicodemus about how He will be lifted up and when He is, all who believe in Him will live forever with Him.

We do not know if Nicodemus understood all that Jesus had told him or that he got a chance to hear that great sermon of Jesus that follows their conversation and starts, *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have ever lasting life.”* **John 3:16** But we do know that Nicodemus became a follower of Jesus and when the chips were really down, he stepped out and helped bury the body of Jesus. This was while every male disciple of Jesus except the young teenager John had ran off and was hiding somewhere. Let me share that passage from **John 19:38-42**: *“Later Joseph of Arimathea asked Pilate for the body of Jesus. Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders. With Pilate’s permission, he came and took the body away. He was accompanied by Nicodemus, the man who earlier had visited Jesus at night. Nicodemus brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about 75 pounds. Taking Jesus’ body, the two of them wrapped it, with the spices, in strips of linen. This was in accordance with Jewish burial customs. At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid. . .they laid Jesus there.”*

We can safely say that God got the attention of Nicodemus in salvation. Not only did Jesus tell him how to get saved—Nicodemus recognized the power and greatness of God and allowed it to direct his life. He stood up when most of the other followers of Jesus ran away and in a very clear way announced—Nothing is more important in my life than the relationship I have with God through His Son, Jesus Christ.

The second was a man who left home as a faithful Gentile God-fearing man and who returned as a Christian excited enough that he established a Church in his native land that has lasted for almost 2000 years and is still

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active today. The man was an African man and we do not get to know his name. We know several important details about him: he was the finance minister of Ethiopia; he was a eunuch, standard procedure for those who worked in the palace; and he worked directly for the Queen mother of the land.

He had gone to Jerusalem to worship and was now on the Gaza Road heading from Israel to Egypt. He was reading a passage in Isaiah about the sacrifice of Christ, the prophecy of **Isaiah 53: 7-8**. God chose a man to speak to him named Philip, one of the first seven deacons, and the Holy Spirit told Philip to approach the vehicle he was in and speak to him. By the way, Philip had to run to catch up with the chariot and speak to the man. But when he did Philip asked the man that great lead-in question, “*do you understand what you are reading?*” The man correctly answered I really cannot unless someone explains it to me. Would you come up into my vehicle and help me understand this passage?

Philip did and explained salvation to this man, the Ethiopian Eunuch, that the Bible was talking about salvation and that it was a gift of God that came through the death and sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The man, convicted by the Spirit took over leadership and said to Philip, “*here is water*” ---it could have been the Mediterranean Sea or even a roadside wadi, but it was something that the man knew was part of his salvation. He needed to be baptized in Jesus.

He stopped the chariot and Philip and this African man went down into the water and Philip baptized him into Jesus Christ. The job God wanted Philip to do was done, so an angel of the Lord simply took Philip and flew him to his next assignment in Azotus. But the job that God wanted this Ethiopian man to do was directly in front of him. He had gotten the man’s attention by salvation and now God was taking him home to share this same good news with all the people that he could. This new convert did not have a single book of the New Testament, but the Holy Spirit gave him insight and evidently his teaching and sharing were powerful, because the first Church outside the country of Israel was founded in Ethiopia, Africa, by a man who risked it all to come back to his homeland and share the Gospel of Jesus.

In both of these stories of the Bible we see that the men did risk their lives to follow Jesus, but neither one ever spoke about how hard it was for them to be saved. They allowed God to get their attention with His greatness and His power and then they served Him the rest of their lives.

We have developed a rather sickening doctrine in our “Christian Lite” churches of today. Salvation is marketed as “look at all you get”—saved from your sins, going to heaven, never able to lose this salvation no matter what you do, getting all the blessings of God and Jesus in your life regardless of how you act, and the worst of all to me---God will grant you every desire of your heart—in a perverted way the misinterpretation of that phrase from the Book of Psalms.

Is it any wonder that a large portion of Christians do not stay faithful or active in a church? We have over 80 % of Americans who claim to be Christian but only 9% are Born Again believers. If we focused less on all you can get through salvation and more on how great God is to extend salvation to you as a sinner—perhaps we would see the level of commitment go up. It is the power of God that saves us and it is the power of God that we need to focus on in our salvation. It truly is not all about you—in fact it is hardly anything about you—it is all about God and what He has done, what Jesus has done in dying for us, what the Holy Spirit has done in inhabiting us---trying to console and lead us, and it is all about God in His working to keep us faithful and on track to gain His rewards for this lifetime and into eternity.

The people in the day of Malachi had also dropped their admiration and worship of the Lord and traded it in for something they liked better. They literally said, “We will do what we want and change the Bible rules as we want, but we still need you to bless us God and make everything work just right for us.”

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Doesn't that sound to you a lot like many American Christians today? We will do what we want—you know, go to church as often as we want, redefine the tithe to whatever percent we want to give, call meager gifts great acts of charity; change the Bible rules to fit what we want to do—like eliminate the Bible prohibition to “kill babies” or find some Scripture blessings for “same-sex marriages”, or just change the passages we do not want in the Scriptures—but God we still need you to bless us and give us all the good things that we have gotten used to—and you really should add even some new blessings.

Salvation is such a great gift of grace—it demands that we focus on God. Christians must give God the credit, the glory and the praise; and non-Christians must not lead our land to be anti-Christ and anti-Christian and still expect God to bless this nation.

One step of God getting our attention in salvation is to point out:

You cannot accept and reject whatever you want spiritually. Vs. **Malachi 1:13**

A quick glance at this verse shows us that the people had become mired down in a self-focused religion. They may have still sacrificed animals to God but they did it while complaining, sneering at God, and culling their herd for undesirable animals and giving them to God for their offerings and sacrifices. Let's take a quick look at why none of these are showing that God has their attention but shows that they are just doing their own thing

1. They decided that what God had asked them to do was too much of a burden and they needed to lighten the load. It was not a matter of knowledge—each and every one of them knew what the law said and what God wanted them to do. They just didn't want to do it so they didn't.
2. They decided that really God was asking them to do some ridiculous things. They sneered at God and contemptuously declared that the rules were too binding and severe. They had good and perfect animals in their flocks but since they did not want to give them to God—they put the blame on God for making such terrible rules.
3. They passed off their culls as “good enough for God”. They literally culled the bad animals out of their herd to have a better herd and gave those culls to God as though they were a special gift.

When people decide what is the right worship, fellowship and offerings to give God and do not follow what God directs—we need to realize that God has a right to be offended and reject those offerings. He is not required to look the other way and pretend like the people do not know what they are doing is wrong.

We have labored over the wrong things in worship the past few years and it has added to this “I want to do my own thing—mentality.” We have fought over which style of music is the best—really, do you really think we are going to sing American hymns or American Contemporary Worship Songs in heaven? You do not think that God has superior heavenly music for us to sing that will meet the need for producing joy and worship from all the peoples of the world.

We have labored over preaching style—ditto to the statement above. We have labored over dress codes, piercings, tattoos, service animals in Church, and a host of other things that have taught a lot of people that you can make a big deal over many things that are not essential to salvation and that is your right!!!

So, we have also said Lord, the desire to do our best and be our best is just too burdensome—why not let us do what we want? We have sneered at God when it has come to some of the areas of Biblical rules. When was the last time you heard a major sermon about the sin of living together before marriage—it is so common in many churches that the Pastors just do not address it but act like it is just fine? In fact, some Church leaders practice the same kind of adultery and fornication and continue to serve as leaders in the Church.

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Food drives for the Church can be ‘clean the pantry out of all those things we just didn’t eat’. The clothing drive for the mission team can be a “let’s get a donation for things we were going to throw away.” The volunteer day of working at the Church can be either a ‘no show’ or a ‘let’s go and gripe about everyone at the Church’. We have often culled our possessions and offered God and His kingdom some very junky gifts. Is it any wonder that God has been offended, rejects those gifts and takes away the blessings that we could have gotten?

It is key that we do not accept or reject on a basis of “I will do what I want” when it comes to the salvation that God has given to us.

1. The first part of verse **Malachi 1:14** tells us that you cannot promise something prized to God and then give something terrible instead without God closing His “Blessing Basket!” The ironic thing about this is it was all voluntary. No one was making the people promise to give these prized animals—they were offering them and then when it came time to make the sacrifice—they simply substituted a ‘cull’ from the herd and took it to the temple to offer.

I was a very young preacher when I first saw this in action. The country Church where I was the Pastor—Walnut Grove—from my Little House on the Prairie days was out of space and really needed to build. We drew up plans that would enlarge the building and make it very serviceable, then hired an architect to draw up the plans and finally raised the money to start the building. The congregation was made up of farmers and while I was at the Church one weekend—it was a weekend church for me while I was still a full-time student at LCC, one of the farmers came up to me with his suggestion of how we should pay for the new building. He said we should take the number of acres each farmer farmed and assess an amount for each acre. As noble as this sounds—it was neither noble or sound. This man and his brother-in-law grew broom corn seed and sold it throughout Texas and Mexico. They only needed a few acres to grow all the seed they needed for their business. They each farmed less than 100 acres. Most of the congregation was made up of grain farmers who sold corn and soy beans on the regular market and to make a living and they farmed an average of 800-1,400 acres. So, this great plan would allow the man with the plan to pay 1/8 or less of the amount the other families would pay. I thanked him for his idea but said I thought we would be able to raise the money with unsolicited donations. We did and raised over \$30,000.00 in four weeks in 1966.

The promise or pledge were there—let’s all give to pay for this new building we all know that we need—but when it comes time to give—I have devised a scheme that allows me to give a fraction—promised a prize animal but substituted a cull for me to have more— of what the rest of you give.

2. The last part of verse **Malachi 1:14** tells us how God getting our attention through salvation is really supposed to work. A relationship with God starts when we acknowledge His greatness and power. We see that God has been the one who has come to get us to save us. God has given us all the things needed for us to be saved. That we too can be born of water and the Spirit because the baptistery is meaningful, because Jesus Christ died for our sins and the Spirit will take over our lives and hearts and fill us so full that we will stay close to God all of our life. We need to see that when we acknowledge the power and greatness of God is when the blessings start to flow in our lives.

It really is a matter of time and fulfilled signs of the times. I want to share some Scriptures of promise and prophecy that tell us that is true:

*“The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name.” **Zechariah 14:10***

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“As we have heard, so we have seen in the city of the Lord Almighty, in the city of our God; God makes her secure forever.” Psalm 48:8

“In the last days the mountains of the Lord’s temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and all nations will stream to it. Many people will come and say, “come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord to the temple of the God of Jacob.” Isaiah 2:2

Does God still get our attention through salvation? Yes, the plan of God has not changed and God still gets our attention through salvation. He still convicts our hearts, causing us to repent and accept Him as our Lord and Savior. It is His plan and it is the way that He moves the Church forward to serve Him and it is the way that He comes into our lives and our hearts and allows us to have sweet communion with Him.

It is a shame that salvation has morphed into “have you joined the Church” in many Christian communities today. It is not about a personal conviction of accepting Christ as much as adopting the rules and ordinances of a particular denomination. When you look at the conversion stories of Nicodemus and the Ethiopian Eunuch you see men open to the Holy Spirit and Christ who sought out someone to explain it to them and then they whole-heartedly gave their life to Christ.

You want the blessings of Jesus Christ in your life that comes from salvation—we must seek Jesus Christ to come and rule over our life. We must be willing to give Him everything that would limit or inhibit our salvation and accept His leadership to repent, publicly confess Him as your Lord and Savior and be immersed into Christ. (Buried in Christ and raised to new life.)

I trust we have all done that—or if not, please call me and we will see that it happens in your life. But born of the water was only one of the areas that Jesus told Nicodemus that you must be born again. He also said you must be born of the Spirit.

The Bible has a lot to say about the Holy Spirit in the end times and I want to share with you some of the key prophecies that involve the Holy Spirit that need to be a part of our life if we want the great “Blessing Basket” of God to open and pour out unbelievable blessings on us.

I was raised in a church that believed that the Holy Spirit had done His greatest work in the first few centuries and when the canonization of the Scriptures came, the passage of **I Corinthians 13:10 was fulfilled**, “*when the perfect comes, the partial (prophecy, tongues and special knowledge) will be done away with.*” I was also taught that only the Apostles could pass along these special gifts through the laying on of hands and they had all died in the first century.

These may sound like sound arguments, but they are full of holes. For one thing, they flew in the face of experience. Church history shows us abundant evidence of spiritual gifts being experienced on those who continued to believe in them. Some of the outbreaks of the supernatural were amazing like the camp meetings on the American frontier that helped birth the church I was raised in.

Two verses in the same passage show the argument from I Corinthians was taken totally out of context:

I Corinthians 13:10—the very next verse shows us it was Jesus who would be the perfect that was coming when it said: “*For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then (when the perfect comes) face to face, now I know in part, but then I shall know fully.*”

Also **I Corinthians 1:7** says that all the gifts of the Spirit will continue to be operative until Jesus returns, “*you are not lacking in any gift, awaiting eagerly the revelation of our lord Jesus Christ.*”

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Finally, the argument about the Apostles passing the gifts along to others was a sham because it attempted to convert the gifts of the Spirit into the gifts of the Apostles. The Apostles may have been able to lay their hands on people and pray for them to receive certain gifts, but the gifts came from the Holy Spirit, not the Apostles. The Bible clearly teaches that every believer receives at least one supernatural gift of the spirit at the time of his or her salvation, **I Corinthians 12:4-11** and Paul said it: *“To each one is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common good.” I Corinthians 12:7*

The Bible teaches that the end times would be characterized by a great outpouring of God’s Spirit, and a key passage is:

Joel 2:28-29 *“It will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all mankind; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on the male and female servants I will pour out My spirit in those days.”*

Since this is quoted in the first sermon on the Day of Pentecost, many have maintained that it was fulfilled then. But again, the context of the Book of Joel says that “It will come about after this. . . what is the this? If you read **Joel 2:18-27** you will see that the chapter is talking about the regathering and resettlement of the Jews in the land of Israel—something that did not occur until the last century.

The passage speaks of the outpouring of the Spirit as the ‘early and latter rain’ referring to the two rainy seasons of Israel. The prophet is telling us that we have two great outpourings of the Holy Spirit: the early rain—Pentecost and the First Century and the latter rains, the latter part of the last times when **Joel 2:31** says, *“and I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth, blood, fire, and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.”* The consistent language of the Old Testament talking about the Second Coming of the Messiah—Jesus Christ.

The Latter Rain began in several settings in the early 1900’s but it grew in great intensity after the Jewish nation was established on May 14, 1948. It was first seen in the great anointing of Billy Graham’s Ministry that moved millions of Americans closer to God, into salvation, and a willingness to be moved by the Holy Spirit. It emerged in our nation through the Charismatic Movement of the 1950’s and 1960’s. It continued with the Third Wave Movement in the 1970’s -1980’s and many Churches were open to the Spirit leading and direction. They strongly modified one teaching of the early Pentecostals and Charismatics, they stopped the emphasis on the gift of tongues as a sign of having been baptized in the Spirit.

Let’s take a moment and look at who the Holy Spirit is as we see that born of the Spirit was one of the main ways that God was getting our attention in salvation.

The first thing we see is that the Spirit was never an “it”. He is not an inanimate object but a being. He inspired the Biblical writers, **II Timothy 3:16**; and the Bible is ‘the sword of the Spirit, **Ephesians 6:17**; and the Spirit can speak directly to our spirits, **Romans 8:16**.

Second, the Holy spirit is a person, and always referred to directly in the Scriptures as “he”. Jesus called Him a “Helper”, or (paracletos)—helper, intercessor; and one who would convict the world of sin, **John 16:7-8**.

The Holy Spirit is the supernatural presence of God in the world today. He convicts a person of sin and when a person responds to the Spirit by accepting Jesus as Lord and savior, he is “born again” and the Father gives that person a very special birthday present—the Holy spirit!! The Spirit ceases to be on the outside drawing the person to Jesus, but moves inside the person and takes up residence within him, **Romans 8:9**

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He then becomes the Potter of God to shape us in the image of Jesus and continues until we are filled with the Spirit. We will never understand the signs and wonders of the last days without the infilling of the Holy Spirit. Because the Spirit is directing these signs on earth and leading Christians on how to navigate the signs.

God gets our attention in salvation: first through our conviction and salvation and then by implanting the Holy Spirit into our life. Let's all be filled with the Spirit and we will always hear God.

Next we will study **Malachi 2:1-9**—a study I called: **“God calls Christians to be Christ-Filled Christians”**. God allows us to pass on many blessings to each other and Christian leaders are allowed to give massive blessings—but if these are done just to make the leader feel good—blessings of flattery, blessings of condoning, blessings of compromise with the Word of God—then these blessings become curses upon the people and upon their nation.

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Malachi 2:1-9 GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION—TO FILL US WITH CHRIST

[Malachi 2:1-9 NIV] 1 "And now, you priests, this warning is for you. 2 If you do not listen, and if you do not resolve to honor my name," says the LORD Almighty, "I will send a curse on you, and I will curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not resolved to honor me. 3 "Because of you I will rebuke your descendants; I will smear on your faces the dung from your festival sacrifices, and you will be carried off with it. 4 And you will know that I have sent you this warning so that my covenant with Levi may continue," says the LORD Almighty. 5 "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for reverence and he revered me and stood in awe of my name. 6 True instruction was in his mouth and nothing false was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and turned many from sin. 7 "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the LORD Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth. 8 But you have turned from the way and by your teaching have caused many to stumble; you have violated the covenant with Levi," says the LORD Almighty. 9 "So I have caused you to be despised and humiliated before all the people, because you have not followed my ways but have shown partiality in matters of the law."

It is possible for Christians to feel they never hear from God. It adds so much stress to their life because they often feel, “I do not know what God wants me to do?” This book of Malachi, the last of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament lays it out very clearly—God has very specific ways He uses to get our attention and very specific things that He wants us to hear and put into action. I hope and pray as the study unfolds tonight you will hear God clearly and you will be able to follow His direction and receive the blessings--He has for those who hear Him!

The theme of the small book of Malachi is:

“The Great King---King Jesus—will come not only to judge people but more importantly, to bless and reward those who have remained faithful and followed His directions. No one is more determined to stay and work with His children and His followers than God. As the old, old Praise song said, “He leaves the ninety and nine to find the one!”

Nothing will force God to leave us—however, we can walk away from God and lose His blessings—in fact, as we will see tonight, people can be so unfaithful to God that they turn their blessings into curses. Nothing will do that more quickly than forgetting that God is the source of real blessings and we cannot just make feel-good blessings for ourselves or others just to improve status, likeability or wealth.

It is really easy to just give ‘flip answers’ that we do not mean.

Personal ones: “Who me, oh I feel just fine today!”

“Of course, that did not hurt my feelings, it was just something they said—I consider the source!”

“Why, I’m just doing great and I have all that I need right now!”

Spiritual ones: “Of course I’m sure you did not upset me—do I look mad?”

“Well, of course I will pray for them and ask God’s blessings on them—now who was that we were praying for and blessing?”

I remember a lady who came to DCF Church, converted to Christ and immediately sought to be the great spiritual leader of the Church. I remember one evening while we were getting ready for a special service

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someone came and asked to be anointed and prayed for and one of our pastors told them they would be with the person immediately after completing a short task they were doing. The woman was indignant that it was not done right away and said, “Well, where’s the oil, I’ll just go do it!” The scene that followed is what I walked in on—the woman grabbed the oil container off of the communion table which happened to be on the floor for that service and immediately poured it out all over her, overfilled her hands and got in on the clothes of the lady she was attempting to anoint and pray over. When the lady reacted to this oil running over her clothes the woman indignantly said, “Well, do you want anointed or not?” When the one wanting anointed did not respond quickly enough—the woman who was doing the anointing, said, “Well, I have to go clean up this mess,” she put the oily bottle down on the communion table purple cloth and left. I stepped forward, took the oily bottle off the table, cleaned it off and asked— “Do you want to try to get the oil out of your clothes before we finish the anointing?” The woman looked at me and said, “No, I think I needed a major anointing tonight.” We had a great anointing service. When we decide to bless someone, anoint someone, or even pray for someone for our glory, we are inviting disaster and we are not doing something that is Christ-filled.

It is the desire of God that we be filled with Christ, so we do not give ‘flip answers’ but instead we give answers directed by our saved relationship with Christ who has allowed us to be filled with the Holy Spirit.

It was Jesus Himself who said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”* **Matthew 5:6**

How are we filled with Jesus Christ—it happens when we are saved through the name of Jesus, *“Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”* **Acts 2:38**

And then we are filled by the Holy Spirit as Jesus sends Him into our life for permanent residence. We are then no longer seeking the Holy Spirit but we are seeking to stay filled with the Holy Spirit. We fulfill the prayer of Paul that he wrote at the end of the book of Romans: *“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”* **Romans 15:13.**

It is possible to be so filled with yourself that we ruin what God intended for good. We even do spiritual things for our own good and our own acclaim. We consider them blessings that we are doing for others; but God says “No, you have turned the blessings into curses because you have made these acts of service all about you and not about me!”

Malachi addresses the priests of Judah in the second chapter of his book because they were the only ones who God had ordained to give blessings to the people of the land. But today, I think Malachi is addressing everyone who prays for someone; intercedes for someone; or gives a blessing to someone. In short, every one of us. Christian acts of blessing, prayer, and even comfort must honor God.

If they honor God—the acts of Christian blessings will bring the greatest of blessings for the one giving and receiving the blessings. So, it really does make a difference who you ask to pray for you and who you ask to give their blessing to your plans.

Godly acts of worship must honor God. They must recognize God as the source of all blessings, they must revere God for what He has done and continues to do in our life, and they must give God all praise and honor when the blessings come. Have you ever seen more than one group or more than one person praying for the same miracle to happen and when it does, they want to claim the credit? “Well, the prayer team prayed for Jim when it looked like he wouldn’t make it and because of our prayers Jim was healed” ---while someone else may say, --“as soon as I heard old Jim was in bad shape, I just claimed a miracle for him and God gave me that miracle.” I worry that God does not always get the credit He deserves when people on earth are trying to

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determine which prayer was the one that saved a life, and who gets the credit here. Why is it so important that the glory is given to God?

Well, Malachi says that when Godly acts of blessings do not give God the credit, they can become curses in the lives of the people. Malachi 1:1-3a We can misdirect our blessings in many ways:

We may use flattery and sweet words about the person we are praying for that really is not for the ears of God, but it really is for the ears of the person that we are blessing. We can condone some really wrong things in the life of the person that we are praying a blessing for by pretending that all they are doing is right and that God will bless them regardless of what they are doing in their life. We can compromise Biblical values and teachings in our prayer of blessing so we will not offend the person we are praying for.

Such blessings or prayer for blessings will not produce the blessing, and can and will produce a curse in the life of the one praying and God says even in the life of the one being blessed.

You want your children and grandchildren blessed—then Malachi says you must honor the name of Jesus and you must make sure that God is the one you are seeking the blessing from and that you are applying Godly principles to your life and the life of the one you are giving a blessing. It is very eye opening to hear God say, that if you are giving blessings for the praise of the person being blessed, or to make you feel better about what you are doing, or to get ahead in some way in your life—watch out—it will become a curse and even produce a Godly rebuke that the person and their descendants receive in their life.

Why, because we become just another ‘spin doctor’—the person whose job it is to put his finger into the wind of public opinion and decide how to bend the facts to make them more appealing, with little or no regard for truth. They are the people who live by polls and not principles. It can be a spiritual malady as well as a public malady. Every one of us is spring-loaded to put our own failings in the best light and the failings of our adversaries in the worst light.

We must be careful about labeling one another a spin doctor because **Romans 2:1** warns us to not pass judgment or judge other people if you are doing the same thing you are judging them for doing. We can soften our own sins with mild words and skewer others with hard words. I’ve seen it often, to label the other person as a gossip while we are just telling what we have been told—is a perfect example of how this happens in Christian circles. It is possible for the truth to still hunt us down and when it does, we have one of two choices: blame others and deflect or just suppress the truth.

The priests in the day of Malachi did one better—they suppressed the truth, they shifted the blame away from themselves, and they joined forces with those who were practicing sins and started committing the same sins.

In this election year, it is easy to point out how misguided many politicians are in labeling the sins of their opponent as unforgiveable and their own discretions are never mentioned; but I am not just talking about politicians here. I am speaking about mankind in general. This is the way we are, apart from God’s mercy. It would be fool’s play tonight to turn this text into a commentary on the gutting of truth in government. That application would be far too small and would let all of us off the hook—and would not be helpful. What we need is to find out how we can get free from the slavery of ever suppressing the truth in the blessing and interceding for others.

The truth is we need to glorify and thank God. Without the grace of God in our lives, we all have a tendency to suppress the truth that we serve a God who is more powerful than all else. He made everything we know and see and we have nothing outside Him. So, we exist to bring glory to Him and not to compete with Him for

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glory. We are to be dependent on Him—seeing ourselves as a servant of the Lord Jesus—so we remember that He supplies us and we never supply Him.

The beautiful thing is when we realize this and God gets the glory—we get the blessing.

Malachi goes on to say that when these misguided Godly acts do not bless God but even change His plan—then even the festivals will be joyless and difficult. God will embarrass the priests who are taking the wrong sacrifices before God and instead of making it a happy time of celebration, food, and festivity—it will become a joyless time that eventually will be taken away. **Malachi 2:3b-6**

In 1965 when I was a summer missionary to Barbados, the youth had planned a program to promote the Youth Camp and encourage more people to attend. The Church held it in the Ostin’s Church and opened the Church up—that means put all the wood shutters out on hooks and turned on all the lights. The Church sat about 20 feet off of the main road in Oistins, the parish capital of Christ’s Church Parish. The program started with a Bible drama about Paul and Silas in prison and it was so hilarious that even the drunks were enticed off the street and into the Church. In fact, two climbed over me to sit on the pew bench by the window. The laughter was uproarious and prolonged. I did not think a single person got a spiritual blessing from that part of the program. The next event was a skit that was supposed to be quite funny and enticing, but it was so boring that the drunks beside me, got up and crawled over me again to get out of the Church. I was pretty deflated after the service about what had happened, when older and wiser Christians advised me that it was great to get those two men in Church—they often went around the community bragging about never stepping inside a Church in their life. They said, “Besides, God got the glory tonight and the church will be blessed.” This 20 year old Bible College Student got a great lesson that night in Barbados—when you look only at your way of seeing things- for me it was the quality of the performances and the reaction I expected from the audience--- you can miss the glory that has been given to God and when you miss that the glory that was given to God— you miss the blessing.

Malachi continues on his teaching about being filled by God and not the praise of others and he reminds the readers of the special covenant that God had made with Levi (a little history here) ---Levi was one of Jacob’s sons and he became the father of the priestly tribe. We really do not have a lot of material about the life of the priests until the time of Moses and Aaron—both from the tribe of Levi--, Aaron the older brother went with Moses as a prophet of God to petition Pharaoh to let the Israelites depart from Egypt. It was Aaron’s faithfulness to God that caused God to make him the High Priest of the Israelites and declare that all of his male descendants would be a part of the Israelite priesthood. This was part of the code that God gave Moses on Mt. Sinai. But the quotation of our passage today refers back to his grandson Phinehas and the statement is found in Numbers 25:11 where Phinehas took action against a moral outrage in the camp of the Israelites.

God had told the people not to intermarry or intermingle with the pagans of the area because they worshipped different gods and it would reintroduce idolatry back into the life of the Israelites. God had taken them out of Egypt, a country with thousands of false gods and they had learned to follow Jehovah. They had some major bumps in the road but they still followed Jehovah. This one was a game changer—where Phinehas proved to be very loyal to God. The Moabite women were worshippers of the Baal of Peor and they begin to invite the Israelite men to come to their festivals. We would call them drunken sex orgies today They would feast, drink, bow down and worship the Moabite gods and then engage in sexual conduct with the Moabite women. Some of the men were married to Israelite women so, as well as worshipping foreign gods, they were purposefully committing adultery. God called Moses to get it to stop. Moses assembled all the judges of Israel and told them they were to find all the men in their tribe that were cavorting with the Moabite women and sentence them to death and execute them. There had already been 24,000 Israelites die from a plague caused by this blatant immorality. While Moses was having this meeting with the judges, one of the Israelite men,

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Zimri the son of the leader of the Simeon Tribe walked right past the leaders of Israel and he brought with him Kozbi, the daughter of a tribal chief of the Moabite nation. They walked right past Moses, Aaron and all the judges who were at the door of the tabernacle weeping and seeking God to cure this sin and this plague.

Phinehas had heard Moses and knew what Moses had told them was from God, so he followed the two and when they entered the tent of Zimri and embraced—under the direction of God, Phinehas took his spear and drove it through both of them.

God blessed Phinehas and said he and his family would have a special blessing from God—they would live in peace and uprightness, would turn many people away from sin, and they would teach the truth of God to all. It was a clear direction from God that those who would keep and honor the covenant of God would get the privileges of the covenant, but they could not expect the privileges of God to come to those who would not keep the covenant of God.

What were the things that God promised to those who honored Him in their acts of service and the things they did for God?

1. They would experience a full life and a peaceful life.
2. They would have a relationship with God based on their awe of the name of God and adherence to the teaching of God.
3. They would teach only that which was true and never what was false.
4. They would walk with God and turn many people away from the world and teach them to follow God

That is the same promise that God gives to each of us today who will bless, pray for, intercede, and lead people in a way that honors God and gives Him the glory. But the opposite is what Malachi states, for the priests of his day no longer followed the way of Levi but had devised their own plan and it was leading people away from God.

Clear teaching of this passage is: if you make up a new covenant or teaching and somehow change the laws of God—you will lose all the privileges that come from obedience and you will lead yourself and those you teach away from God and into a life that God cannot bless, but only curse.

Why is this true? In *II Thessalonians 2* Paul explains the end of the age and the great apostasy and deception that will come as a part of that time. He says the lawless one will come and with him “*the deception of unrighteousness*”. So, unrighteousness and deception are always linked and their goal is to extinguish the truth. Unrighteousness keeps people from the love of the truth—which the bible says is what sets you free from sin and death. You see, when you love sin, you cannot love the truth. The truth is too threatening and it might take away your illicit pleasures. So, unrighteousness is really loving sin more than loving God and His truth.

The whole concept of God getting our attention to fill us with Christ and the Holy Spirit is a matter of the heart. It is something that we must accept in faith. We keep the covenants of God because we believe that is how God will bless us. When the heart is in love with self-exaltation, in love with independence from God and any moral direction and in love with the pleasures of sin; the mind will inevitably distort the truth or suppress the truth in order to protect the idols of the heart. What is needed is not just new ideas or more information; but a new heart, a new set of passions, desires, and pleasures.

The priests of Malachi’s day were not mentally deficient. They knew the law and they knew what they were to do—they still sacrificed all the animals they were to sacrifice, still labored from early morning to late at night

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preparing the sacrifices and the meat portions for all the people involved—they just did not expect the people to bring and sacrifice the right animals. It was a matter of being morally deficient. They loved their own sins—for many of the priests also brought the cull animals of their herds to sacrifice for their families, so they launched a path of self-determination and suppressed the truth that God is God and the people were to depend on God and live for His glory.

Malachi closes this passage with one more truth of how God gets our attention to fill us with Christ. He says those who quit honoring God in their acts of worship and blessings that they give to people will have some really rotten consequences.

Malachi 2:7-9

He directs this at the priests of his day and tells them when you violate the covenant that God made with Levi and cause people to stumble—there is a price to pay.

1. Godly people will despise you—literally it says---they will find you contemptible.
2. You will lose the respect of the people because you have not followed all the laws of God but have shown partiality in picking and choosing which laws you want to keep and which laws you want to ignore.

It may seem hard to realize that God will keep for Himself a righteous remnant that will always be able to see what is right as God directed and to oppose what is not right. I have always been blessed to have leaders in the congregations that I have served who have a strong gift of discernment. They are able to see those who are frauds, able to see who is really honoring God and who is doing spiritual things for their own advancement, and able to direct the Church away from those who would steer the Church in the wrong direction. They are the ones who will find contemptible those who demolish the Church that Jesus has established and replace it with a Church that has rules, laws, and directions that they like. They will despise those who take the Word of God and manipulate it and change it so that it allows them to keep the sins they treasure so much. This faithful remnant is also the group that will receive the great blessings of this passage and find that God truly does direct their lives in a very meaningful way that blesses others.

But Malachi goes one step further and says eventually the people will lose even the respect of the ones they led into sin—because they will see that the partiality that the leaders showed about the Word of God ended up hurting every one of them. God forbids partiality from the spiritual leaders in *Lev. 19:15* and *Deuteronomy 10:17*. Now we are familiar with partiality as it applies to people, to situations, and also to judgments; but the Bible says we are to be as impartial as God is. God reveres the Word He has given to us—He calls it the Living Word and it is not to be perverted in any way. We are not to show partiality by making the Word of God say what we want so we can treat people the way we want to treat them.

It is amazing that the priests of the day of Malachi had fallen in love with sin and with the desire to have the people like them because they were making life easier for them and more like they wanted. But the result would be that the people would hold them in contempt and they would have no respect for this priests that would not stand for the truth.

I am sure when the people were being led off into captivity that many of them spoke harshly to and about the priests that did not remain firm in the truth but gave into the desire to please and placate and brought an end to their nation.

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How does apply to us today? God sends signs and we have to be insightful enough to see the signs. We need to realize that it may not be spiritual leaders who point out the signs to us. It may not be the ones we expect to warn us but we may need to see the signs on our own and let that set our direction.

Jesus spelled out signs of nature that would be clear signs of the times.

In **Mathew 24:7** he speaks of ethnic groups battling each other, countries battling each other, famines and earthquakes.

In **Mark 13:8** he gives the same list and in each of these passages, He says that these signs will be the beginning of birth pangs that will lead to the end of the age.

In **Luke 21:10-11**—Jesus adds this thought: . . .*”and pestilences in various places, and fearful events and great signs from heaven.”*

Famines are quite clear—and droughts, floods, and strange weather all lead to famines.

Earthquakes are also quite clear and we see and hear the great increase of earthquakes that has happened in the last two decades.

But I want to focus on the areas that Jesus added in Luke. Pestilences, fearful events and great signs of heaven all refer to the undoing of creation. The God who put creation into existence can also take it apart and undo the creation that He made. I feel this is to get our attention so that we will live in a way that insures we are a part of that great Remnant that God will bless, direct and encourage.

In a time when our nation is ravaged with fires, weather disturbances, extremes in weather highs and lows—we need to be aware that these are all areas that Jesus said would be the signs of nature that we ought to observe and note. We have seen that it does not take a removal of the sun and moon for you to not be able to see them, the moon darkened, and the sun not giving out light—all it takes are massive forest fires that fill the sky with smoke and change the way we see the sun, moon, and stars. It does not take a huge drought to ruin the crops in the Mississippi Valley—all it takes are a series of floods triggered by hurricanes and weather disturbances that eliminate the crops or eliminate the possibility of harvesting crops or putting the crops out. We are very vulnerable to the ravages of those natural signs and they totally change our lives.

It is the same with our spiritual life. Let us all be aware that when asked to pray for someone—we are praying down the power and healing of Jesus and it is not our great ability to pray that is on display. Let us all be aware that when we are asked to intercede on behalf of someone—we are seeking and asking God to enter this person’s life in a greater manner and heal or change the situation that is causing them so much pain and anxiety. When we are asked to bless someone or we feel that we should bless someone---remember that we are giving the blessing of God so we must be true in what we say and genuine in applying the same things to our own life. Let our blessings, our prayers, and our intercessions be something that blesses God, the person we are caring for and ourselves.

God will always get our attention when we need a refill of Jesus in our life or a ‘fill-her-up’ dose of the Holy Spirit. These are probably even more vital signs than the signs of nature for us to see, because they impact everything we say and do. Be blessed and be listening for God!

Next week, we will look at how important covenants and keeping those covenants was for God. We always seem to think that God is more interested in how we behave than anything else—wrong! God knew we would sin and He sent Jesus to eliminate the results of sin—death and the grave and turn those into great steps of victory for us—life everlasting and an eternal glorified body. That is why God could label men like David, Paul,

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Peter and women like Tamar, Bathsheba, and Mary Magdalene as some of His priceless treasures. He would eliminate the sin in their lives. But when we violate His covenants—we walk away from forgiveness and the shelter of our God. I am calling the lesson: “God Bases His Greatest Blessings on Covenant Keeping”.

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Malachi 2:10-16 MY BEST BLESSINGS COME FROM COVENANT KEEPING

[Malachi 2:10-16 NIV] 10 Do we not all have one Father? Did not one God create us? Why do we profane the covenant of our ancestors by being unfaithful to one another? 11 Judah has been unfaithful. A detestable thing has been committed in Israel and in Jerusalem: Judah has desecrated the sanctuary the LORD loves by marrying women who worship a foreign god. 12 As for the man who does this, whoever he may be, may the LORD remove him from the tents of Jacob—even though he brings an offering to the LORD Almighty. 13 Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer looks with favor on your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is the witness between you and the wife of your youth. You have been unfaithful to her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. 15 Has not the one God made you? You belong to him in body and spirit. And what does the one God seek? Godly offspring. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful to the wife of your youth. 16 "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the LORD Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful.

It is possible for Christians to feel that you never hear from God. It adds so much stress to their life because they often feel, “I do not know what God wants me to do?” The book of Malachi, the last book of the Minor Prophets and the last book of the Old Testament lays it out very clearly—God has very specific things that He wants us to hear and put into action. I hope and pray as the study unfolds tonight you will hear God clearly and you will be able to follow His direction and receive the special blessings, He has for those who hear Him!

The theme of the small book of Malachi is:

The Great King—King Jesus--will come not only to judge the unrighteous but more importantly, to bless and reward those who have remained faithful and followed His directions. No one is more determined to stay and work with His children and His followers than God. No one can take His children out of His hands!! Nothing will force God to leave us—however, we can disobey and reject His covenants and when we do, we automatically either create our own covenants or we make a covenant with another god other than God Jehovah. That is disastrous for us and hurtful for God. He can take our sin and forgive it, but when we choose another covenant than what He has offered we walk away from the shelter and forgiveness of our God.

God has created a “Hall of Fame”—I call it “The Hall of Faith” in the 11th Chapter of the Book of Hebrews and it has some men and women who were exceptionally righteous all of their life—no Biblical misdeeds for Able, for Enoch, and very few for Abraham; but it also contains the names of many men and women who had some severe lapses in their lives. Moses and David were murderers; Samson had problems with idol worshipping women; Noah had trouble with the bottle; Rahab was the hotel hostess that also served as the prostitute for the night for the right price; Gideon was a “fraidy cat”, and the list contains many who had great sins or great personality flaws yet the Bible says they were in the list because: *“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth.” Hebrews 11:13*

I am afraid that we have been programed to think that God is more interested in how we behave than anything else. Wrong! God knew we would sin and He set aside provisions to take care of repented sin. It was so clear that the Bible says before the world was created, it was determined that Jesus, the Son of God would come to die for our sins. *“And Jesus is the head of the body, the church, He is the beginning and the firstborn*

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from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood, shed on the cross.” **Colossians 1:19-20.**

When God was handling the mess Adam and Eve created by eating the forbidden fruit, He questioned Adam and Eve and then turned to the serpent, the one who promoted and presented the temptation and said: . . . *“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers, he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”* **Genesis 3:15** This was realized in total when Satan led the insurrection to have Jesus killed, but the death of Jesus was really the event that took all the power away from Satan—the power of death and the grave.

Think with me a moment as we realize that God has taken care of the sin issue in our life quite well. If we have Christ in our heart, we will have conscience pangs and for most of us as those conscience pangs hit us, we are anxious to repent and clean up our mess from our sin. The Holy Spirit convicts us of wrong and we are led to make it right. When the Holy Spirit touches us at conversion, we want to repent of our sins and we want to be baptized into Jesus. When the Holy Spirit convicts us after becoming a Christian—that we have done something that disobeys God or hurts someone else—we repent and want to make it right or if that is not possible—we want God to make it right.

Our sins convict us and lead us back to Christ. God knows what our behavior will be and He has prepared a plan and a way to cleanse us from sin, to give us the strength to move past what we have done, and to live with a renewed conscience that has been cleansed. We marvel at how He does that and the Bible examples that prove it: Leaving the 99 and searching for the lost sheep; the return of the prodigal and the great welcome he gets from His father; the conversion of Zacchaeus; the forgiveness of Peter after he betrayed Jesus on the night of the arrest of Jesus and then Jesus asking him to lead his Church. The list is endless and in almost every chapter of the Bible you see how God has a plan to forgive the sins of His children and to welcome repenting sinners back into His fold.

But to those who keep His covenant, God has set-aside some very special blessings. Let me read what God told Moses to tell the people at Mt. Sinai:

“Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”
Exodus 19:5

As great as those promises are, the Bible says that Jesus has only increased that extremely generous set of blessings with more as He has established a new covenant with believers through His death and resurrection.

“For this reason, Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that He has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.” **Hebrews 9:15**

The Bible in James deals with the sins of omission and the sins of commission—and they are both offences to God, but sins of omission may even describe things that we did not fully know and are unaware or ignorant that it was a sin but sins of commission have to do with deliberate sins. Those who break the covenant of God know what they were doing, it is not done out of ignorance—it is done intentionally. They know what God said and yet they want to do the opposite and they do. It is a willful sin and it can lead to death—certainly it will lead to some very disappointing things happening in the life of the one breaking the covenant.

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Malachi switches the direction of his writing; he has been addressing the priests and what they have done wrong that has created some of the national problems that Judah was having; and now he addresses the whole nation—priests and all other people. He does not tell them they have sinned—for their transgression is much deeper than that. He tells them that they have deliberately broken the covenants of God and God has withheld His greatest blessings from their land.

Remember what Moses told the nation of Israel: If you obey and keep my covenant then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. You will be my special people. They had failed on both counts: they were not keeping the covenant and they were upset at God that He was not giving them all the blessings that they wanted and had been accustomed to.

What were these covenants they had shoved aside and made legal when God had declared they were illegal?

1. The **first covenant** they broke was they totally disregarded God’s covenant statement that they should not marry foreign women who worship idols and false gods. **Malachi 2:10-12** Malachi starts his address to the nation by reminding them that they had one God—and this God is the Father of the Covenant. So, as they broke the covenant that caused the plagues on their nation by their deliberate and ungodly behavior the plagues were affecting everyone: those who still kept the covenant of God as well as those who were breaking the covenant.

This practice of marrying foreign women who worship idols and false gods was brought into the nation by Solomon. Maybe he wasn’t as wise as we always thought. The foreign wives of Solomon began to plead with him for a place to worship their gods and Solomon allowed a place to be designated, outside of the city walls in the Valley Kedron, next to the precipice right on the other side of the Temple grounds. This area soon had a proliferation of false gods and idols and Solomon added to the idolatry by building some structures. **I Kings 11:7** says, *“On a hill east of Jerusalem, Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the detestable god of Moab, and for Molek, the detestable god of the Ammonites. He did the same for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and offered sacrifices to their gods.”*

Let me add one thought at this time to show how detestable this was to God Jehovah. That very same East end of the Valley of Kidron became the collection spot for the wastes from the animal sacrifices in the Temple and the garbage of that area of the city and Jesus told His followers that it is the closest reminder we have to hell and called that area the Valley of Gehenna.

The Lord became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the Lord’s command. So, the Lord said to Solomon, *“Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen.”* **I Kings 11:7-18**

That one tribe was Judah the homeland of Malachi and the people he was writing to. You would think anyone living in Judah with just the slightest memory would remember that God had taken 10 of the tribes away from Judah and that new nation of Israel had quickly fallen into false worship and taking foreign wives who followed idols with false worship and the nation had quickly fallen,

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dispersed and would be no more until 1948 AD. But that was not the case. The men of Judah from the priests on down were now participating in the same sin and it meant their land was severely divided and a spiritual mess.

It did not matter the size of their offering—God did not intend to bless the land until they quit ruining their country by taking wives that worshipped idols and false gods. God cannot be purchased with a large offering, a generous donation, or any other act of service intended to make God think good of you and excuse the wrong things in your life. Since our God is always righteous and never unrighteous, it is not possible to bribe Him, flatter Him into favorable action, or induce Him to bless you with gifts.

How does that apply to our nation, the United States? Good question and as we continue to look at the signs that Jesus said were signs of the times, tonight we take scripture from **Matthew 24:12, 37-39** and **II Timothy 3:1-4** and we see these social signs that will become more prevalent in our communities:

The end-time signs of society will be:

1. Decrease in enthusiasm for Christ and Christianity
2. Ignoring the signs of the times and finding other reasons and interpretations for the signs. Like all-natural signs are now just tossed on the climate change pile and no one is looking for what God is saying, just ways to reduce their carbon footprint.
3. People will be very self-focused and their greatest love will be for themselves. Our nation has become racked by self-interests, ethnic exclusivity, class and racial strife, and a hate-filled political campaign.
4. They will be greedy and love money—we continue to hear of the corruption that was a part of the stimulus payments and the PPP funds.
5. They will be proud
6. They will be abusive
7. They will be disobedient to parents and all other offices of authority.
8. They will be ungrateful—always wanting and never appreciating.
9. They will be unholy in actions and belief—the principles of the bible do not guide the actions of many groups within our nation.
10. They will be incapable of loving others—especially those who are not like them in appearance or belief.
11. They will be unforgiving and use personal and generational grudges as a reason for division.
12. They will be slanderous and willing to say anything against those who oppose them.
13. They will be lacking self-control, hating the good and loving the evil, treacherous, rash, and conceited.
14. They will be lovers of any type of pleasure and not lovers of God.
15. They will have a form of godliness but see no power in being a believer or in following Christ.

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Now those kinds of people were present in the days of Timothy when he wrote his Epistles—because he warned the Church not to follow their leading, but they were a select few. The signs of the times will show that the number of people who believe and behave like the end-time social signs will become the majority and will direct the nations of the world?

Just like the days of Malachi most people who act this way know it is not what God wants them to do—but it just feels so good or empowering so they want to do it. Now, if Solomon and the introduction of foreign wives and their idols could split the country of Israel into two parts; and Malachi could warn that it is about to happen again and the nation of Judah will go into captivity again because of breaking a covenant that God told them not to break, then who do we think we are to believe that if a majority of our nation wants to break God’s covenants and act like this against the will and teaching of God—that God will turn around and bless and preserve our nation?

We will be a faithful remnant that God blesses and preserves, but that may not be enough to save our great land.

2. The **second covenant** they broke was they misused the laws of marriage and divorce that God had given His people. **Malachi 2:14-16** The covenant of divorce although allowed in the Old Testament is rather vague. It was only granted to men to divorce their wives, the woman had no legal right to divorce her husband, the woman was to get a certificate of divorce but she had limits on what she could do the rest of her life, and once the man had given her the certificate, he was no longer responsible for her financially or emotionally. **Deuteronomy 24:1-3**

The men of Judah, during the time of Malachi, including the priests, had twisted this Scripture to say--if we find these foreign women more attractive to us, we will just give our wife a certificate of divorce and move the foreign women into our house. The covenant they had made with God for their marriage was discarded and they based the divorce and the new wife simply on lust and passion and it had nothing to do with serving God.

These men had been raised as Jews all of their life and they knew that God wanted them to take a Jewish wife and raise Godly children that would enlarge the kingdom of God and make the Jewish nation even stronger. Many of them had had a family with their wife and had had years with them to build the business, the home, the vineyards and fruit groves; but now they decided the wife did not look so good anymore and these foreign women looked great—so it was time to tell her I want a divorce, legalize the paper and move the new wife into the home.

I know some of you will immediately think of several professional men you know who did just exactly that. They married a wife, she probably dropped out of school to help him get his degrees and certificates; had a family with her, built a business or a practice; built a large home or even two or three homes and then decided it was time for a trophy wife and left his wife who helped make him successful and married this young attractive woman. As scummy as that is—and it is scummy—it is not quite as bad as what these men were doing.

They were more like covered wagon pioneers—who married a woman in their youth –usual Old Testament age of marriage was 15-16 for a man and 13-14 for a woman. They had taken a parcel of land that had been deserted from the time the nation went into exile and they had made that land farmable. They took out all the rocks, cut down the brush and thistles that had overtaken the land, built a vineyard, planted a grove of figs, olives, and other fruits. Built a wine vat to harvest the grapes into wine and built an olive vat to press the olives into oil. They had built all the buildings on their

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property and when they were too poor, first married, to afford all the needed work animals, they had even done a lot of that work themselves. The wife had weathered quickly doing all that strenuous farm labor plus bearing several children, and taking care of such a large family, she had aged. But without her the man would have had very little prosperity. Then he gets enamored by a foreign woman, who has done no farm labor, has built no buildings or arbors or groves, and has lived a pampered life all of her life and he trades the wife of his youth in---divorces her—and takes a new wife. It was a violation of the first covenant—marrying foreign women who worshipped false gods and idols and a violation of the second covenant---getting rid of your godly wife who had stood with you since your youth. God could not bless that mess—so Malachi hits it head on.

Malachi starts this discussion, by saying the altar of God had been flooded with tears by those who were upset at God for not blessing their farms, their land, and their nation when they gave their offerings. Now get this, they offered inappropriate animals for sacrifice, were not very strong in their faith in God Jehovah because of taking idol worshipping foreign women into their home and not asking them to convert to Judaism, and they got rid of their faithful God-fearing Jewish wives for the new foreign model. Yet they wanted God to give them great blessings, wonderful crops, and a bounty they could not contain. When it was not happening, they were at the altar of God—weeping and wailing all day long—wanting God to bless them.

I was in my second ministry walking over to the new Church Sanctuary one day when I heard the loudest wailing and bawling, I have ever heard in my life. We had just built a large auditorium that held 600 people so I was quite surprised to hear such loud noise coming through the walls of this new Worship Center. I slipped in a side door and there was a man draped over the front steps of the stage pleading with God to undo what he had just done. It was Ronnie B. and the town was so small I knew right away who it was. His wife was a regular at our worship services but Ronnie would never come to Church. I had visited him several times and he always had a great reason why he didn't need to come. I bent over him and asked if I could pray for him—"No, don't need that," he sobbed. I said, "Do you want to talk?" This time he just kept his face buried in the carpet and yelled into it "No". I said "Do you just want me to leave you alone to talk with God." "Yes", he screamed.

I went back to the office to call his home because I really thought he might have killed his wife the way he was acting. I called and got her friend who told me the wife was not at the home—she had gone to a safe place but the friend was there with the police and they were hunting Ronnie B. He had beat his wife severely. I told her he was at the Church and she should send the police to the Church and rushed back over to where he was to distract him until they arrived. But he must have expected that was what would happen and had left the Church and I could not find him or his truck. He was located later that night and arrested.

Those were some of those that flood the altar with tears that Malachi spoke about. They are tears of hypocrisy, because the person crying does not want to change, they just want the result of what they did to change. The men of Malachi's day were the same kind of men as Ronnie B. They wanted God to bless them although they knew that they had not kept the covenants that God had asked them to keep.

Then the real shocker of the passage is they had the audacity to ask "Why?" Why is God not blessing us and recognizing those large and generous offerings we are giving to Him? This isn't fair. We are doing our part giving these large offerings and God is not doing His part and blessing us. So, Malachi puts the words of God into his book and says, because you have mistreated the wife of your youth.

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She has been faithful to you and you have been unfaithful. And the same God that witnessed your marriage is now witnessing what you are doing to destroy your home and with it your nation.

Malachi makes sure they know that this was a great sin in the eyes of God. They had a legal binding covenant that had started in the Synagogue when the parents had pledged their daughter to a man, and the priests had verified the relationship at each step, and finally God had been the witness to what had happened. In fact, **Genesis 31:50** and **Proverbs 2:17** both speak of the role that God has in the marriage of two God-fearing believers.

I do not think that divorce is the great signal for end-time concerns in our nation. Divorce is so much broader today—available for men and women and it covers so many aspects of lives that it would be hard to even find out the real reason for a number of divorces in the United States. One obvious thing shows in the statistics: for the last ten years, as the number of marriages has declined significantly, the number of divorces has dropped at an even larger percentage.

But I do worry about our nation walking away from the Christian heritage that it was founded upon. The American constitutional system was the first government devised by men that was based upon Biblical principles. The process was marked by checks and balances so that no one person, all people were flawed by a sin-nature, would be able to dictate and control the land. The move from the idea of a family or a person having such extensive knowledge and power that they deserved to govern was thrown right out when they rejected having a king.

The American colonists rebelled against a king and they had no intention of replacing the British monarch with an American one. What is amazing is that they did not proceed in establishing an oligarchical form of government, in which the rich and educated would lead the land, since most of the leaders of the American Revolution were wealthy aristocrats.

But the vast majority of them were also devout Christians, and they were fully aware of the biblical teaching about the fallen nature of man. Accordingly, our Founding Fathers did not trust anyone with power—not even themselves. They then proceeded to construct a government that would limit the use of power.

Equally important was their conviction that the Word of God constitutes a higher law to which all men and governments are subject and that the fundamental rights of Mankind are derived from the law and not from government. So, it became essential that they combined these thoughts and Thomas Jefferson expressed the blending in the Declaration of Independence:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.”

So, our Founding Fathers did not establish a one family rule, nor did they establish an oligarchy in which the educated and wealthy would rule, nor did they establish a democracy like the French had just done because they felt if the common man had total rule it would become a mobocracy. So, they established a Republic with a huge number of checks and balances. When we became a nation and the constitution was ratified the nation had only one elected office. The local representative to the House of Representatives was elected by the people of that area, but senators were appointed by the Governor and the president has never been elected by a direct general election. It now seems that the Christian heritage is free territory to attack. One recent president often said, “We are no longer a Christian nation.” True, he did not spell out what he meant, but the very words are ominous when you think of the heritage of our American constitutional system.

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If we continue to break covenants with our Christian heritage and decide that we are a non-religious land with an amoral value system, won't our flood of tears on the altar of God also ring hollow. Why should God bless a nation that no longer acts or thinks that He exists and instead worships power, wealth, and prestige.

I think the message of blessing the faithful, spelled out clearly in Malachi applies to all of us. Keep your faith and keep the covenants of God and you will be blessed with the greatest blessings that God can give to a person.

Next week, we will look at **Malachi 2:17-3:4**, “God gets our attention to Touch our Heart”. The people of Judah during the time of Malachi had become very good at putting words together that excused their actions, blessed what they wanted to do, and eliminated what God had written. Their words were plentiful but their actions were wrong and that made their words also wrong.

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Malachi 2:17-3:4 GOD WANTS OUR HEART - OUR WORDS, NOT AS IMPORTANT!

[Malachi 2:17- 3:1-4 NIV] 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?"¹ "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. 2 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.

Malachi was written to warn the people of Judah that the Great King—we now know that is King Jesus will return to judge the unrighteous but more importantly, to bless and reward those who have remained faithful and followed His directions. God stays when all else leave. His faithful are never alone, because He is always there to guide them. However, we see that when we reject His covenants, we either create our own or make a covenant with someone else other than God Jehovah. That is disastrous for us and hurtful for God. We cannot change the rules He has given and expect Him to consider us still faithful to Him.

When I first got started in organized sports, it was not uncommon for one of our assistant coaches to tell us several times in a practice, “Put your heart into it.” Now he did not mean that literally—no way we could have put our physical heart into anything. But what he meant was, give it all you got, try your hardest and play with extreme determination. I have found that to be great advice in all of the endeavors that I have done as a teen and adult.

When I felt the call of God to go to the city and start a new congregation—like Paul did where he went to the urban centers of his day—I felt I should do the same—I had no idea how much of our family security I was giving up. In the established Church I had always had a house furnished or an allowance that would take care of my home. In the established Church we had buildings, grounds, traditions, and leaders that I could immediately tap into and build upon. In the established Church we had a reputation and a way to relate to the community. But answering the call to start a new Church in Indianapolis now called “The Creek” and in those days, “Indian Creek Christian Church”—I had none of those: no guarantee of a home—just a limited salary where I was to provide a home, no buildings—just a run-down school that we rented only on Sunday, and no respect or reputation of any kind in the neighborhood. I really knew what it meant to “Put your heart into it.” It was my time to respond in faith and commitment to a call that God had placed on my heart and gradually upon the heart of my family. It was a time to trust that God had not made a mistake when He touched my heart to go to the urban areas and start a Church—as it turned out—start two churches—one in Indianapolis and the other in Phoenix.

It was the hope that came from that trust that led us through some of the early difficulties of starting a ministry with no people, limited support and a skeptical community. I want us to focus tonight on why God wants our heart and why He still says to all of us, “Put your heart into it.” It is the real basis of our hope—since hope is actualizing what you believe but cannot see!!!

Hope—it is something all of us need. It is essential to life and without it, people descend into deep depression, more and more commit suicide, and some simply lie down and die. During the Holocaust, Viktor Frankl, who later became world renown as a psychiatrist, was a prisoner in one of the Nazi death camps. He observed that

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every year as Christmas approached, hope would sweep the camp that the prisoners would be released on Christmas day. It was an irrational hope, but it was hope. Then, when Christmas would come and go without a release, hundreds of prisoners would just lie down and die. Without hope, they could not live. Frankl concluded, “It is a peculiarity of man that he can only live by looking to the future.”

Our world desperately needs hope in these end times. We live in a world of increasing fears: fear of the COVID plague, fear of economic collapse, fear of terrorism, fear of social and racial unrest, fear of a nuclear holocaust, fear of war, and the fear of life and death. Our nation needs hope. Our economy has not recovered from the close-down of COVID, people are still without jobs, many small and large businesses and corporations have declared bankruptcy, many seniors have lost their retirement funds, nature seems to have gone haywire and people are wondering just how deep these series of events will drag down our country and our world.

Everywhere people are looking for hope, and that includes Christians. You might think well Christians are the only ones who have hope. As true as that might be as a statement, every crisis reveals that many Christians put their hope in the things of the world and often cannot express much of a spiritual hope beyond the vague statement— “*My hope is that I will go to heaven.*” I do not feel that all believers have, “*Put their heart into it.*” Maybe not even completely given their heart to Jesus.

When you read the **I Corinthian 13** chapter, the “*Love Chapter of the Bible*” you see that Paul ends that great poem with these words, “*There are three things that remain: faith, hope and love, and the greatest of these is love.*” It is not hard to make the case that we hear hundreds of sermons in a lifetime on faith and even more on love, but not very many are ever preached on hope. Why is hope ignored that much? I think it is because hope is directly related to our future and our knowledge of Bible prophecy. Stop and think with me for a moment. What is your hope? How would you explain it to an unbeliever? Could you get beyond the words, “My hope is that I will go to heaven?”

I want to take some time tonight and share why we all have great hope and why we can, “*Put our heart into it*” serving the Lord and trusting our future to Him.

1. **We won't just sleep**—be out of existence for a while. There is nothing in the Bible about ‘soul sleeping.’ When we die our bodies do sleep metaphorically, but the spirit of the dead never loses their consciousness. When Jesus taught the story of Lazarus and the rich man in **Luke 16** and said both died and went to the abode of the dead—He showed that each man was fully conscious. They even carry on a conversation with each other. Their souls are not asleep. When John was taken up to Heaven in **Revelation 7**, and given a tour of the throne room of God, he writes: “*After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands and they cried out in a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb’*”: **Revelation 7:9-10**

They were fully conscious as they stood, waved palm branches with their hands and cried out and sang tributes to Jesus. John later tells us that these were martyrs of the Great tribulation. Just two of many examples in the Bible that show no one will experience ‘soul sleeping’ after this life.

2. **We will be in the presence of Jesus.** Paul declared that we will be fully conscious and interactive after death. In **II Corinthians 5:8** he wrote, “*to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord.*” He said the same thing to the believers in Philippi when he wrote in **Philippians 1:21-24**, “*For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two, I desire to depart*

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and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.” Paul did not expect to be in any other place than in the presence of Jesus upon his death. He would be with the Lord immediately.

3. **We will have a body that will be right for this intermediate time between our earthly life and the getting of our glorious eternal body.** The Bible does not talk about being disembodied spirits waiting for our glorious body and being some floating spirit until then. Immediately after death both the saved and the lost receive a body that is not of flesh—but it is not the glorious body we shall receive for eternal life that will come at our resurrection. It is what makes us recognizable and tangible.

It was how King Saul and the Witch of Endor were able to recognize Samuel when God sent him back from the dead to stop the wicked séance. It was how Peter, James and John could recognize Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration. It was how the people of Jerusalem were able to recognize the deceased saints that walked around Jerusalem after the death of Jesus on the cross, **Matthew 27: 32-33.**

4. **We will have a glorious body that will last for eternity given to us by Jesus.** When Jesus returns the Bible says He will bring with Him the spirits of the saved—**I Thessalonians 4:13-14.** He will resurrect their bodies in a great miracle of re-creation in the twinkling of an eye. He will reunite the spirits with their bodies, **I Thessalonians 4:15-16** and those still alive will be able to fly to the Lord and meet Him in the air in a transformed eternal body.
So, the old saying that, *“There are two things in this life that no one can avoid—death and taxes”* is a wrong statement. The only thing we cannot avoid is taxes and more taxes. A whole generation of believers will avoid death—those living when Jesus returns to this earth. It is no wonder that Paul then writes, *“Therefore, encourage one another with these words.”* **I Thessalonians 4:18.**
5. **We will have a body like the body of Jesus for heaven.** **Philippians 3:20-21** says, *“Who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”* John tells us almost the same thing in **I John 3:2-3**, *“Dear friends now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him, purify themselves, just as he is pure.”*

Why do we have great hope: we will not lapse into a time of unconsciousness or soul sleeping; we will not be disembodied spirits as we await our eternal bodies—we will have a body, and we will be engaged in meaningful activities for eternity—worship and service. (No lounging on clouds, playing harps and crooning a tune) What we will do will be both edifying and fulfilling. No one will be bored any time after we die.

As we saw last week, the people Malachi wrote his letter too had lost their hope and they were turning to many other things to try and restore the pleasure and joy in their life. They had quit living by the covenants of God and had made their own series of covenants that they lived by. These were not right and they were causing many harmful things for their nation. God no longer had their heart and the idea of *“Put your heart into it and serve God Jehovah”* was as popular as a workout session at a fancy ball. They did not have God in their heart and God did not have a control of their life so they stooped to words. You might wonder why say, stoop to words—because they now blamed God and whined to Him because life was not going the way they wanted. They were not getting the blessings that they wanted and, in their mind, it was all God’s fault.

Why does God want your heart—and feels that our words are not as important?

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1. **Because, when your heart is not centered in God, you are easily discouraged. *Malachi 2:17*.** It becomes easy to lose your faith in God when you lose your respect and awe of God and refuse to give Him your heart. This group of people challenged the moral government of God. They declared that He was unfair and unreasonable and had gotten everything confused and wrong. What were their charges against God?

- a. First, the charge of cynical people. They did not want to do what God had commanded so God never fully occupied the Temple they had built for Him—we know that this is true—because the Shekinah Glory of God which closed down the Temple of Solomon for a short time never came on this Temple when they dedicated it. The people did not put their heart into it, they had not given great offerings to make the Temple a special building and they did as they pleased regardless of the teachings of the Bible.

So, it was God’s fault—they said! Cynical people always have someone to blame and these people took the blame and placed it all on God. They said that God only blessed the evil—in fact, they said that God went so far as to say that the evil people were really good and gave them all the good blessings.

When we are in a cynical mood or even a cynical period of our life it is easy to do the same thing. We hunt up illustrations and justifications of what we think is misplaced justice and throw those at God as if we were exactly right. We point out how the innocent are hurt, killed and humiliated while the wealthy, powerful and guilty are blessed and get more and more.

It is not possible for God to have your heart and you be cynical towards God. It does not work. James said it well in James 3—the same well cannot give our good fresh water and poisonous water at the same time. James goes ahead and says the same mouth cannot both curse and praise God and be right. If you or someone you know has a cynical streak in them, pray for God to remove it and change that because it always leads people away from God

- b. Second, the charge of skeptics and unbelievers.

They said that the God of justice had abandoned their nation. He had left and there was no justice left anymore in their nation. They just said this because this was their way of pleading their innocence to Malachi about what he wrote. They had no intention taking right and wrong seriously. They just used words to justify what they wanted to do and how they were doing it.

Talking to a real skeptic is like having a discussion with a brick wall. No matter what you say, demonstrate in your life or share the words of the Bible, the skeptic has a negative way of redirecting your words to show that it does not apply to them. They have been mistreated and God should have done something to either prevent it or redirect it—it is not right and the justice that God promises never comes. They think this charge against God frees them from any responsibility or even any punishment that might come their way, because they have demonstrated that it was the fault of God—not theirs.

If you have a skeptical streak in you or you see it in someone you love, it is not as fatal as cynicism, but it takes you down a descending road. The person who is skeptical towards God will often be skeptical towards their mate, their family, their co-workers, and even the ones who take care of them—mailmen, barbers, nail saloon workers, cooks and waiters/waitresses, etc. They just lump all humanity into one basket and speak of how inept or dishonest or ineffective they are. They are miserable people to be around. Pray that God will convict them of how unreasonable they are---or they will not die as very lonely people.

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1. **God wants your heart because when it is not centered in God, you will not properly fear the right things or understand the spiritual world around you.**

Malachi 3:1-3a. On your own you do not always think clearly about spiritual matters. God did not want the listeners to think they would have no notice of His coming as the Messiah, so He tells them that He will send a messenger. Now a messenger was usually who announced the king and his coming and who prepared the people for what was coming. We know from the Old Testament that this person who was like Elijah was John the Baptist. **Isaiah 40:3-5** and **Malachi 4:5** clearly tell us who it was. But so, does the New Testament: all four Gospels, **Matthew 3:5; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4** and **John 1:23** say John fulfilled this prophecy. **Luke 1:17** tells us the angel told the father of John the Baptist, Zechariah, “*And he will go on before the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the parents to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous—to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*” And John did. He was an evangelist that excited his nation and they all came out of the city into the wilderness to hear him and to hear his word. His preaching message was blunt and to the point, the people needed to repent and turn from the evil that they were doing or they would fall under judgment when the Messiah came.

John also announced to the world who Jesus really was, “*Behold the Lamb of God who takes away sin;*” he baptized Jesus and gave Jesus the pick of his disciples to form the twelve. Most that rose to prominence: Peter, James, John, Andrew, Philip and Nathaniel came from the disciples of John. Jesus actually quotes this verse in **Matthew 11:10** to tell His followers that John the Baptist was the fulfillment of **Malachi 3:1**.

When the messenger had completed his task, then the Messiah would come and He would bring with Him a new covenant, a covenant of peace, **Hebrews 9:15; 13:20**. But for peace to be real, it would be just and righteous. So, the Messiah would bring judgment to the evil unbelievers but would also include those who said they belonged to Him but did the opposite of what He had taught them.

The way that He will purify them is to remove the dross from the silver and gold so the silver and gold will be pure—He will refine those who need to be purified. But He will also purify those who have become impure in what they do and how they do it—He will be a “fuller”—one who washes and thickens cloth with strong lye soap. He will cleanse and purify but not necessarily destroy, because His goal will be to purify the Levite priests so that with “clean hands and a pure heart” they may offer praise and thanksgiving as part of the priesthood under the New Covenant, **1 Peter 2:5,9**. Accepting Christ as the Messiah, they will become ready and able to be a part of the glorious kingdom of God in Christ.

Without giving our heart to Jesus, we will not be prepared to sort and sift through all the spiritual signs of the times and find the answers that God has for us. But when He has our heart, and we give every thought and decision to Him—He will guide us in the way that is right.

I am fascinated that God did not give up on these priests that were abusing the Covenant of God and misinterpreting it in a way that violated the very covenants they were called to keep. His mission even in coming would be to purify and cleanse them so they would be a vital part of His mission for the world.

It is easy to dislike the discipline of God—Hebrews tells us that all discipline feels unpleasant for a time, but the end result is always worth the unpleasantness. God wants to equip His people with clean hands and pure hearts today and to do that He needs to have our hearts.

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I do not know if we will be here to see all the spiritual signs that will be a part of the end days but they are a mixed bag, and could be confusing for those who have not given their heart to Jesus.

Negative signs:

- a. False Christs and Prophets will form cultic groups, **Mat. 24:5, 11, Mark 13:6, 21-22**; and **Luke 21:8**
 - b. Apostasy will be rampant in the church, **II Thess. 2:3; II Tim 3:5**
 - c. Widespread heresy—misuse of doctrine in the church, **II Tim. 4:1-4**
 - d. A movement toward a one world religion, **Rev. 1:7**
 - e. Persecution of true believers, **Mat. 24:9-10, Mark 13:9, 11-13, Luke 21:12-19**
- 2. Outbreak of demonic and occultic activity, I Tim. 4:3**
But there will also be great positive spiritual signs:
- a. An outpouring of the Holy Spirit, **Joel 2:28-29**
 - b. Revival of Davidic worship, **Psalms 150**; and **Amos 9:11**
 - c. Worldwide evangelism, **Mat. 24:14; Mark 13:10**
 - d. Great understanding of Biblical prophecy, **Daniel 12:4, 8-9**

We will need a pure heart and the discernment of the Holy Spirit in us to make the right choices in being part of the spiritual victories that the Lord has designed and not the spiritual disasters that will infiltrate the end times. Letting God have your heart will move you right into the place you need to be for that discernment to take place. It will not be a time for each person to decide what they want to do, but a time when we will need the leadership of God as He directs us.

The result of that purification and refinement is that people will do what is a blessing for them and a blessing to God.

- 4. God wants your heart, because when it is centered on God you do the things that please God. Malachi 3:3b-4**

Jesus put it very clearly when He was addressing a problem in His day. The problem, God had commanded that the people take care of their mother and father in their old age but they devised a law where they were declaring huge amounts of their possessions as dedicated to God and they legally did not have to use them in the care of their parents. In other words, they took the Covenant of God about care of believer's parents and made a new covenant so they could be exempt from any real care of their parents but only had to offer small insignificant help.

Jesus said, *“You hypocrites, Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you: ‘These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain, their teachings are merely human rules.’ Jesus called the crowd to him and said, ‘Listen and understand, what goes into someone’s mouth does not defile them, but what comes out of their mouth, that is what defiles them.”* **Matthew 15:7-11**

Just like the people Malachi wrote to and Jesus spoke to, the same principle is still true today. When the heart is not pure then the words that come out of the mouth are also not pure. So, maybe the first thing the coach should have told us is: “Put your heart into this sport—so you can put your heart into what you are doing!”

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Give your heart to Jesus and He will direct how you are to use that heart for your blessing and His glory. Why give your heart to Jesus—because He is the source of our hope.

5. **We will have a glorious body like Jesus one day and that is the final reason for our hope and giving Jesus our hearts.** The resurrected body of Jesus was similar to our present body in many respects, but there were some big differences. Jesus seemed to have a different dimension to His body that allowed him to pass through the wall and into a locked room and He could move from one place to another instantly. His disciples were so started and frightened by His ability to vanish and reappear suddenly at another place that they thought they were seeing a spirit. But Jesus countered that idea immediately by telling them, *“Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have,”* **Luke 24:39**. When the Bible says *“that our glorified bodies will be ‘spiritual’ in nature”*, **I Corinthians 15:44**, it does not mean we will be ethereal spirits. It says our natural body will be raised a spiritual body, not a spirit. We will still have a body, but it will no longer be controlled by the sin nature of our flesh. NO, it will be a body given completely to the control of the Holy Spirit.

One last thing I want to leave with you about our hope fulfilled, when we give our hearts to Jesus: our glorified bodies will be perfect bodies. That means *“the blind will see, the deaf will hear, the lame will walk, and the mute will speak.”* Those with mental impairment will have healed minds, **Isaiah 29:18-19, 32:3-4, and 35:5-6**. There will no longer be any pain or death, **Revelation 21:4**. God will wipe away every tear and there shall no longer be any mourning, crying or pain, **Revelation 21:4**.

My final advice, *“Put your heart into it!”*, and you will have the joy that come from serving the Lord the way He designed us to serve and I promise you the hope for the future will become much more alive, exciting and real to you. This life will no longer seem like all there is and your eternal life with Jesus will move from a *“Oh, I’ll think about that when the time comes”* to *“I know I will never have a step of the rest of my life—now and eternally that will confuse, frustrate or upset me! I will always be in the hands of the Lord.”* Let’s not just use our words to honor our God—let’s give Him our heart!

Next we will study **“God Gets our Attention to Give us Grace and Mercy” Malachi 3:5-7** As disappointing and dreary as the history of Judah is—how many times have you read through an Old Testament Book and said, these people are dolts—they just never get it and repeat the same mistakes over and over. I especially have felt that when they go from a good king to a bad king for over 200 years. But there is a silver lining in that dreary story: God stays faithful when Judah does not. God’s history with Judah ought to encourage everyone of us. He never gave up and He never gives up on you.

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Malachi 3:5-7 GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION—TO GIVE US MERCY AND GRACE

[Malachi 3:5-7 NIV] 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. 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 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?'

Malachi was written to warn the people of Judah that the Great King—we now know that is King Jesus, will return to the judge the unrighteous but more importantly, to bless and reward those who have remained faithful and followed His directions. We see two wonderful traits in our three verses that bless us about our God who stays.

1. He never changes so the opportunities He gives to one He will give to all.
2. God does not give up on someone as long as there is hope they will change.

However, those who falsely accuse God about not keeping His end of the covenant will be under scrutiny by God about how they have kept His covenants. Jesus stated that very clearly, *"The judgement you use to judge others will be the judgement used to judge you."* We cannot accuse God of not staying just because we do not like what is happening in our life unless we are living life in a way that follows what God has said are His covenant agreements.

The irony of the passage we are studying tonight cannot be avoided. It could be ripped out of the thoughts and discussions of many in our nation at this very time. They are sick of the weather disturbances, the plague of Corona Virus, the tensions in our nation, and the lingering problems with getting all of the economy moving for everyone. I know we have many who feel that God has just left us on our own, they may not even believe in God in a meaningful way, or are upset that God has not solved some of the problems that we now face. When people of faith state their commitment to the things that God has said are important for all—the critics of God and His spokespeople do not respond with a measured or reasonable statement, but instead emotionally refer to the fact that they are people of faith and it is an insult to them that you question the depth of their faith.

Meantime, the Judeo-Christian values that we have known all of our life are on a steady path of erosion and in their place are many values that are so foreign to the Bible that in another generation we would have called them heresy and blasphemy. So, we change the covenants to fit what we want and the way we want and chide God for not going along and blessing us just how we want.

Humanism has grown so strong in our nation that many now feel we must just take all situations in our own hands and find a way that government can solve them for us. They are frustrated with how long God takes to solve the things that upset them and how disappointed they are in all who do not accept their new moral system. One clear fact from the Old Testament and the New Testament also is that when people looked to government to solve their problems instead of turning to God, the solutions were never completely right and things just got worse.

References that were made to God in presidential elections just 20 years ago are now made to science. Science has become the ultimate source of facts to solve the arguments and problems. But we all know that science just states facts and does not make moral judgments. Before we as Christians all hop on the 'Science is King bandwagon' let me remind you that no one exalted science more than the German Nazi machine of 100

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years ago. They put huge sums of money and research into genetics which became one of their justifications for genocide—they said that science proved that there were superior and inferior races as well as superior and inferior people; they bred together the finest Aryan women and Aryan men in Germany to enhance the super-race but found the children were not clones of their ideal body-model parents but often did not even have the characteristics they valued; they invested heavily in war machines—boats, planes, tanks, and other materials far beyond the capability of any other nation because they assumed they could fight wars on multiple fronts and they would overpower any other force; they led the way with experimental medicines, experimental surgeries, and other health initiatives that led to huge numbers of people they deemed inferior being killed by their research; and the list is enormous. They considered themselves as the smartest nation ever and yet were morally devoid enough to take human skin and make lampshades, extract all the gold out of the teeth of the people they were gassing and burning in the furnaces, and used other body parts as they wanted and needed. When science is exalted without any moral framework—a menacing force of evil is the result. Science out of control is more of a weapon of hideous proportions than an answer.

God has turned His face again and again when it comes to His people. We see the God of the Old Testament coming and rescuing Judah over and over. Numerous prophets, numerous leaders, miracles in wars, escapes, and saving the nation are very common all over the Old Testament; yet, the people accuse God of leaving them and making them survive on their own.

It is so hypocritical. Humans have created a series of sayings, proverbs, and expressions to show that you are foolish or even stupid to keep letting people abuse you. The most famous to me is one that is 365 years old: *“Fool me once shame on You, fool me twice, shame on me.”* But the list is endless: *“Don’t be a sucker.” “He treats you like he is a used car salesman.” “Stand up for yourself.”* We as a human race are very eager to not let someone take advantage of us over and over; but God even when His people broke the covenant would still send a rescue line, throw out a life saver, or send just the right person to lead His nation back to Him. That kind of unqualified love is Divine.

Why would God be so persistent in getting our attention to give us grace and mercy? Because that is who God is. We all are enthused by the verse **John 3:16**, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Rightly so, but the very next verse explains the depth and persistence of this love, **John 3:17** *“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

That is what Malachi is trying to explain to the readers of his book in the passage that we are studying tonight. He answers the question that was posed in **Malachi 2:17**— *“where is the God of justice?”* The God of justice is about to show up and He will be ready to judge those who have not kept His covenants-- Malachi says God will start by judging the things in Judah that were causing the nation to collapse.

- 1. When God comes—either in Christ, the Holy Spirit, angels, or even designated people, the first thing that happens to get attention that leads to mercy and grace are that God judges and stops the things that have the most negative influence in the land.**

Malachi 3:5A says, *“So, I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers. . .*

Sorcerers had tremendous power over people who believed that they were able to tap into special powers and either reveal the future or cast spells that would control the future. The fear of the unknown has always been a strong fear for most people. We have seen in the Corona Virus Plague that the unknown has multiplied many fears and magnified many situations. The rise and fall of the people catching COVID has alternately

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made people feel more relaxed or more frightened. Sorcery and all branches of the occult have always been some of the main tools that Satan uses to control people in his kingdom. **Deuteronomy 18:10-12** spells out many of the arms of sorcery that kept people under the control of the Devil and his imps: *“Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire—(primarily the main sacrifice of the god Molek), who practices divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord, because of these same detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you.”*

God does not want pretenders controlling the lives of people and that is exactly what sorcerers are: they are people who pretend to have more control over people than they really have. Most of the power they have is the power of suggestive implementation that becomes self-fulfilling when people believe what has been done or said is significant. All areas of sorcery are a work between humans and devils, demons or imps. It is not the dead that mediums consult, but simply an evil spirit that directs the people to do what the devil would want them to do. There is not an area of the occult that does not exult Satan and his legions of demons.

The effects of the occult and sorcery will always be a diminishing of the power of God in the land and an increase of the influence of evil. When God is getting attention to bring mercy and grace, He will first eliminate the influences that will keep people from accepting His grace and mercy.

Adulterers in the time of Malachi had a double negative effect on the land of Judah. First, they took the people away from the Godly commitments they had made to each other and second, they introduced idolatry into the land. God will restore a commitment to family, marriage, and relationships when He is trying to give someone mercy and grace. His desire is never to cause harm to His God ordained family structure and bond. The book of Malachi ends with the promise of God to send *‘one like Elijah’* before the day the Lord comes and the effort of this prophet will be to turn the hearts of the parents back towards their children and to turn the hearts of the children back towards their parents. The bond of family has always been one of the greatest ways that God touches our hearts to show us that mercy and grace are for the sinner and the rebellious.

Perjurers are those who do not follow the Ten Commandments, “You shall not bear false testimony against your neighbor,” (Exodus 20:16) God will judge those who lie about each other because they will eventually destroy not only the judicial system of a nation, but all unity and teamwork. If you cannot trust what your neighbor will say about you is the truth and what they even swear in a court is a lie and not the truth, then you have no community left. It is a short series of downward steps to the elimination of that community or nation.

2. When God comes—the second thing that will happen to get attention that leads to mercy and grace is that God judges and stops the social injustice that turned a nation into class warfare, and was destroying the unity and cohesiveness of a nation. *Malachi 3:5b*

People who oppress others no longer fear God. They might believe in God in their minds and insist that they are strong Christians, but they no longer fear God. The commands of God do not have power over what they think and what they do. Their power over others allows them to think that somehow, they were given this power to use as they wished. They follow a pattern of oppression that is both traceable and predictable. Those who do not fear God and are in power over another person always make sure that they do not pay any wages higher than what they have to. They are selfish and make sure that their pockets are lined with everything possible and if that means they can suppress the wages of their workers and pocket the money for themselves—they will. When God comes to offer mercy and grace, He will move against those who mistreat the widow and take advantage of the orphan and even the single parent families. God has a special heart for widows and the Bible often tells us how we are to treat the widow. It involves sacrifice and commitment to the widow and it certainly never tells any of us that we can take advantage of a widow. The same is true of

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those who are orphaned and those who are raised by a single parent. The fatherless and the orphan have a special place in the heart of God and He will judge those who mistreat them. It is a terrible sign of how deeply a nation has fallen when they are legally permitted to take advantage of the vulnerable in any way. God condemns such behavior and lifts up those who take care of the widows and orphans as being Godly people in how they live.

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after the orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” James 1:27

I spoke earlier about those who oppress others no longer fear God. Fear in this instance is to “stand in awe of something.” It is commonly what we call today respecting something or someone. When a nation no longer has respect for God and what He thinks and says, they no longer feel any restraints against evil. People become objects to use and get money from and not brothers or sisters in the Lord.

When God comes to offer mercy and grace, He will judge those who mistreated the foreigners in the land. The Lord carefully laid out a plan for the foreigners that were in their country. They were to be treated with the same rules, laws, and kindnesses that the Jews were given. *“Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt.” Exodus 22:21*

It is at this point that many become very concerned. They know that Jesus is coming and with Him he will bring His judgment and since they have not always done what is right—they worry about what that means to them.

But we need to realize that if we have kept this one Covenant of God— “We have accepted that Jesus Christ is both our Lord and Savior and we have covenanted or accepted that He has lived a life of perfection and has become the perfect substitute for our sins”—we do not need to fear any judgment.

At the time of the Rapture, both the living and dead in Christ will receive their glorified bodies. Then we will be in Heaven with the Lord. This will be a time of our judgment, but it is not judgment over heaven or hell— eternal destiny—WE ARE ALREADY IN HEAVEN--it is sealed you are in heaven with Jesus; but to determine our degrees of reward. Each of us will stand before the judgment seat of Jesus, often referred to as the Bema Seat of Judgment, *I Corinthians 3:10*, to be judged on how we used our spiritual gifts to advance His Kingdom, *II Corinthians 5:10*. Our works will be judged as to how many, how good, and how genuine was they were. Some will be embarrassed as their works are all burned up as self-serving or selfish; but others will receive great rewards.

REWARDS will include positions of honor and ruling during the Millennial reign, *Luke 19:11-27*. Several will be crowns—undefined as to what exactly a heavenly crown is.

1. A **Crown of Righteousness** will be given to all who lived in daily anticipation of the return of the Lord *II Timothy 4:7-8*
2. A **Crown of Life** will be given to those who stayed faithful when persecuted *James 1:12*
3. A **Crown of Glory** will be given to elders and pastors who were faithful *I Peter 5:4*
4. A **Crown of Rejoicing** will be given to those who were soul winners *Philippians 4:1*
5. An **Imperishable Wreath** will be given to those who exercise self-control, *I Corinthians 9:25*

While these judgments and rewards are being handed out even the clothing will indicate the degrees of the reward and will reflect *“the righteous acts of the saints.” Revelation 19:1-6* It reminds me of a University Graduation Ceremony. Some will have honor tassels, some special awards, some different colored gowns,

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hoods, and stripes, but all will be graduating. It will be a time when the Lord is able to personally say to us, “*Well done good and faithful servant, you were faithful over what I gave you.*”

At the end of this time of reward and judgment, the entire host of believers in heaven with Christ will set down and celebrate our union with the Bridegroom, Jesus. It is called the Marriage Supper of The Lamb, **Revelation 19:9** and it will be a time of unparalleled celebration, **Revelation 19:1-4**.

This is the plan that God has for each and every one of His creation, but it will be realized only by those who accept the covenant He wants to make with you. Take your sins and give you eternal life through the perfect life and sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, His Son. So, Malachi has one more point to tell us about the coming of the Lord. He answers the charge of the Judeans— “*Where is the God of justice?*” by telling them how Jesus will come and purge the land of the evils that force other people away from God and then gives them a grand and glorious thought:

3. God will call everyone back to the Covenants He first established so they can come back to Him and receive His mercy and grace.

God does not change and He will wait patiently for the prodigal to return to Him as long as there is still hope that the prodigal can and will return. It is not injustice on God’s part as the people were saying, but it is the merciful patience of God that allows people to live their lives and make their choices.

In the familiar story of the prodigal son in **Luke 15**—the Father always worried about what situation his wayward son might have fallen into. Otherwise, he would not have gone to search the road each day hoping to see His son, but He never left His home to go and find the boy and drag him home. He waited for the son to realize how bad his life had gotten when he made all the decisions and the son really decided to go home and put the decision making for his life into the hands of his dad. It happened when the son said: “*I will be a servant for my father, because even his servants live better than I do.*” He made the humble decision to put his life under the control of his father in a greater way than the father had ever controlled him before. The father accepted part of that decision—he welcomed the boy back into the home and under his direction and control, but he did not allow the son to be a servant and no longer a son. When the son wanted to humble himself to the point of being a servant for his dad, the father took him back as a son and said my son which was dead is now alive again. When we seek God for salvation—He is just the same as He always was—He does not change and He also welcomes us back, restored us as a Child of God, **John 1:12**, and gives to us the inheritance of all that a son would get but a servant would never receive. God calls the people of Judah back to Him. He makes a very accurate statement that as soon as the nation was born, “*the agreement between God and Abraham*”—literally a covenant between God and Abraham to have a special nation through which the Messiah would come, God had watched them rebel. There are very few chapters from the middle of the Book of Genesis to the end of Malachi in which God is not having to deal with the rebellion of His special people. But God kept His end of the covenant, He did not destroy the nation. It went from twelve tribes to one tribe--Judah which encapsulated the tribe of Benjamin, but it was still a nation. In fact, it was only one large tribe when Jesus was born in Judah but raised in a Galilean area considered a part of Syria and controlled by the Romans. Jesus did not even grow up in an area considered a part of Israel anymore. This reduced land was inhabited by Jews which were really Israelites but no one called them that anymore because now they were just the tribe of Judah. I cannot stress how insignificant they had become in the economic and political events of the day by the time Malachi wrote this book until 70 years after Jesus was born. Then they became even more insignificant. In AD 70 Rome destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the Temple of Zerubbabel and Herod. By AD 125 Rome had dispersed the Jewish citizens of Judah and banned them from coming back and living in the area

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and banned the name of the land as Judah or Israel. It also became an arm of Syria and the people who occupied it called themselves Syrians.

But then God had Malachi write this fabulous phrase of mercy, grace, forgiveness and restoration: *“Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord Almighty.” Malachi 3:7B.* We all know that the Bible has many end-time prophecies that talk about the restoration of Israel. Did you catch that—not the restoration of Judah—Israel had been destroyed as a country two thousand six hundred and ninety-eight years before it became a nation again. Think of the fact that this country did not exist for almost 2,700 years and yet God again and again spoke of the restoration of Israel in the last days. It is restored complete with Hebrew as the national language, Israeli coinage, stamps, and all the marks of any other independent nation.

The kicker is—when it became a country again, it was filled with atheists who came to Israel primarily because Hitler and Stalin had taught them, they did not have a safe home in Europe or Asia. They gathered back together for safety and to save their lives and God made them a nation again, and then He has been redeveloping their faith.

It truly is a matter of turning our heart to God to return to God. When we do that God will accomplish all else that needs to happen. God did not desert the nation of Judah nor did He change but when the people changed God had to touch their heart with mercy and grace to change their lives. Judah had not been faithful, yet God knew they could change and so He preserved them while Edom, *Malachi 1:1-3* had been unfaithful and God knew they would not change and they were destroyed.

What are some of those end-time prophecies about Israel—note these are not end-time prophecies for Judah apart from the other eleven tribes but all end-time prophecies have to do with all twelve tribes in the nation of Israel.

Our God, who never changes, spoke a covenant keeper for all of us:

“Return to me, and I will return to you’, says the Lord Almighty.” Here are 7 prophetic signs of Israel for the end-times. Each of these has been fulfilled in part or total.

1. Regathering of the people of Israel, *Isaiah 11:10-12, Ezekiel 37:1-12*
2. Re-establishment of the state, *Isiah 35:1,2, 7-8; Zechariah 12:1-6; and Matthew 24:32-35*
3. Reclamation of the land, *Isaiah 35:1-2,7; Ezekiel 36:34-35*
4. Revival of the language, *Zephaniah 3:9*
5. Resurgence of the military, *Zechariah 12:6*
6. Refocusing of world politics, *Zechariah 12:2-3*
7. Reoccupation of Jerusalem, *Zechariah 12:2-6*

God keeps His promises, He never changes and *“If we will return to God, He will return to us.”* God never pours out any wrath without warning because, *“He does not wish that any should perish, but that they all should come to repentance,” II Peter 3:9.* Jesus said that when we see all these signs come together, He will be ‘right at the door,’ ready to return *Matthew 24:33.* God is stating, Jesus is at the gate of heaven ready—the big question tonight is – *“Are you ready?”*

I would like to add one side note tonight. Recently we witnessed the signing of the Abraham Accord, a peace agreement between Israel and two Middle East States known as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain.

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First, these are not peace accords, Israel has not been at war with either of these nations, so technically they are normalization agreements. They do not guarantee peace in the Middle East but do guarantee that these three nations will start trade relations, tourism, and technological exchanges. They do not have a common border with Israel, are not a threat to Israel, and will never be. They are not a part of the sworn enemies of Israel: Lebanon, Gaza, Syria, and two non-Arab nations Turkey and Iran.

If this is not a peace accord that is mentioned in the Bible then what is the biblical significance of the Abraham Accord. I want to quote Amir Tsarfati of the ministry “Behold Israel”. He said, “I believe this accord sets the stage for the **Ezekiel 38-39 Gog-Magog War.**” According to **Ezekiel 38**, Israel must be safe, secure and prosperous. These Trump-negotiated deals are making Israel stronger in the Middle East and less of a controversial state. The Arabs are treating Israel less like it is an illegitimate state. Israel is being considered a fair player in the Middle East. The Arab countries are seeing the benefits of siding with Israel.

(Then he said) “May I add, all of this shift is in thanks to Barack Hussein Obama. The Iran Deal that he signed in 2015 basically backstabbed the Sunni countries such as Saudi Arabia. That’s when the Saudis, who are like the mother of all the other Gulf states, decided they must change the way they see Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was the only one who stood in Congress against President Obama and against his administration and spoke out against the Iran Deal. When the Saudis saw that, of course, they knew which ally to choose.”

We think it is just United States geopolitical moves, but they often are exactly what is needed to allow the prophetic pieces to fall into place. If all 7 of the prophecies about Israel are fulfilled—let me ask you a valid question tonight. Are you really ready for Jesus to come tonight?

Next we will look at another pivotal passage of Malachi, **Malachi 3:8-12**. In this passage Malachi tells us how to remove and reverse national curses. So, I have titled the study, “**God Tells Us How to Remove National Curses!**” Robbing God of power, prestige, direction and even support is dangerous. He is not forced to bless those who rob Him and try to destroy His influence. Share with me as I outline steps, we can take to help reverse some of the national curses that have fallen on our country.

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Malachi 3:8-12 GOD TELLS US HOW TO REMOVE NATIONAL CURSES!

[Malachi 3:8-12 NIV] 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. 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 floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it. 11 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. 12 "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi was written to warn the people of Judah that the Great King—we now know that is King Jesus, will return to judge the unrighteous but more importantly—to bless and reward those who have remained faithful and followed His directions. We see a clear principle that Malachi outlines for nations blessed by God in all of history. Do not rob God in any area and you will not be able to contain all the blessings that He has in store for you. Rob God in any area and you lose the blessings for that area and begin to receive curses. Rob God in many areas and the curses will overwhelm you. The kings and leaders of the world may conspire against God to break free of His laws and rules, ***Psalms 2:1-3***, but God merely laughs because He has enthroned Jesus on the seat of rule in Jerusalem, in the Millennial Kingdom, and Jesus will only declare the Lord’s decree, ***Psalms 2:4-6a***.

When I saw the line in verse nine of the scripture tonight, it really struck me. It says, “*You are under a curse—your whole nation---because you are robbing me.*” I quickly realized that had to be more than just not giving your tithes. After all, only a handful of nations have ever followed God so closely that the entire nation tithed to God. It must mean robbing God in any area will place you under a curse, if your area a nation that God has blessed!!

It was not hard to see the curses that we are under in the United States today:

1. We have a **curse upon our weather** and it is out of control in much of the nation—even extreme climate control changes will not guarantee that these natural events will pause or especially stop.
2. We are under a **curse of ethnic groups opposed to each other**; sexually defined groups extremely opposed to each other; the class warfare has grown more bitter; police vs citizens seem to be a present curse; the crime rate and severity of crime is at curse level; and the choice of future political systems for the United States has produced a series of three curses.
3. We have the **curse of pornography** flooding the world, produced in the United States under the guise of the First amendment freedom.
4. We have the **curse of drug and alcohol addiction** upon our land.
5. We have the **curse of the expulsion of Christian thoughts, values and the bible out of all public government directed institutions**.
6. Finally, we have the **curse of mental illness** now affecting, depending on the expert—one-third to one-fifth of the United States population. I will not speak to this tonight because I feel this is partially as a result of the other curses.

Sharon and I were visiting Flo and Darrell Harding this week and our discussion got back to how much different things are today than in our good old days. First, we focused on how carefree things were in the 1950’s: didn’t lock houses, cars, or even worry about things disappearing; people seemed kinder and much less confrontive;

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professionals like Doctors, Dentists, Tax Accountants, Lawyers were more accessible and more personable; people knew who you were in the smaller stores and often could help you get just what you wanted; traffic was slower, gas was cheaper, and almost everyone knew how to get their car running again if it had trouble; the waitress, servers and cooks often knew you by name and catered to your special tastes; children were not as publicly sassy or as difficult to teach; and most of all it did not seem like a daily crisis was always the order of the day.

What happened from 1950 to 2020? One thing for certain is that the nation did not slip from that was going well to what is now a curse upon the land in just one giant leap or one year. It took a myriad of small and large steps and often it took decades for things to disintegrate to where they are today. Those small steps often robbed God of a place He had in directing our nation and its future and each one took away some of the responsibility and power that we once gave to God and now we decided it should be our responsibility and our power. These steps were often small and seemed unrelated so we did not realize what had been lost and what had been put in its place and was now declared lawful and correct. We were chided if you were a strong Christian with phrases like: old-fashioned, fundamentalist, nonflexible, and fuddy-duddy. It was as though whatever was in place and working needed to be updated, modernized and have the stamp of the present put upon it.

A nation that was so thankful for God helping them survive the Great Depression and being on the victorious side of a World War where the odds were stacked against them; seemed to chip away at that faith one small decision at a time, until we truthfully could not claim that God was helping lead America anymore. It was only then that a larger part of our nation asked ourselves, are we really better off than we were before and the answer was NO.

But those who spoke about it were often unpopular because people did not want to hear warnings about their country and the direction that it was going. Even many Christians wanted to paint their view of the United States in patriotic colors and still pretend that the America of the 1950's was alive and well. It was not and it really is not now.

We tend to respond to the concerns of God's displeasure with our nation much like the people of Judah. We say in Christian circles, *“Never America—because we are a Christian nation.”* And in non-Christian circles it is not even a discussion. Most Americans do not believe in the Bible as the Word of God and the Christ of the Bible is just a part of the Christian religion to them. I have been amazed to hear three quotes from popes in the political advertisements of 2020 and each time it is really a quote of Jesus Christ that the Pope is using, but not one politician has said in the words of Jesus, but always in the words of Pope _____ and then gives the biblical quote.

The gradual evolution of anti-Christian laws and perverse and morally decrepit changes piled into a veritable onslaught against Christian morals and virtues. When Donald Trump campaigned in 2016 to ‘Make America Great Again’, he seemed to speak more of economy, the military, and trade agreements than following Biblical rules and teachings. There were and are several things that are anti-Bible and anti-God and they seem to be accepted and some even treasured at how open-minded we are:

1. The **gross apostasy in our Churches**: we have many Churches who now believe that the Bible is man's search for God and not the Divine Word of God given for mankind to find God and salvation; we have many churches that openly accept moral changes that are totally against what Scripture teaches; and we have many who see an ever-decreasing role of Jesus in the Church and a much greater focus on redefined love and political action.

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2. Our **legalization of the slaughter of babies in their mother’s wombs** including full term abortion. What began we were told as an attempt to keep women from being butchered and physically maimed by back street and alley abortionists has turned into abortion on demand at any time of the pregnancy. I think it will be just a short time of the new presidency, if the Democrats sweep the Presidency, Senate, and House that it will be illegal to publicly speak out against abortion, homosexuality, and other moral mistakes that our nation has adopted as the law of the land.
3. The **legalization of same-sex marriage**. The idea that homosexuality is only a Biblical apparition and that open-minded people would never oppose any part of the homosexual experience is the sentiment of the land as well as the law of the land. The only change I see in this area will be the restrictions including laws that ban any anti-homosexual talk of any type including the quoting of the Bible.
4. The **flooding of the world with violent, immoral and blasphemous movies, videos and television programs**. We are by far the greatest supplier of pornography for the world. Even ethnic pornography is often filmed and produced in the United States.
5. We have a **drug problem and the overwhelming addiction to drugs** in the United States is the constant ruin of thousands maybe millions of people and their input and influence.
6. We have been hell-bent through the courts and legislation to **kick God out of all aspects of public life**. God is unwelcome, in the name of fairness and democracy, in almost every public setting in our government, schools, and publicly controlled environments.

Did you ever stop and think that God may have permitted the Trump Administration to have such a strong economic growth for three years just to dramatize the destruction of it overnight. God may have wanted us to be fully aware that we are experiencing some of His discipline; but the problem is that most Americans have become so secular that they cannot perceive the spiritual any longer. So, they dismiss God’s discipline as, “*bad luck, climate change, and misdirected people.*”

The Bible, specifically the Apostle Paul prophesied that in the end-times men would love three things---self, money, and pleasure, ***II Timothy 3:1-5***. That is precisely where we are in America today. But God cannot be mocked and we do reap what we sow, ***Galatians 6***.

Let’s look at our study passage from Malachi tonight:

God had just proclaimed a great blessing for all believers of all time:

“Return to me and I will return to you says the Lord Almighty!” *Malachi 3:7*. The Scripture follows with a dialogue between the people and God. “*How are we to return—they ask?*” They are so used to their sins and the way they are doing things—they do not think they have anything to renounce and return to God.

So, God asks another question, “*Will a man rob God?*” To rob another person was a bad evil but to rob God was something that caught their attention. It seemed totally blasphemous to them---that they would rob God. They ask, “*How are we robbing God?*” God says, “*in the tithes and offerings that you had pledged to give me.*”

It is at this point that God says they are under a curse, and it a curse that is affecting their whole nation. The entire nation is suffering because the people are not keeping the covenant bond with God they made for tithing and offerings. In Judah this was not only the right thing to do religiously, it was the law of the land.

GOD POINTS OUT THREE THINGS THAT CONTROLS HOW HE RESPONDS TO THOSE WHO ARE ROBBING HIM.

1. **When a nation that has been blessed by God, robs God of honor that He should have, God withdraws the blessings that came with His special place of honor. *Malachi 3:8-9***

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For the people of Judah, they robbed God of the finances that they had promised to God. They were committed to tithe and give offerings to God and had said that very thing, but when the time came, they brought only part of the tithe and the offerings as we have seen were lame, blind, and diseased animals for sacrifice. The curse from God was clear—they failed to honor Him with their finances and He would not prosper their land with good crops. Rob God of finances and you will have fewer and fewer finances. If you plan to keep it all for yourself, you will have less and less to keep.

Let's take the five curses that I listed that I saw America experiencing today and trace how these might be because of robbing God of a place of honor:

- A. **The curse upon the weather of our land.** The Book of Romans states it as clearly as possible. God does have a special place of honor as creator of our world. It says, *“The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth of their wickedness, since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world God’s invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse.”* **Romans 1:18-20**

God sees the unwillingness of a majority in our land to acknowledge that He is creator and withdraws all the safeguards that He holds in His control of the weather. God has withdrawn His hedge of protection and lets unchecked nature do what it will.

- B. **The curse of factions, ethnic groups, and national control** *II Timothy 3:16-17* says, *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

When people no longer consult God in dealing with each other, they have removed God from the place of honor He has as the creator of humankind. We see it from the Tower of Babel on, man without God is always fighting, dividing and destroying. The curse of mankind and factions without God always leads to destruction.

- C. **The curse of America being the great distribution center of pornography** as well as immoral and violent movies, videos and magazines. *I Peter 2:11-12* says, *“Dear friends, I urge you, as foreigners and exiles, to abstain from sinful desires, which wage war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”*

Can you imagine the shame we have brought upon God by claiming to be this great Christian nation and yet supplying the world with the most immoral filth that is produced today? Do you see some hypocrisy in that?

When our nation legalized pornography under the First Amendment rights, they robbed God of the place He had had in influencing the moral agenda of our land and He has stepped back and let us decide morality in many areas. When a nation begins to worship the creation instead of the creator, God will lower the hedge a final time and deliver the nation over to a depraved mind. We chose this curse with our actions.

- D. **The curse of drug and alcohol addiction.** **Romans 1:28** says, *“Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.”*

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When you rob God of the position, He rightfully should hold in directing your life, you allow God to step back and let you do whatever you really want to do. Addictions and depravity will always follow.

- E. **The curse of removing the influence of God and His word from public settings. Romans 1:21-22a** says, *“For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for other images. . .”*

When we exalted humanism as a greater good than Christianity and worshipped money more than Jesus, we robbed God of the place He had in helping lead our nation. The result is public settings devoid of the influence of God. Morality that is now taught simply as the greater good and behavior guided and controlled by political correctness instead of Biblical principles. It is a curse because it continues to lead to a more morally depraved nation.

2. **When a nation that has been robbing God of His rightful position, restores God to that position—the blessings are more than a nation can contain. Malachi 3:10-11**

God told the people of Judah and us today how to remove the curse of God from your land. Restore God to the place of honor and power where He belongs and deserves and you will not be able to contain the blessings. God is saying here is how you return to me so I will return to you. Restore me to the rightful place I should have in your life and the life of your nation. For the people of Judah, it was an unwillingness to give what they had promised to God and the result was very puny and dismal yields for their crops. But God said, *“if you will restore me to the place of honor that I deserve you will be unable to store all the grain, wine, and produce that is harvested off of your farms and vineyards. It will be like I opened the windows of heaven, like a torrential rain and just poured out more blessings than you can ever imagine or store.”* And that is just the start: *“for I will also come back as your defender in the fields you have and will destroy the locust; prevent the hail from damaging your crops; keep the blight from landing on any of your plants; and control the mildew so that it never settles on your grapes and olives. You will have a crop like you could never believe. Just put me back in the rightful place where I belong in your life and quit robbing me of my prestige and power.”* My prayer tonight is that we seriously take this promise of God and apply it to our nation. I truly believe it is the only way that our national curses will be removed.

I love the promise that Solomon received from God after the Temple had been dedicated to the Lord:

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command locusts to devour the land or send a plague among my people. If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.” II Chronicles 7:13-14

I truly believe in that Scripture, but if you notice it is directed to believers to repent of their wicked ways and return to God and He will return to them. We have a much bigger task tonight than just praying for the forgiveness of our sins and the changes we need to make in our hearts.

We have the entire United States as a burden on our shoulders----we must pray that our nation will quit robbing God of the place of prominence and power that He should have and **“RETURN TO GOD!!!”** It is the only way to restore Biblical blessings on our entire nation. Pray that God will again be seen as the Creator of the world and all that is in it—so that the curse upon the land and our weather can be lifted.

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- A. Pray that the groups of our nation will come together under the leadership of Christ and see each other as truly brothers and sisters in Christ. Restore God to the arbitrator of relationships.
- B. Pray that God will again rule as the moral director for our nation and the United States pornography industry will be found to be unconstitutional and will be destroyed by the courts. That the freedom of the first amendment will not be a freedom to produce filth but a freedom to speak intelligently and respectfully about what you believe.
- C. Pray that God will again rule as the personal motivator to keep people away from addictions and that addictions will no longer be accepted as just one more medical problem and illness that we now have.
- D. Pray that God will be allowed back through Biblical principles as the prevailing concept of leadership in the United States and that humanism will be unseated as the order of the day. Pray that the name of God and Jesus will again be spoken in government agencies, in schools, in courts, in town meetings, in state legislatures, in national legislatures, and most of all by our leaders.

The result of these areas being returned to God and no longer robbing God of the rightful place He should have in each one is ----"WE WILL NOT BE ABLE TO CONTAIN OR STORE ALL THE BLESSINGS THAT WILL COME!"

God will once again fight our battles—and just as He powerfully helped defeat the Nazi war machine and stop the Japanese who through loyalty were sacrificing their lives in record numbers to destroy our troops, our boats, and our planes—God will again let this nation be great.

That is how we will make America great again—it will be by placing God back in the leadership we robbed from Him and allowing His principles and teachings to shape our policies and negotiations. It will be taking what has become a curse upon our land and restoring God to a place where it can and will turn to a blessing.

God started out this discussion by saying,

“Return to me and I will return to you says the Lord Almighty.”

(GOD GIVES ONE MORE BLESSING FOR A NATION THAT WILL QUIT ROBBING GOD)

3. A nation that restores God to the rightful place of power and authority that they have robbed Him of will be the jewel of ALL the nations and a land of unbelievable blessings and delights. *Malachi 3:12*

God had spelled out the place that He wanted Judah to have among the other nations: *“You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord’s hand, a royal diadem in the hand of the Lord. No longer will they call you Deserted or call your land Desolate, but you will be called Hephzibah---delightful—and your land Beulah—married, for the Lord will take delight in you, and your land will be married.” *Isaiah 62:3-4**

God does not expect to have the same relationship with the United States as He had with Judah; but the principle is the same—if we will restore what we have robbed from God—all the nations of the world will notice how God is blessing our land and we will become the darling of the nations. Our land and ours alone will be seen as the most delightful land in the world.

I recently read a quote from Jay Leno:

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“With hurricanes, tornadoes, fires out of control, mud slides, flooding, severe thunderstorms tearing up the country from one end to another, and with the threat of coronavirus and terrorist attacks, are we sure this is a good time to take ‘Under God’ out of the Pledge of Allegiance.”

Although I’m sure it was spoken tongue in cheek as humor---it is only funny because it is so obvious and true.

So, I am encouraging us to be activists—not so much in the political arena, because I do not feel we can find political solutions for our nation’s problems when our problems are rooted in the rejection of God, His Word, and His position of power and influence over our land. I do not know what is ahead of us with this upcoming election but I do know that if a nation that has been blessed by God, like our nation—does not acknowledge the role God has played and robs God of His rightful place—the results will be disastrous.

Pray for God to be restored to His rightful place—I honestly do not see either major political candidate capable of doing that, nor do I see either major political party capable of doing that—it will have to be the prayers of Christian believers all over this land.

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Malachi 3:13-15 GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION TO GUIDE TRUTH & TRUTH TELLING

[Malachi 3:13-15 NIV] 13 "You have spoken arrogantly against me," says the LORD. "Yet you ask, 'What have we said against you?' 14 "You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What do we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty? 15 But now we call the arrogant blessed. Certainly, evildoers prosper, and even when they put God to the test, they get away with it.' "

Malachi gives us another principle about God. Murmur against God and speak arrogantly and critically of God—and the blessings you so desperately want will be gone. God had given the positive principle to all of us: It is **Malachi 3:10** when God asks the nation to test Him by giving all of their tithes---You test God by doing what He asks and when you do the result is---you cannot contain the blessings. You speak arrogantly and hatefully towards God and you will not see any more blessings in that area of your life.

I am amazed at how often the people of God in the Old Testament were just plain mad at God. One of the things they often got mad about was this: they thought the wicked and sinful people were getting all the good blessings of God and that He never punished or stopped the sinful people---but just blessed them.

The irony to them was--they sacrificed a lot of fun and enjoyable things to follow Him and keep His stringent rules and yet He was not blessing them.

The **73rd Psalm** is written entirely about this subject: It starts:

“Surely God is good to Israel (we might say for today—to all of His believers). To those who are pure in heart.”

But then this Psalmist, Asaph—which simply means collector—so we might say a good person to use for a survey—he has gathered what others think and will now give you his thoughts based on all the input. He says:

“But as for me, my foot had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong, they are free from the common human burdens, they are not plagued by human ills. Therefore, pride is their necklace, they clothe themselves with violence. From their callous hearts comes iniquity, their evil imaginations have no limits. They scoff, and speak with malice, with arrogance they threaten oppression. Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth. Therefore, their people turn to them and drink up waters in abundance. They say, “How would God know? Does the Highest know anything?” This is what the wicked are like—always free of care, they go on amassing wealth.”

Asaph and those he surveyed had one great big problem: They thought all wicked people should fail miserably and immediately! When they did not fail and disappear as quickly as they thought they should—they decided that God didn’t know what was happening on earth---He was so out of touch that He was just ignorant of how prosperous the wicked people lived.

And I might add: --They literally thought “And that is a crying shame? God is that out-of-it—He doesn’t know who to bless!!”

But Asaph is not done whining yet: When he was caught up in this animosity towards God—it affected him with a “*poor me*” attitude. The Psalm says:

“Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure and have washed my hands in innocence. All day long I am afflicted, and every morning brings new punishments.”

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Asaph was depressed and he worked very hard at justifying why he should be depressed. God didn't care about him and how he was living for the Lord and in fact, God had allowed him to be afflicted and punished every day of his life. I have had some sour friends and church members in my life—but this little diatribe by Asaph is one of the most miserable I have heard.

It reminds me of the chorus of that old 1963 Rock 'N Roll song: “It's My Party” by Leslie Gore:

“It's my party, and I'll cry if I want to----Cry if I want to, cry if I want to----You would cry too if it happened to you.”

Now maybe that song sticks in my mind because that was the year that I met my beautiful wife, Sharon. We did have a few moments to cry—then and now--- but we have essentially been together ever since 1963—yes, that is 57 years!!! However, at college while we were dating, we met several who went through all those upsetting dating cycles and the tears were many and intense as we sat in the lobby of the girl's dorm talking and sneaking kisses and watched the other couples come back from an evening out. You had NO TROUBLE KNOWING WHO JUST BROKE UP!!!!

Asaph said—I was so out of focus about God that “If I had spoken out like that, I would have betrayed your children.” I would have brought the curse of God down on our land and it would have been terrible for you and your children.

But—he took another route than just wallowing in his misdirected misery and anger towards God.

Here is what he said he did:

“When I tried to understand all this, it troubled me deeply till I entered the sanctuary of God, then I understood their final destiny.”

In other words, he stopped focusing on the immediate and looked at a longer time line to see what happened to the evil and what happened to the people of God.

I want you to listen closely to his conclusion of what happens to the wicked:

“Surely you place them on slippery ground; you cast them down to ruin. How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors! They are like a dream when one awakes.”

Have you gone to your High School reunions yet? You need to—one to make sure you are past all the hurts and joys of High School and two, to see what time and gravity has done to your fellow classmates.

You will find out four things about your classmates:

1. You will find--most of the athletes who were able to eat all they wanted in High School because they worked it off in athletics have gotten ----fat!
2. You will find that many of the little 'starlets' of High School never got beyond dressing and primping like they did as a teenager. It might be more sophisticated but they often look like they are still trying just a little too hard.
3. You will find that friends are friends forever and some of the people you have not seen since High School are still very cool to talk with and tell stories with and you really wished you lived a lot closer than you do.
4. You will find that although the prediction on most successful might have been right for male and female winners; the rest of the classmates have been put into a barrel, shaken up, and rolled out

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differently. Some that you knew would do great—haven’t and some that you knew would never do great—have been quite successful.

If you are willing to pray and seek God about what is happening in your life and what you are feeling about the fairness of God—you will find that He will give you the answers you need to stay on the path that leads you back to realizing God loves you.

I love what Asaph says at the end of his Psalm:

“But as for me, it is good to be near God. I have made the Sovereign Lord my refuge; I will tell of all your deeds.” Psalm 73:28

What is the truthful way to speak to God about something that you think is unfair? Are we to just hold our words and not say anything? I think we have a responsibility to always tell the truth—however, what is on our mind because of a tragedy in our life may not really be the truth. I think it is always wise to take our concerns to God, even the concerns where that we think God has been unfair—in the words of Asaph—when we are troubled deeply—let’s take it to God and in the presence of God we will be led to the truth that we need at that time.

However, if we find ourselves just speaking to God about how unfair He is and how His blessings are biased towards the sinners and the evil people; we will easily eliminate the very blessings that made us upset about not getting our sufficient share.

The Bible spells out this problem in our passage for tonight, **Malachi 3:13-15** and tells us how we can lose the blessings of God because of our arrogance and open criticism of God.

1. When God gets our attention to guide truth and truth telling---He does not expect us to be His critic. Malachi 3:13

When I think of arrogance and truth telling, I remember the story about the biology teacher at the University and his final for the semester that would be one-half of the student’s grade.

One young student who was on the border line of graduating with honors had put all the time possible into studying for the final exam only to walk into the classroom on examination day and see 20 birds fettered to a table with bags over their heads. He immediately asked the professor what the birds were doing fettered to the table and the professor said, “This is your final exam, I have provided blank sheets of paper for you to identify the 20 birds by looking at their legs and providing the answer.

The student was aghast to say the least and blurted out to the professor, “I have studied hours for this exam so I could graduate with honors and you have made a travesty of this class. This exam is a ridiculous evaluation of our knowledge. You are not a satisfactory teacher of Biology; you are a joke.”

To which the professor angrily said, “Young man, what is your name?”

The young man pulled up both of his pants legs and said, “You tell me!”

The critics of God had: questioned God, **Malachi 2:17**; violated God’s covenant, **Malachi 2:11**; disobeyed His laws, **Malachi 2:9**; defiled His altar, **Malachi 1:7, 12** and had despised His name, **Malachi 1:6**; and now they openly criticized and chastised God. They had openly criticized God to each other and also in their prayers to God.

But their reply is like the clueless critic who is called on the carpet about saying hateful things to and about people. Just like that charlatan, these people said, “Like what?” “What have we said that was arrogant towards God?”

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God does not withhold blessings when we in the midst of pain or hurt from a severe loss in our life—cry out, “Where are you God.” “Where were you when this happened.” “Why did you not stop it?” God understands grief and He certainly understands our need to grieve the losses in our life. But He does withhold blessings when we make Him the scapegoat for everything wrong in our life and openly criticize God for not being there for us.

Sometimes a thoughtless mate, who is quick with the judgments of their partner is called into account about how they are treating their spouse and they often say the same thing. “Well, just tell me what I said then that was so bad and so unthoughtful.” It is as though they do not even hear what they are saying. We can be that same way with God. When we want to make God the villain in every situation just because He did not change our poor actions into good actions that bless us; we are being arrogant toward God. Anytime we demand what God is to do—our arrogance is so strong; God cannot bless what we are doing or what we are demanding.

2. When God Gets Our Attention to Guide Truth and Truth Telling—He Does Not Need Us to Brand Him as ‘Unfair’. *Malachi 3:14*

God had just told His people, if you put me to the test and bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, you will not be able to store all the blessings that I pour out on you. But in spite of this great promise from God, the people complained that obedience to the laws of God did not bring any rewards.

They literally said, this is futile--- unprofitable, useless and serves no purpose to serve God. And what good is it that we keep His commands and follow His laws? It is as though they had a boss—worker relationship with God and God was forced to give them daily wages for being good and keeping some of His commands.

I think they would have also wanted unemployment when they took a week off to sin. This is a problem for many Christians. They want and demand immediate, gratifying rewards for anything they have done for God. They would be happy with a weekly check of blessings from God for any good deed they have done.

They call God unfair and then set up some mental concept of how God ought to work and reward them and then say God is not keeping His side of the agreement. Not only that—the most ridiculous charge against God was that they had dressed up in mourning clothes—sackcloth and put the ashes over their heads and bodies as though this would show God, they were genuinely repentant of the wrong they were doing.

It sounds a lot like Halloween to me. They dressed up in their costumes-- the mourners’ clothes, never changed their mind about God being unfair, never changed the things they said to each other about God being unfair and wanted God to immediately send the blessing cart with all their needs met.

They pretended to be grieving over their sins and then declared all this religious activity was useless. I think from God’s standpoint it was more than ridiculous—it was insulting and one more reason not to give them any blessings. God is never pleased with pretend faith and “putting on the religious costume at the right times and the right places.”

Which led to their third charge against God---He was so unfair—He even blessed the wrong people.

3. When God Gets Our Attention to Guide Truth and Truth Telling—He Does Not Need to Be Told He Does Not Know Who to Bless. *Malachi 3:15*

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It has been a long time since it was in use, but do you remember the old charge when someone was losing an argument— “And your Mother wears combat boots!” Not quite such an insult with so many mothers now in the active military service and serving as First Responders, but at the time it was invented it was intended to be used when you had nothing intelligent left to say—insult their mama!!!

When God wants to guide people into truth and truth telling, He does not need His people to turn on Him and say, “You bless the evil people and ignore the good deeds that your people do!”

I do not know why some people want to try and out argue God—and act like the things they say will make a difference or even make sense. The critics of God basically said—you make the evil doers healthy, wealthy and wise—and when they are tested—they fail but you pass them anyway! They had a very wrong attitude about God Jehovah and true moral values. They were so wrong that they had come under the judgement that they accused God of doing.

In the words of *Isaiah 5:20*—they had crossed the line, because:

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.”

It took me a moment to realize that we can be guilty of the very sin we are accusing God of being unfair. Our selfishness shines so brightly that we miss the fact we are just upset and angry at God and falsely blaming Him for the fact we did not get all that we wanted.

We have entered a scary time in our nation. We have those who advocate for a socialistic country, those who use racial and ethnic division to further other agendas and a wholesale rejection of Judeo-Christian values. We are at a crossroad that leads you to ask, are we poised for a revival or a revolution in the United States?

It is unlikely that we are in a national mood to receive a revival. A majority of churches are focused on the social gospel and weaving the new morals of the nation into their Church policies, and they have moved way beyond evangelism.

In the age of “woke” relativism, evangelism is so old-fashioned they do not even use the word.

This is not new to most Christians that have studied prophecy. The end-times will be highlighted by lawlessness, apostacy, and lethargy by the nations.

But even more disturbing to most American patriots—including many Christians watching—is our nations trend toward revolution. In just the last 20 years, we’ve seen a dramatic rise in lawlessness and increased polarization—politically, ethnically, economically, and socially.

In recent months, chaos has engulfed many American cities. Even now, polls claim that an increasing number of Americans are ready to get rid of Capitalism in favor of adopting Socialism. Many of our modern American movements reject Judeo-Christian morality, worldviews and societal standards.

So, what hope remains if revival is a distant possibility and revolution is already underway? I think we take the words of tonight’s scripture and apply them to our life. God is getting our attention to guide truth and truth telling. He is not deserting His people at this time of confusion and unrest.

So, I would give you a third ‘R’ tonight--the immediate answer might not be Revival or Revolution—the immediate answer I believe for each of us to find a Reliance on the Word of God. This is a time to know your Bible better than you have ever known it before. This is the time to learn it so well that you feel comfortable taking it to worship and hunting up the passages that the preacher is quoting. This is the time to make sure you have Bible before Breakfast; you have the Lord before Lunch and most of all that you have Devotions

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before Dinner. If you think I am using food to motivate---you are right---what is good for the teacher is good for the listener!!

Let's stand with David who wrote **Psalm 56** while he was being pursued by his enemies that wanted to kill him:

“This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I have put my trust. I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?” Psalms 56:9-11

The Bible offers us many examples of people who determined to put their trust in God—even in the midst of catastrophe: Jeremiah as natural disasters destroyed his country; Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the fiery furnace; Daniel in the lion's den; and Habakkuk, who calmed his own heart with a prayer for mercy while watching his city be destroyed.

Christians, you and I, can demonstrate that kind of tough faith because we have the revelation of God. He has told us what to expect and has also promised us that He will never leave us or forsake us.

God reveals Himself and His great plan for all Mankind throughout the entire Word of God. I want to share some practical ways we can overcome the fear of revolution in this age and the coldness of apostasy as it has swept through the non-evangelical church.

1. **Study the Word of God**—the Bible says to hide it in your heart and write down the promises as you read them—becoming well-versed in the bible.
2. **Pray**—and don't quit praying
3. **Determine not to hinder the Holy Spirit** in any way in your life and do not cause the Holy Spirit to be sorrowful about what you are doing—the Bible calls it grieve the Holy Spirit.
4. **Keep your eyes on Jesus**, not only to receive a blessing but to give you a three-fold plan:
 - a. Speak to everyone you meet about Jesus and what He has done for you.
 - b. Live the Godliest Christian life you can live.
 - c. Live in the expectation that Jesus will come for you and all other believers.

Our hope is bigger than a national revival—that would be great but not the greatest thing that could happen. Nor is it in just dodging a revolution or national disaster.

Our blessed hope is in the Person and the promises of Jesus Christ. We cling to the truth God shared with Habakkuk after telling him the nation of Judah would be captured—it is: *“The righteous shall live by faith.”*

By placing your trust in Jesus Christ—our Blessed Hope—you can overcome any chaos that is leading the world toward an inevitable doom. This is the revival that I think God is wanting at this time in America—it is a revival of one person at a time. And the change that every believer in Jesus Christ will receive will revolutionize us for Christ.

Next, we will begin to see the great victories God has in store for those who remain faithful to Him. The study will be **“God gets our attention to remind us that He blesses the faithful in the middle of Chaos.”** This will be election night and I have some special thoughts I want to share with all of us on this vital night. God never gets caught up in the moment—He is always directing the moment and we shall see whether it was the time of Malachi or today—the result is the same—God protects His people.

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Malachi 3:16-18 GOD BLESSES THE FAITHFUL IN THE MIDDLE OF CHAOS

[Malachi 3:16-18 NIV] 16 Then those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in his presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored his name. 17 "On the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty, "they will be my treasured possession. I will spare them, just as a father has compassion and spares his son who serves him. 18 And you will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.

Malachi gives another principle about God. God does not forget His people and those who are faithful to Him have a special blanket of protection over them. We have fallen back on the Scripture of Jesus that ‘it rains on the just and the unjust’ as though it fits every situation and every circumstance. A deep examination of the passage for tonight, **Malachi 3: 16-18** adds some insights that we need to apply to our life so we can see that to receive our hope in God—we truly need to look up!

Because the passage in **Matthew 5:45** is often used for all situations about how God operates, let’s take a look at what Jesus was actually saying in this passage.

Jesus in this part of the Sermon on the Mount is calling all of His followers to a deeper level of discipleship than just being obedient to the Law. He has taken the Beatitudes and built a ladder of progressive discipleship that goes far beyond the strict obedience of the Law.

Then He tells His disciples to be the influencers of their community. They are to be the salt and light and truly make a difference to those around them. Then He puts the body—the arms, legs and core to the thought that He has just given and He uses 7 Old Testament examples to show how His disciples are to be even more involved in following Him than the Old Testament believers were. Basically, He is telling them that it is not just the actions that determine how strong a disciple we are—our motivation is just as important. A person who has dark deeds and sins in his or her heart but does not do them actually just mentally—is not righteous--no, they are hypocritical because they commit the sin in their heart and mind and experience the same pleasure as though they committed the real sin. Abstinence is not just not doing the act—it is also not doing it vicariously in your mind or in your heart.

The last one of these is the love for enemies in Matthew 5:41-48. The Jews followed their leaders who taught them when the Bible commanded them to love their neighbors—that only meant the other Jewish people that they knew. They did not have to love or even be nice to those who were not believers. In fact, the Pharisees and scribes taught that they were to HATE THEIR ENEMIES. Jesus appeals to the character and nature of God and says—they are to love their enemies and act like God towards their enemies.

Several things this is not saying:

1. It does not say that God will save everyone and send them all to heaven because He loves His enemies just as much as He loves His children. God is a righteous God and He will judge each person on the basis of whether they allowed Him to be their Savior or rejected Him as their Savior.
2. It does not say that when you love your enemies you bring them under the saving umbrella that you have with Jesus. God does not save people because of someone else—grandparent, parent, spouse, or a saved friend who was nice and loving towards them.
3. It does not say anything about the eternal destiny of your enemies—it just tells you to love them as God loves them

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What does that mean?

The universal love of God shows up in blessings which God gives to all people indiscriminately. This is what the Bible calls ‘common grace.’ So, God does not get up every morning and clean the sinners out of your neighborhood or narrow the amount of nations in the world because they have been evil and wicked. He does not clean out the sinners but often waits until Judgment Day. No, He gives them the life that comes from the sun and the growth that comes to all through rain. They just come to everyone—therefore, they are gifts of common grace that God gives to all. This has nothing to do with the ‘amazing grace and everlasting love’ that God gives to those who believe in Him—that He keeps for those who have called Him Father and asked Him to be the Lord and Savior of their life.

Jesus asks all of His disciples to do the same. Give common grace to everyone you meet and have contact with. Be honest with all mankind, be loving to everyone, give each person the best of your craftsmanship, give all an equal share of your attention and good work. In other words, be the same to everyone whether they are your friend or your enemy.

Jesus quickly added—what good is it to just be nice to those you love and those that love you—the entire world does that! It has nothing to do with your discipleship with Christ—the worst criminal and the most excessive sinner will still be nice to those who are nice to them. You only distinguish yourself from the people of the world when you love even those who are not loving towards you.

This has been the principle of how God operates and how He wants you and me to operate. **Psalm 145:9** “*The Lord is good to all; He has compassion on all he has made.*”—that is common grace—but the next verses tell us that God has Amazing Grace reserved for those who follow and serve Him. It says: “*All your works praise you, Lord, your faithful people extol you. They tell of the glory of your kingdom, and speak of your might, so that all people may know of your mighty acts and the glorious splendor of your kingdom. Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures through all generations.*” **Psalm 145:10-13a**

When I went to High School in 1959 our small-town high school still allowed ‘freshman initiation’. I’m sure some of you experienced the same humiliation that I did. We pushed pennies up the concrete sidewalk with our nose—about 300 yards—and with the size of my nose that was a big deal. We spent the entire lunch hour picking up pebbles and small rocks off of the baseball diamond, we pushed parked cars with their brakes on around the block in front of the school, we carried books for upperclassmen, gave up our spots in the lunch line to older students—is this bringing back some horrible memories for you? But it went much further—it fostered an environment of picking on freshmen that extended to our neighborhoods, around town, at activities—sports, band, GAA, etc. It was topped off on “Initiation Night” when we were to be dressed in white bed sheets—like diapers—the girls could cover their body from neck to legs but the boys had to just have the sheet/diaper basically around their privates and rear end and then led through a series of blindfolded experiences under the stage in the school gym. When I was elected to be the student body president of my High School in the spring of my Junior Class year—the first thing I did was go to the Principal, then the Superintendent and finally the School Board to present my recommendation to stop freshmen initiation at our school. They heard my reasons and called it off for the fall. They also enforced some rules about anyone who continued to try and initiate freshmen. It ended in 1962 and Windsor High School in Windsor, Illinois has had no formal initiation since that time.

That was common grace! It was extended to all—even some of the younger brothers and sisters of the students who had made the first month and one-half of high school a ‘Living Hell’ for me. Even some who never appreciated the fact that it got stopped and even some that did not know that it ever existed. That is

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the common grace that God calls us to model after Him---what we can do we should do in such a way that it is a blessing for everyone.

But that did nothing more than remove one belittling, humiliating, and demeaning situation in their life. It did not keep them from experiencing difficulties in High School, it did not guarantee they would pass each class or even get a diploma, and it did not change their GPA. That all depending on how they would respond to the events of High School, how hard they worked in the classes they were taking and how hard they applied themselves to the school work in front of them the next four years.

That was common grace!!

LET’S TALK ABOUT ‘AMAZING GRACE’

But what are the benefits of this special Amazing Grace that God has reserved for those who follow Him and believe in Him as Lord and Savior? Some are obvious and we tend to focus on them:

1. We are saved and bound for heaven to live eternally with our Heavenly Father in a city Jesus will prepare just for the saved.
2. We have the Living Word of God to guide us, we have a communication connection with the Lord of the universe—prayer and we have God inside of us—the Holy Spirit--to encourage us to pray.
3. We have God’s direction and guidance to lead us to make wise and Godly decisions and once again we have God—the Holy Spirit—inside of us to tell us those decisions and to lead us in following them.
4. We have an absence of fear and an abundance of peace through the difficult times in our lives.
5. We have an abundance of gifted people in the Body of Christ who will help us complete all we need to accomplish as a part of His family.

But I want to talk about another gift that comes with this special “Amazing Grace” that is given to those who follow Jesus and believe in Him as their Lord and Savior. They are remembered by God and protected when God is bringing a curse against His enemies. The entire book of Exodus proves this point over and over.

Let’s start with the plagues that God brought through Moses on the land of Egypt to force the Egyptians to let the Israelites go on their three-day journey to sacrifice and worship God.

The first plague affected just those who lived on the Nile River and they had to dig beside the River to get drinkable water when the Nile turned to blood. But then God gets very specific and the plague of the frogs, the flies, the livestock and the boils were just on the Egyptians and not any of those plagues affected the Israelites. God spared them entirely. Then the hail fell on all of Egypt except Goshen which was the home of the Israelites. The locust ate the entire land of Egypt including Goshen because the Israelites would soon be gone and God did not want the Egyptians to have a place to harvest. The plague of darkness was just on the Egyptians and God laid out his final plan to curse the land of Egypt and spare the Israelites—it was outlined by God to Moses and Aaron. It was the 10th plague—the death of the firstborn males. As God outlines this plan, He says in **Exodus 11:7**—“*But among the Israelites not a dog will bark at any person or animal. Then you will know that the Lord makes a distinction between Egypt and Israel.*”

This last plague, the death of the first-born son only affected the Egyptian families and their cattle. It did not affect the Israelites because God gave them the formula to spare their sons and livestock. It is observed every year since and is called the Passover Feast of the Jews and when Jesus, at a Jewish Passover Feast, initiated the Lord’s Supper or Communion for Christians to remember His death, burial and resurrection it became one of

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the sacraments of the Christian Church. It is a weekly reminder for each of us that God will pronounce a curse on His enemies but spare His faithful followers.

The stories that follow all have the same message. When God pronounced a curse on those who were His enemies they were destroyed and the faithful were preserved. 3,000 died after the sin of the Golden Calf and all had participated in the drunken/sexual orgies of the event. The death of Aaron’s sons, Nadab and Abihu was because they offered fire of idolatry at the Tabernacle of God, but no one else was harmed, *Leviticus 10*. The death of Korah and all who rebelled against Aaron as well as the destruction of their property, *Numbers 16*—says the earth opened up and swallowed those who rebelled and then also swallowed up all of their possessions. The children of God choosing not to enter the promised land were known by God and until all of them passed away, no one of their children could enter the promised land, *Deuteronomy 1*. The only exceptions were Joshua and Caleb who stood with the Lord and said that the Israelites could defeat the people of the Promised Land and pushed to enter just as God had planned. This was a punishment that all felt—40 more years living in the desert with only manna and God’s provisions—shoes did not wear out, clothes did not wear out, etc. But the curse was all the doubters passed away and only the two believers were saved.

Let me focus on one other as we see this principle outlined again and again in the Bible. When God brings a curse against His enemies, He spares those that believe and trust in Him.

It is the story of Rahab and the destruction of Jericho in *Joshua 2*.

The story starts right after the Israelites had miraculously crossed the Jordan River and prepared themselves through circumcision to take the land. Joshua sent two spies to infiltrate Jericho and scout the surrounding land. They ended up at the hostel run by Rahab the prostitute. She hid the spies and before she helped them escape through a window in her hostel that overlooked the outside wall—she acknowledged her faith in Jehovah as the Only True God and asked the spies to spare her life and the life of her family when they conquered the city of Jericho. They agreed with two conditions: 1) She was to tie a red or scarlet chord from the window where they escaped and 2) She was to have all her relatives in her house when the walls of Jericho fell. She agreed.

When Joshua gave the commands of the Lord on how the city was to be taken, he added this thought: *“The city and all that is in it are to be devoted to the Lord. Only Rahab the prostitute and all who are with her in her house shall be spared, because she hid the spies we sent.” Joshua 6:17*. Here was a woman who had been a true believer less than two weeks but God saw her heart and knew she was a true believer and the curse was on the city of Jericho, not on those who believed in Him. When the story turns to the destruction of Jericho again the Scripture says: *“But Joshua spared Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, because she hid the men Joshua had sent as spies to Jericho—and she lives among the Israelites to this day.” Joshua 6:25* This same Rahab is listed in the genealogy of Jesus, *Matthew 1: 5* and was the Great, great, grandmother of King David.

I want to share a story tonight that shows how individually God works. It is not a spared from God’s curse story because I believed, but it illustrates how specifically God does things and easily explains how God could spare one family in the destruction of an entire city; or preserve the life of two faithful men while all the unfaithful passed away.

I was a starter on the basketball team at Lincoln Christian University starting in my sophomore year. It was a big deal to me and an important part of my life. In fact, much more important to me than all the years of High School sports I had played—where I lettered in Track, Baseball, and Basketball. We were leaving that night on a three-game road trip and I had a full schedule of classes before we left that afternoon. In those days, you

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were responsible for your own duffle bag and if needed a small suitcase of clothes to take in the vans. I had a 7:00 am class so I took my duffle bag—I had stuffed three days-worth of clothes in that bag—I was a 19-year-old sophomore in college and neatness did not count in those days. I went to the gym and all the sports offices and locker rooms were locked. We held chapel for over 1,000 students in the gym, so I chose one corner of a small entry way to the gym to hide my duffle bag under a stack of chairs. I would get it after my last class and right before we left for the game. I lived off campus and did not have a car so no way could I get home to get it in the one hour I had between my last class and the team leaving and I never skipped class. The day was going great until I left the last class and headed to the gym to get my duffle bag for the trip. I could not find it—it was not where I had carefully hidden it that morning. Disaster—because I would be left off the team and the road trip without this bag. I started some earnest prayer—shoot—I was making deals with God by this time—whatever would work. I went to the cafeteria—it was like the Lord told me to go there—and another student came running up to me—His name was Bob and he said I have been looking for you for the last two hours. He said, “Tom, I found your duffle bag this morning when I was moving a row of chairs to set them up for extra seats for chapel and I took your bag and hid it on the stage. I’ll have to show you where its hidden—it had your name on it so I knew you needed it.” I could not speak—I just hugged him and said. “Thanks.” What he said next really floored me—he said, “Normally I go to work after lunch but God told me to find you and tell you what had happened to your duffle bag. You’re so happy, I will never miss those 2 hours of pay.” I honestly was so poor in those days, I had nothing to offer him for his loss of wages—but later when I had a part-time preaching job, I paid him back—1 year later. Now, 50 minutes later when I would have gone to the coaching staff to tell my sad story of why I could not make the trip because I had lost my duffle bag, I would have been walking home and sad for the next three days. But here was God taking a 19 year old young man with a crisis that seemed bigger to me than it really was and arranging all the details: out of 1,000 + students—He sent Bob to find me, had Bob rearrange his schedule and lose very needed wages, and told me to go to the cafeteria where we could meet just so my crisis could become a time of victory. I have never doubted the care of God to arrange the details to bless those who follow Him. This is important because:

Tonight, is the presidential election and our nation being at another crossroad in its long history. If our nation chooses to move further and further away from its Christian heritage and the Judeo-Christian laws of its start then we could easily be headed in a way that will cause God to bring another attention getting crisis or plagues in our nation. I just wanted you to know that if that is true—and God is sending any curse, He will still protect those who serve and follow Him as their Lord and Savior.

Our passage from **Malachi, 3:16-18** tells us how that will happen.

1) God Knows Those Who Belong to Him and Are Unashamed to Stand for Him. Malachi 3:16

I believe there is never a time that God does not have his “7,000 in Israel, who have not bowed their knees to Baal”—the number that He used to assure Elijah that he was not alone. (**1 Kings 19:18**) Even in the land of Judah at the time Malachi was written the mummering, false offerings, cheating on tithes, the open criticism and fault-finding of Jehovah God and the mistreatment of the vulnerable had not infected everyone. There were still those who held God in respect and worshipped and adored Him.

But the condition of their nation really made them afraid and upset. They were not afraid of what the sinners in their land might or would do—they were afraid that God would get fed up with such a sinful people and send judgment on the land of Judah—the result in their minds was that all the unrighteous and all the righteous would be destroyed. “They would go down with the ship although they had nothing to do with blasting the holes in the ship that really sunk it!!

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They prayed and called out to God and we have no record of exactly what they said—but we do know the result. God heard them and encouraged them to write an earthly Book of Remembrances that would lie open before God at all times. He would see and remember their faithful words, disposition, and heart-given praises at all times. It is clear that the words, deeds and the disposition of God’s faithful people are ever before the Lord Almighty. While He runs the universe—He has you on His mind. No detail done for God is missed or forgotten.

The idea of God keeping a Book of Remembrances is common in the Old Testament: **Exodus. 32:32; Psalms. 56:8; 69:28; 139:16; Ezekiel 13:9; Daniel. 7:10, 12:1**—all speak of a book that recorded those who feared God and that thought upon His name. They would be those who held His name in reverence and who kept Him in their thoughts to direct their lives. It is clearly a teaching in the New Testament also and is found in **Philippians. 4:3** and **Revelation 20:12**. I am afraid that we stop too quickly and just call it the Book of Life—but if you will reread **Revelation 20** you will find that other books are opened and these will include this Book of Remembrances where God holds forever the thoughts, deeds and worship of His faithful people.

2) God Will Not Bring a Curse on The Wrong People. Malachi 3:17

Those who are faithful to God Jehovah will have the most intimate relationship with God that is possible. He tells of a day in which God will make a judgement—this is commonly what the Bible calls a curse and it is not to be confused with the Day of Judgment. God continually comes in judgement against evil and wicked nations and nations that once followed Him but have now turned their backs on God and left Him out of the leadership of their nation. When God comes in judgment against evil or against apostasy—what the Bible calls a curse—God will be very mindful of those who serve Him and whose names are written in the Book of Remembrances that lies before Him. He will be as mindful as a Father is of a son who serves and obeys Him.

God will treasure those who are faithful to Him—they are His special treasure and they belong to Him—so in scripture God says they are “MINE”—and in the midst of His judgement upon the land—God will spare His righteous.

*Our world is so cynical that they do not believe this, but look at the three wars that Israel fought against the combined powers of Syria, Egypt and Jordan and were assisted some by Iran and Lebanon. The numbers are Biblical in proportion. Israel lost few soldiers, planes, and equipment; but their foes lost thousands of troops, almost their entire field of fighter planes and thousands of ground armaments and tanks. This was God defending a nation that did not believe in Him yet—they were still atheistic—but they had been returned to Israel by God and He was completing His blessing on them and His curse on the Arab nations that attacked them.

3) God’s Curses Are Forms of Judgments and Will Never Be Targeted at The Wrong People. Malachi 3:18

The righteous who are faithful to God will be spared and the judgment will target and strike those who are under a curse. Throughout the history of Israel, the Jews had had opportunity to see the difference in results from serving God and not serving Him. Those lines often got very fuzzy for them—but each time it happened the lines were so clear that no one had any trouble seeing the message that God was sending.

We have a large number of people in our nation who call themselves progressives and they have a very terrifying agenda to anyone who is a strong Christian. Many are in very important offices in our nation and they already control many of our large cities and states. Their published agenda is:

1. To overrule all executive orders that enforce Judeo-Christian principles.

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2. To expand hate crime legislation to include speech against abortion, homosexuality, same-sex marriages and transgenderism.
3. To promote the Sexual Perversion Movement to include legal protection of polygamy, polyamory, prostitution and other deviant sexual behaviors.
4. To defund our police departments and possibly the National Guard.
5. To gut the Second Amendment by sharply curtailing the right of Americans to own arms.
6. To impose taxes on churches and ministries that refuse to endorse the sexual revolution and all the new laws.
7. To impose draconian taxes on middle class Americans to provide reparations for blacks and homosexuals.
8. To pack our Supreme Court with judges who are not strict constitutionalists.
9. To amend the Constitution to eliminate the Electoral College.
10. To isolate and endanger Israel by giving maximum support to its enemies.
11. To maximize the support for the United Nations and other world organizations and move towards a One World Government.

Some of those goals are very specifically to overturn freedoms and rights that we have enjoyed in the United States for almost 250 years and I do not think God will curse our land for overturning those or even for bankrupting our nation. But some of the goals are so blatantly Anti Judeo-Christian and Anti God’s teachings that we have no assurance that God will not pronounce some level of judgment on our land for those changes. I just wanted you to know that this has happened throughout history and those who stay faithful to God, who look to Him for guidance, and who praise Him with their lips and actions are all recorded in the latest edition of The Book of Remembrances and it sits open before God all the time and He will spare those who have their name in that Book when He pronounces or gives a judgment to our land.

Stay close to God—let His praise every be on your lips and serve as He would have you *serve and like the people who received the Book of Malachi*—

“You too will again see the distinction between the righteous and the wicked, between those who serve God and those who do not.” Malachi 3:18

I listened to a preacher last Sunday tell us that Jesus was our president in actuality—not Donald Trump or Joe Biden. I would go one step further---Jesus is our Ultimate Defender against anything that would come against His faithful people and His chosen children. Praise the lord and thank you Jesus.

We will continue to look at how God rewards His faithful. I have titled the next lesson— **“God Gets Our Attention to Remind Us that His Promises are Always Fulfilled”**. We will study **Malachi 4:1-3**. The Day of the Lord seems so far away, but that has been true every step of our life: the future is always way out there when we plan to: get our driver’s license, graduation(s), marriage, children, grandchildren, down-sizing and even assisted care living. But those who remain faithful are guided, encouraged and rewarded each step of the way.

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Malachi 4:1-3 GOD PROVES HIS PROMISES ARE ALWAYS FULFILLED

[Malachi 4:1-3 NIV] 1 "Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and the day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. 2 But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays. And you will go out and frolic like well-fed calves. 3 Then you will trample on the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act," says the LORD Almighty.

Malachi gives another principle about God. God does reach out to His faithful people and assures them that every promise that He has given will be fulfilled. If God spoke it—it will happen. But we are so impatient that often we do not allow the timing of God to develop on God’s plan—but demand that it happens on our time or we just won’t believe it. I truly wonder how many precious promises of God have gone unclaimed because people quit believing and because of their doubt never received the blessings that God had for them.

Let’s start and see the Biblical correlation between faith and receiving God’s greatest blessings. We saw last week that God gives ‘common grace’—He sends the sun on the good and the evil and He sends the rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. We cannot claim the items of common grace as a fulfilled promise from God—they are given indiscriminately to believers and unbelievers alike. No, we are talking about the promises that God says are yours if you believe in Him for salvation and anticipate them. We used to say “You have to claim those blessings” and then you will receive them. Still a good thought.

There is a strong correlation between faith and receiving God’s Promises:

Let me just take 10 great promises of God that are given to all who believe and who have faith that God will do them.

1. **God will forgive sin**—I John 1:9 says, *“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”*
2. **God will give us peace**—Psalm 85:8 says, *“I will listen to what God the Lord says, He promises peace to His people, His faithful servants—but let them not turn to folly.”*
3. **God will bless us**—Psalm 67:6-7 says, *“The land yields its harvest, God, our God blesses us, May God bless us still, so that all the ends of the earth will fear Him.”*
4. **God will lead us**—Psalm 23:1-6 is one of the strongest Scriptures that illustrate this promise.
5. **God will never leave us**—Hebrews 13:5 says, *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”*
6. **Jesus will never leave us**—Matthew 28:20 says, *“and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*
7. **God will answer prayer**, I John 5:14-15 says, *“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we have asked for.”*
8. **Jesus will answer prayer**, John 14:13-14 says, *“And I will do whatever you ask in My name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. You may ask me for anything in My name, and I will do it.”*
9. **God will help us overcome temptation**, I Corinthians 10:13 says, *“But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.”*

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10. **God will give us eternal life**, I **John 2:25** says, *“And this is what He promised us, eternal life.”*

You need to realize that these are just a few of over 200 hundred promises that God has outlined in His word that will be given to those who faithfully believe in Him.

But there are two other vital Biblical steps that we need to recognize that will make sure these become our promises.

Fulfilled promises have two conditions: God speaking them and our believing that they will happen—they are not just something that God dangles in front of us as an incentive to do what He wants—as many often say about God. They think God is peevish with His promises and if He is disappointed in His people, He just withholds His promises from them. I want to share with you some vital scriptures that prove that God will keep His word and offer all the promises He has spoken. These are Scriptures that define God’s attitude about His promises.

God gives us many promises: **II Peter 1:4** says, *“Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”*

The bible is very clear—God does not limit His promises or keep them reserved for only a small few—no God gives many promises to all who believe in Him and what He can do. Then we see the commitment of God to the promises that He offers:

First, He confirms them with an oath: I want to quote the middle verses of **Hebrews 6:13-20**. These eight verses all confirm that God has sealed His promises with an oath. Let me read **Hebrews 6: 18-19**, *“God did this so that, by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled to take hold of the hope set before us may be greatly encouraged. We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure. It enters the inner sanctuary behind the curtain.”*

The passage began with God swearing an oath with Abraham and telling us that God always keeps His promises and while Abraham waited patiently God brought every promise for Abraham to reality. But the author of Hebrews wanted all readers to know that is also true for all believers. He says that God used two unchangeable proofs—His promise and His oath that will guarantee what He promises will always be offered.

Second, God remembers His promises—unlike some of us who have to be reminded that we promised to do a certain job at home or at work—God does not only remember-He reviews all of His promises.

Psalms 105: 42 says, in reference to leading the nation of Israel out of slavery in Egypt: *“For He remembered His holy promise given to His servant Abraham.”*

Third, God keeps His promise and this is repeated often in the Bible: **Joshua 23:15; Isaiah 38:7; Acts 13:23, 32-33; II Peter 3:9**. Let me share one of those with you.

“The Lord is not slow in keeping His promise, as some understand slowness. Instead He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

God has given us another promise that is frequently in the Bible---He promises to keep His promises!!

Fourth, God swears to be faithful to His promises. **Hebrews 10:23** says, *“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.”*

God keeps track of His promises and is faithful to see that they are done.

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Fifth, God fulfills all of His promises through Jesus Christ, His Son and our Savior. It is spelled out in *II Corinthians 1:18-20*, “*But as surely as God is faithful, our message to you is not “Yes” and “No”. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ who was preached among you by us—by me and Silas and Timothy—was not “Yes” and “No”, but in him it has always been “Yes.” For no matter how many promises God has made, they are “Yes” in Christ. And so, through Him the “Amen” is spoken by us to the glory of God.*”

Whatever God has said would be a promise, Jesus has fulfilled it and made sure that it has happened.

Sixth, God’s promises never fail. For those who accurately keep track of the promises of God—they will all be fulfilled and come true. Solomon shares this truth with all the people, “Not one word has failed of the good promises He gave through His servant Moses *I Kings 8:56*.

God speaks it and it is always offered to His people. He never promises something that He withholds from His faithful followers. We must believe that these promises will happen. If they are beyond our faith to believe—then the promises are never realized. I want us to see how the Scripture spells that out to us.

First, God’s promises are from God. They are not just something good that has been offered to us—they are promises that God says we can have. “*Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*” *II Corinthians 7:1*

To receive the promises that God has given to His people we need to worship God and not other idols in our life. It is not possible for us to worship something other than God and expect God to give us His special blessings. We can not blaspheme God and yet receive His special blessings.

Second, we must believe that the promises of God are real. When we declare—oh, that could never happen—or, God just can’t do that in my life—we negate the promise because we are unwilling to receive it.

There are many passages of the Bible that spell this out—but one that is crystal clear is **Romans 4:16-21** which says:

“Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring, not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: ‘I have made you a father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.”

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, “*So shall your offspring be.*” Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, --since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God. Being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.

So, Abraham was made the Father of many nations just as God had promised, because Abraham never lost faith that that would happen. It did not seem futile and unreachable just because he was old and Sarah had a womb that was not able to produce children without a miracle from God. The promises of God must lead us in faith to the fulfillment of those promises—not drag us upset and depressed away from those promises because of doubt.

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Third, we must share those promises for them to continue to bless other people. *Ephesians 3:6* says, “*This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Jesus Christ.*”

When the promises have come true in your life and you believe that God can do it for others—then your faith will bring those promises, which are available into reality for someone else.

Fourth, we are to rejoice and celebrate the fulfillment of the promises of God, “*I rejoice in your promises like one who finds great spoil.*” *Psalms 119:162* and we are to meditate on the promises of God often, “*My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises.*”
Psalms 119:148

Fifth, we are not to fall short of realizing and utilizing the promises of God. *Hebrews 4:1* says, “*Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it.*” This is the promise of rest that God first gave with the Sabbath and expanded as He gave each promise to His children and here it means the many promises of God: like His peace, confidence in your salvation, reliance on the strength of God and the assurance of a future heavenly home—but it could literally cover every promise that God gave that gives our mind, our body, or our spirit rest.

It is available but not taken by everyone. How many of you tonight know good Christian believers who have zero peace in their life? They worry about everything, they are restless and unsettled, they are never content with anything in their life, and they speak out negativity all the time. This is just one but we could look at each promise that God gives and see that it is quite possible to live, be saved, and on your way to heaven and never realize many of the promises that God gave to live your life with joy and meaning.

I want to share how that unfolded in my life. After my junior year at Lincoln Christian University on June 12, 1966 Sharon and I got married. We each had a job—in fact that summer we both worked for a contractor in Decatur, Illinois. She had been the office manager for him for almost two years and I joined his work crew building custom homes. I also had a Church where I preached weekends and we had rented an apartment above the Farmers Bank in Mt. Pulaski, Illinois where Sharon was to work starting in the fall. We thought we had covered all the bases. My father drove the 60 miles to our apartment three times that summer and helped me put wood paneling on one wall of the two big rooms in our apartment and the Bank Manager gave us free rent for the work done. It was quite a marvelous summer and our planning had us very excited about the next year. We invited my parents to come up for dinner to thank Dad for all the work he had done on our apartment about two weeks before the fall semester of my senior year.

After dinner and a nice conversation, dad and I retired to my office—one corner of our master bedroom where I had a desk, two wooden book cases as a credenza and two chairs in front. I never saw anyone at our apartment professionally, but I guess we thought we had to have the two chairs up just like every office scene we ever saw. When I again thanked dad for all he had done for the summer, I said, “Dad school starts in two weeks and I was wondering if you had brought the tuition check with you to pay for my schooling this year?” Dad and Mom had promised to pay my undergraduate tuition if I would handle the room and board. Dad looked at me and said, “Well, your mother and I thought that now that you were married, you would take care of your own tuition.”

I’m sure I swallowed hard a couple of times and in my mind, I thought---Dad I saw you several days this summer—I sure wish that you would have given me some warning that this was the new reality. But instead I said, “I want to thank you for the three years of tuition that you gave me. It meant a lot and it made it possible for me to be involved in so many of the school activities—like basketball and track, music tour groups, student

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government—where I had been the student body president the year before, mission trips, the Christmas band, and a few dozen more things that I had gotten to do.”

That was the end of the discussion on tuition for the fall semester. When my parents left, I immediately told Sharon what dad had said. We were pretty overwhelmed, but before we reacted in any way, we got down on our knees and thanked God for the situation we were in and that He had impressed on us the need to save. We had the money saved for the fall tuition and although we had some things in mind for that money—like newer furniture to replace the furniture we had borrowed from Sharon’s parents, like a second suit for me to have for ministry, and other things that we truly needed—we knew that this was God leading us to trust in Him and not our plans and to always have a nest egg saved up that could be used for any purpose.

The promises of God—Be content in what you have and God will give you peace, God will take care of us and if we are faithful in our giving to Him—He will be faithful in His blessings to us, and God will never leave or forsake us became the very foundation of our married life. We have had some very lean years as we started two new churches without strong financial backers and we have found that the promises of God always come our way when we believe in them. That two weeks’ notice that we were on our own for a bill we did not expect, taught us that we could always lean on the promises of God.

God desires for us to always stay expectant even with discouraging facts. To the faithful in Judah—Malachi teaches this truth of what God will do for them—these are their precious promises.

1. **God will handle those who are oppose what He teaches. *Malachi 4:1***

The idea that a devouring fire is an apt description of the judgment of God is seen all over the Bible. It is the idea that the evil is like the dry prairie grass or the stubble of the field after a harvest—they are kindling for the fire and the destruction will be complete. Malachi says it will be like a tree is pulled by the roots and the roots and the tree burned. It will be total and complete—so—Malachi says keep trusting in the promises of God and one of those is that God will judge those who oppose His Word and His people.

2. **God will reward those who have been faithful to Him and His promises. *Malachi 4:2***

They will bask in the healing of the nations—the idea that God will offer His righteousness and healing for all who might seek it. The heat of the judgement on the evil will be as hot as a raging fire. But the sun’s rays on the faithful and righteous will be like the warmth of the sun that will give spiritual, emotional, and physical healing to all who trust in the promises of God. They will be as lively and frolicking as a young calf that has been confined in a stall but now is let loose in the field of their dreams. It is the prophet’s best reference to a life filled with joyful, vigorous and carefree living. It is the promise of God to all who stay faithful to His promises and trust that God can and will do for them.

3. **God will right the wrongs, judge the evil and wicked, and reward His faithful promise keeping followers.**

The fire of the Lord in judgment will reduce the evil to ashes. Ashes were often used in the Bible times to level a path and specially to make it safer. We still do the same and often spread ashes on highways and off ramps where the snow and ice have made the road quite slippery.

I want us to remember, It is just like the score at halftime—it really does not mean a thing to see how triumphant the evil look in this life, whatever may be the lot of the evil and the righteous; or the proud and the meek—the ultimate victory of the righteous and the defeat of the wicked is abundantly promised by God. God ties those promises to the reality of His gifts of promise.

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The saved and redeemed will not live eternally in an ethereal world called Heaven. Our eternal home is going to be on a new earth. The current earth is eternal—*Psalm 78:69* and *Psalm 148:6* tell us that.; but it will need to be purified and renovated by fire. Just as the flood destroyed the earth in the day of Noah—in other words—the world after the flood did not resemble the world before the flood; so, the world after the purifying fire will not resemble the world before that great fire. As God burns away the sin of the last revolt of Satan in the Millennium, *II Peter 3:12*—He will reshape the earth like a hot ball of wax. He will refresh it and restore it to its original perfection,

Acts 3:21. He will then lower the new Jerusalem down to the new earth, with the redeemed inside. Then, He Himself will come to earth to live in our presence eternally— *“The tabernacle of God is among men, and He shall dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be among them.” Revelation 21:3*

Heaven is where God resides. When the new earth is completed, heaven will descend to earth as God takes up residence on this new earth. So, it is true, the redeemed will live eternally in heaven, but Heaven will be on earth.

The last study on the Book of Malachi is titled **“God Gets Our Attention to Extend a Lifeline to All Who Will Respond.”** We will study the last three verses of *Malachi—4:4-6*. When the Bible says that it is the desire of God that none shall perish—God directly extends help and salvation until all who will respond---do! God will keep that Promise also.

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Malachi 4:4-6 GOD GETS OUR ATTENTION TO SEND A LIFELINE!

[Malachi 4:4-6 NIV] 4 "Remember the law of my servant Moses, the decrees and laws I gave him at Horeb for all Israel. 5 "See, I will send the prophet Elijah to you before that great and dreadful day of the LORD comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents; or else I will come and strike the land with total destruction."

Malachi gives another great principle about God. God is the God of second chances. When we look at the Bible, we see that God extends opportunities to the most unlikely people. He often takes those that have dramatically failed what He asked them to do and He sends them a responsible task and equips them to get it done. When God extends a call to a person, He does not measure the worth or value of that person—but evaluates if they have the faith and the heart to get it done. It is possible for us to evaluate some things about God in more human terms and if it sounds impossible for us to visualize someone doing it—we seem to decide God may not be able to do that as well. We will take a more in depth look at one of those areas tonight.

God knows when to withdraw His call and offer for salvation, for repentance, and for eternal life. It is at the point where everyone who will respond has responded. Since that is so foreign to us and since we have all seen people repent and accept the Lord after everyone else has given up on them—we hesitate to say that God has a time when He shuts the door or moves past redemption and onto judgment. But God knows all that goes on in the heart and He truly knows if any person will still answer His call. So, God offers a life-line until that day comes. Here in Malachi it is called the Day of the Lord—when Jesus comes to judge the earth and destroy the Anti-Christ, the beast and them followers. In Malachi that life-line is one like Elijah who will attempt to get the followers of God back into a right alignment and this prophet will start with a restoration of the families.

Let's apply this to our nation and our times. America is at a tipping point. As we live through our 245th year, the nation faces its most serious crisis in recent history. Anti-American forces are attempting to undermine and destroy the very soul of the world's greatest nation. The convergence of political extremism, social unrest, pandemic, paralysis and general confusion has left us gasping for breath and groping for solutions. Many are confused, asking: "What is happening to our country? Where did all this begin? Why are we so divided?"

What is the root cause of the current crisis? I want to appeal to what a Princeton theologian named Charles Hodge said in the mid 1800's. He said, "When American education ceases to be distinctively Christian it would only remain neutral—a-religious—for a short while, and then it would ultimately turn decisively anti-Christian. It started within 100 years of his writing.

In a Supreme Court hearing in 1962 (Engel vs. Vitale) the court ruled prayer out of the public schools. Later, even voluntary moments of silence were eliminated and, in time, all religious instruction was banned from American public education. While students are still free to pray privately or in small groups, the absence of God in American public education is now glaringly obvious. The result has been very quick and wide spread secularization.

This secularization of America has grown into a control for public discussion—whether it is media, political talk, or even discussion groups. Nearly 60 years after this Supreme Court ruling, we see many accept:

1. **Secularism**—there is not god or religious value system
2. **Relativism**---there is not ultimate or absolute truth
3. **Selfism**----I am all that really matters

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4. **Materialism**—We need to accumulate more things to show our value
5. **Mysticism**—we need to redefine reality in a new way in our Christian nation.

This war in American is a result of the spiritual battle for the soul of the nation It plays out in several areas under the disguise of social justice and political correctness. But make no mistake—it is an attack by Satan against the very heart of America’s Christian values. It has taken some turns that many do not seem to recognize.

1. A strong movement to deny our heritage—eliminate any positive discussion of Christian influence in American’s founding by the Pilgrims, Puritans, Quakers, and others seeking religious freedom and portraying all as ‘invaders’ who stole the land from the Native Americans and mistreated them.
2. Defame our heroes by insisting that they violated the cultural rules of 2020 and are not worthy of respect or remembering in a good way: includes Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and even Abraham Lincoln.
3. Attempt to remove or defame public statues and government monuments. Eliminate the admiration of past figures.
4. Dismantle free speech and deem it only acceptable if it follows the cultural definition of 2020. To show how far this has gone, realize that pornography is acceptable as free speech but Conservative Christians talk is racist, bigoted, and anti-intellectual.
5. The ultimate effect will be to destroy our nation. Left unchecked, a godless society will implode.

America is in serious trouble and only the power of God can save us. We desperately need His divine intervention. American needs a spiritual awakening and a genuine revival of repentance, regeneration, and interaction to influence our culture. Nothing short of a radiant, Spirit-filled Christianity can speak truth into a self-destructive culture.

But this is familiar territory for God and He has demonstrated time and time again that He is willing to extend a life-line to the most rebellious people—like the nation of Judah here in the Book of Malachi and even to individuals who have done really destructive things to God and to other people. I want us to see just how open God is to offering this life-line to those who will respond.

The Apostle Paul immediately comes to my mind. Here is a man who even describes himself as the ‘worst’ of all sinners. He was a human wrecking ball against the first Church. He beat Christians, threw them out of their homes, killed them, chased them down and made a vendetta against them to eliminate each and every one of them he could.

Yet God stopped him on the way to persecute and kill more Christians in Syria and told him that God wanted Paul to stop persecuting Him and to become an apostle to reach the Gentile world of the First Century.

The credentials of this man were horrible. He was a known murderer of Christians, he vowed to destroy all Christians he could and he was willing to go where Christians had fled for safety to hunt them down and destroy them. But God knew the faith and the heart of this man and knew that same determination would lead him to sit in a dirty Roman jail and write over one-half of the letters that we have in the New Testament. He knew that this man would be willing to be chased out of one town where they were attempting to kill him and go to the next town and start preaching again. God knew His heart and God knew that if He gave this life-line to Paul—Paul would take it and would become the greatest evangelist and Church planter the world has ever seen.

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But there were many others:

Moses—Fled Egypt because he killed an Egyptian man while trying to help his Hebrew people. But God took this murderer and led him back to Egypt where when doing it God’s way he was able to lead all the nation out to freedom from the Egyptian slavery.

Jonah—was so stubborn about going to preach a revival at Nineveh because he hated the people of Nineveh and he did not want to see them spared that he took a boat in the opposite direction. But God used the situation to cause Jonah to see what he really was supposed to do and Jonah did preach and win the city of Nineveh back to God.

Simon Peter-- in the courtyard where Jesus was being tried in an attempt to get a young lady from quizzing him anymore about his relationship with Jesus—cursing, swearing and denying Jesus. Yet Jesus took Peter aside in Galilee right after His resurrection and asked Peter to lead the start of the Church.

James and John were the Sons of Thunder—this nickname was not because their dad had been named Thunder---no this nickname was because they were loud, easily angered, and always combative with others. Their mother came to Jesus one time and asked Jesus to put her boys, James and John on his right and on his left when he came into power. Yet, Jesus kept these two men in His inner circle of three and He allowed these men to play significant roles in the start of the Church and John led for the entire first century.

Some of the second chances almost take your breath away. **King David** stealing Bathsheba away from her husband Uriah and then having Uriah killed on the battlefield on purpose. Yet, God still allowed David to be the King and to be the lineage that marked the birth of Christ. Jesus came as the offspring or son of David.

One of the most breathtaking stories of the New Testament is when Jesus told the story of the **Prodigal Son**. A young man who demanded that his father divide the inheritance and give him his portion. Mind you, dad was not dead yet and the inheritance in New Testament times was not given out until the death of the Father. But the father gave him the inheritance and the young man went to a foreign country and spent it all. He was broke and reduced to taking care of swine—something a Jewish person would never do—when he decided he needed to go home and become a servant for his father and at least have food, shelter, and a nice place to live. The father did not let this happen—he met the boy, gave him all the things that symbolized him being a son—a robe, a ring, shoes, and restored his position as his son. He even held a great party where he invited all the young man’s friends to celebrate that the boy was still alive and back home.

God also extends second chances to those who He knows will not take the second chance and use it right. As you read through the last week in the human life of Jesus Christ—you see Him offering more than one chance for **Judas Iscariot** to change from betraying him to coming back to following Jesus. It is remarkable the way that Jesus treats someone who will betray Him and see the compassion and second chances that He offers to Judas.

King Saul was another where God often intervened and gave King Saul an opportunity to follow God and not his own ego. He did not destroy King Saul after the witch of Endor episode, or for taking the Ark of the Covenant into Battle as a good luck charm and losing it, or for taking over the offering of the sacrifices himself instead of waiting for Samuel the high priest to come and do it, or for all the times that he chased David around his nation and tried to kill him. But we cannot say that King Saul ever really took the offer of God and did exactly what God wanted him to do. So, the line of kings passed from his family and his heritage in the nation of Israel was very tainted and flawed.

Nothing in my mind was more compassionate and loving than God offering the nation of Israel and later just Judah a handful of second chances to return to God and do what He wanted them to do. They were so

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frustrating that God even said, I will preserve Judah just because of the Temple and the memory of King David. This is the thrust of the passage tonight in Malachi 4. God finishes the Book of Malachi with an admonition; a final promise, and a warning. Let's look at each one of them as we see how God continues to extend that life-line after He gets our attention.

Life-lines come in a variety of ways from God.

1. The Life-Line of Admonition Malachi 4:4

God calls His people back to their roots often and that is also true for us. God gets our attention to remind us that when we were regular in worship, when we tithed regularly, when we read us Bible frequently, and when we prayed every day—our life was headed in the right direction. Often repentance is not only for specific sinful acts we should not have done, but just as often it is for drifting away from God and letting ourselves get into those sinful situations that caused us to fall.

The admonition here is to—remember the covenant laws of God that God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai or Mt. Horeb—the same mountain. Malachi declares that Moses compiled all the laws while he was at the peak of Mt. Horeb and received them from God. He was the messenger of God and simply wrote down and copied what God told him. This is not only the ten commandments—this is the whole law including the statutes, ordinances, and all the ceremonial, moral, and legal regulations for the people to live the life that God intended them to live.

The admonition for us today is to return to the roots of God's salvation in our life. Trust God in everything and every way. Allow Him to lead you, direct you, and teach you what you should be doing. Sometimes we forget that we are the salt, light, and leaven of our world—and we just hide away and let our world become more and more secular. One of the admonitions of God is that we change our world for the better and not let it change us. We are not doing the will of the Lord if our communities are going down and down and we are saying nothing.

There is not a special banner or award for Christians who are practicing “the silent witness approach to their faith”. It may be a great way to catch criminals and others that have violated the law, but it is not a way to please God. He wants and expects us to change our world in a way that will make a big difference in the place we call our neighborhood.

So, God calls us with a life-line of admonition to encourage us and remind us that we are to make a difference. We are not going to be able to tell the Lord—well, I was just the quiet, shy type and I never wanted to cause any trouble or disturbance. He is going to ask---“what part of let your light shine” do you not understand. When I said do not hide your light under a bushel or any other place that blocks its light—I meant let it shine.

2. The Life-Line of Promise Malachi 4:5

God promises to send someone like Elijah to turn the hearts of the people to the Lord. Just as the David God sent to be the Messiah was not David the person, but Jesus who had a heart and mind like David—so, this will not be Elijah reincarnated—but someone who is like Elijah who will come to change the world where he has been sent.

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John the Baptist said he was not Elijah, **John 1:21**; but Jesus said John was the Elijah of Promise, **Matthew 17:11-13**. The promise of the prophecy was John who came to prepare the way for Jesus Christ to be the Messiah.

The mission of this Elijah was to turn the hearts or affections of the people back to God and to those they were responsible for. He was to restore a right relationship between parents and children and to turn the hearts of the children to the Lord Jehovah to guide them. Then they would be ready to receive the Messiah, for they would see in Him the fulfillment of all God's wondrous promises and the glorious hope of their own fathers. Elijah had preached a repentance and a return to God Jehovah; this was also the teaching of John the Baptist. A return to Jehovah as the provider and giver of all good things was the only way to avert destruction. Some hearkened, but just as in the days of Malachi, many did not. So, God took back His hand of protection over Judah in both instances and in each the result was the capture and/or destruction of Judah and Jerusalem. When Jesus left the Temple desolate—unprotected in **Matthew 23:38-39**, *“Look, your house is left to you desolate. For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.’”* It was left as a carcass, fit only for vultures, **Matthew 24:28**— *“Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.”* The vultures or could also be eagles (the sign and signature symbol of the Roman army), came and the carcass was devoured in A. D. 70.

Today we need to listen again to those great promises that God gave to Mary and Joseph and see what is left to be fulfilled, for God may be using again someone like Elijah to get us to realize that He is not finished with the first mission of Jesus Christ coming to this earth.

3. The Life-Line of Warning. Malachi 4:6

The Book of Malachi is a fitting close to God's revelation to His people. A final appeal is made to the people to purge out the wickedness found among them and to give to Jehovah an acceptable life and worship. A final warning is given of judgment that will come to the wicked. And a final promise is made that Jehovah God will be righteous in this judgment and He will save and preserve His people that have followed Him and stayed as a faithful remnant of God. There was no more that God could say or do, and so, no word was heard from Him until the silence was broken by the message who would introduce Jesus the Messiah, 400 years later. This messenger's name was John the Baptist and his call to repent was followed by the words of grace spoken by Jesus revealing Himself and also revealing the will of God.

God often extends the life-line of warning so that people will come back to Him and see that He truly holds the key to life and death. I hope that you have a strong relationship with God and so you are listening more to His promises to assure and soothe your soul and not just to the warnings that are telling you—you must change and you need to do it now.

The last two verses of Malachi speak of the coming of John the Baptist and with him the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. When the angel told Mary about the birth of Jesus, he spoke of the promises that God will bring with Jesus:

“Behold you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give to Him the throne of His father David, And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; And of His kingdom here will be no end.” **Luke 1:31-33**

Gabriel told Mary seven promises that would come with Jesus. Four of those were fulfilled when Jesus was born:

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1. Mary would conceive a child.
2. Mary would give birth to a son.
3. The son would be great.
4. The son would be called “the Son of God.”

But three of those can only be fulfilled when Jesus comes a second time and sets His kingdom up here on the earth and rules over the Millennial Kingdom.

1. He will be given the throne of David.

Jesus now is currently reigning from His Father’s throne over His kingdom, the Church. But he will be given the “throne of David”—which has to be on this earth and not in heaven. It was and will be in the city of Jerusalem. He is now at the right hand of His Father, on His Father’s throne. He will occupy the throne of David when He returns to earth to reign from Mt. Zion in Jerusalem, **Isaiah 24:21-23**

2. He will reign over the house of Jacob.

This is not the church. This is a Bible phrase for the children of Israel, **Exodus 19:3**. The Church is never referred to in Scripture as the house of Jacob.

The Bible teaches that a remnant of the Jews will one day accept Jesus as their Messiah, **Zechariah 12:10; Romans 9:27; and Romans 11:25-26**. This will occur at the end of 3 1/2 years of terrible suffering. When Jesus returns, he will gather the Jewish remnant and Israel will be the foremost nation of the world. **Ezekiel 37:11-28; and Zechariah 8:22-23**.

3. There will be no end to His kingdom.

The current Church kingdom is not an everlasting kingdom. It will end when the Church is raptured from this earth and will usher in the Millennial Kingdom where Jesus reigns over the earth. This will be followed by the Eternal kingdom of Christ—which shall last forever.

This forever Kingdom is available to each of us. I pray that you stay close to the Lord, follow His direction in all things, and look expectantly to His fulfilling each of these last three prophecies to Mary from Gabriel.

HOPE LOOKS UP BIBLE STUDY

by Pastor Tom Haney

BOOK OF MALACHI – HOW DOES GOD GET OUR ATTENTION!