***Malachi 3:1-9 “Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts. 2“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap. 3He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. 4“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years. 5And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien - Because they do not fear Me,” Says the Lord of hosts. 6“For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob. 7Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the Lord of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return? “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.***

Last week, we saw how the people were profaning God’s covenant, specifically in marriage. The people were intermarrying, neglecting the spouse of their youth, even while they were aware, awake, and knew better. The priests and elders were prime offenders, being the expected keepers of wisdom and knowledge, yet giving into status and greed, while defiling their God assigned duty. This week, we shift a little and speak about yet another way people are failing to keep covenant with God.

 Verse 1 says *“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.* ***Behold,****I send My messenger –* Malachi now announces the coming of John the Baptist, who will prepare the way for Jesus, God incarnate. In Matthew 21:25-26, Jesus makes it clear that John came by way of divine authority, to call the people to repentance and return. *And he will prepare the way before Me –* Of course, we know John the Baptist did just this. *Isaiah 40:3 - The voice of one crying in the wilderness: “Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert A highway for our God.* The Lord will come immediately, suddenly. Jesus will come suddenly to the Temple, on the heels of the messenger, John the Baptist. We know that they were together, John the Baptist baptizing Jesus, and saying that he must decrease even as Jesus increases. The messenger has done the job. The King is here. When the King arrives, the people that prepared for His arrival fade into the background. A servant is never above his Master. John the Baptist called to practice their belief in such as way as they would be ready to receive the blessing of the coming Messiah. *And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple –* The Lord will appear. The word used for Lord means base or foundation, and also means governor or ruler. This new foundation, the Chief Cornerstone, will catch many off guard. This is true of Jesus first coming and it will be true of His second coming. Of course, we know that Jesus established His church and made way for the Holy Spirit to indwell us, making our bodies the very Temple of God. *Even the Messenger of the covenant –* Jesus is to be the Messenger of a new covenant. He reveals and becomes our mediator, our High Priest, of this new covenant. He is our Peacemaker with God, our Grace bringer, sent by God to bring His wayward children, the human race, home. *In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the Lord of hosts.* The Jewish people had waited, joyfully, hopefully, for the coming of this Messenger. They delighted in the thought of His arrival. Malachi repeats the promise and says, “Behold He is coming!” The Messiah they were expecting and the Messiah they found were not the same. They looked for worldly change. Jesus brought Spiritual renewal and rebirth.

 Verse 2*“But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner’s fire And like launderers’ soap.* ***But*** *who can endure the day of His coming?* No one understood the consequences of Christ coming, His betrayal, and His crucifixion. The Jews looked for a military conqueror. Jesus brought victory over sin and death. The consequences were that the people were divided. Father & son, mother & daughter, households divided. Disobedience has consequences. Rome destroyed the Temple and the city. Believers still suffered trials and tribulations, but Jesus waits to receive us. *And who can stand when He appears?* Of course, we know no one will be able to stand. No one can withstand the trials and tribulations, without divine help. So it will also be when the time of Tribulation arises. Believers will be carried away. In Matthew 3, John the Baptist asks – who warned you to flee the wrath to come? *For He is like a refiner’s fire –* the precious metals will be separated from the dross, chaff will be consumed by the testing fires. Jesus Himself spoke in Luke 12:49 of sending fire, a fire of purification, upon the earth. *And like launderers’ soap –* The Hebrew word for soap here is used in Jeremiah 2:22 as well, speaking of a herbal soap used in those times to get the most stubborn stains and spots out. Fullers, or professional laundrymen, used this. *For though you wash yourself with lye, and use much soap, Yet your iniquity is marked before Me,” says the Lord God.* Marked has the meaning of stained.

 Verses 3-4 *He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness. 4“Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years.* ***He*** *will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi,* Jesus will be diligent, and have a zeal, for God’s commandments, unlike the sons of Levi and their rebellion and poor keeping of their duties that we have been studying so far in Malachi. The zeal will purify, as heat purifies silver. Jesus will reform these abuses and purify the worship of God. *And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the Lord An offering in righteousness.* The purge will bring righteousness back, cleansing the person by way of this fire. But, let’s never forget that not every product of the fire is pure silver and gold. There is dross and waste products. Likewise, there were those that believed Jesus and followed, and there were those that cried out that He be crucified. 1 Peter 2:4-5 *says Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.* We are a holy priesthood, offering acceptable sacrifice to God through Jesus. We offer our time, talents, and life, a living sacrifice. *Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the Lord, As in the days of old, As in former years.* Christiansare called to be an offering, acceptable and pleasant to the Lord. God and man will again be in unity, through the work of Christ, as in the days of old.

 Verse 5 - *And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien - Because they do not fear Me,” Says the Lord of hosts.* This is an answer to the question we saw back in Malachi 2 – Where is the God of Justice? God now says., “I will come near for judgement. It will be swift. God alone is Judge and Witness. He is the holder of Truth. He sees the hearts and actions of people, no one need testify before Him. God lists sins – sorcery, adultery, perjury, those that cheat widows, orphans, and wage earners, and those that fail to take care of travelers and aliens in the land These were sins common in the time of Malachi. They were common in the time of Jesus. They are common today. People don’t change.

 Verse 6 - *For I am the Lord, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.* God is God. He changes not. He is perfect. There is no shadow or gray area. No changing of the light as time passes. He does not consume the Sons of Jacob. He is long suffering, in spite of the sinful ways of the people. He made a promise to Jacob and He is a promise keeper. They were and are His Covenant people.

Verse 7 *Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the Lord of hosts. “But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?* ***Yet*** *from the days of your fathers –* Malachi now turns back to the wicked. *You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them.* The people have departed from God’s ways and are violating His Law. They are treating one another disdainfully. *Return to Me, and I will return to you,” Says the Lord of hosts.* Repent and come back to God and God will return to you, accepting and blessing the people again. *But you said, ‘In what way shall we return?* Malachi now highlights how the people persist in justifying themselves and their sin. God says – repent and the people respond – for what? There can never be true repentance without a true recognition of sin.

Verses 8-9*“Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me! But you say, ‘In what way have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. 9You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.* ***Will*** *a man rob God?* This has the idea of “Is it right to cheat and defraud God? God gives a very straight answer to the question of In what way should we return? *Yet, you have robbed Me!* When humans withhold what belongs to God, we rob Him. This may be talents, time, love, or money. The people ask - In what way have we robbed You? God answers – In tithes and offerings. Now, many times people think that tithes and offerings are money… it can be. But it is also service, time, talents, loving brothers and sisters. In fact, failing to adore God is another way to rob God. Giving all attention to the world robs God of the adoration He deserves. God asks for a portion of ALL He gives us back. *You are cursed with a curse,* You are greatly accursed, lie under a heavy weight of curse, and it continues on you because you continue to rob Me. *For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation –* The whole nation has robbed God. This isn’t the crime of only a few, but all.

And so we leave Malachi tonight, but we leave with a whole lot to think about. Are we keeping the adoration that God deserves focused on the world we think we deserve? How are our blessings being blocked by our failure to honor God with all we are? Malachi 3 has long been scripture I return to again and again, knowing that presenting myself to God as sacrifice is my only reasonable service, as Romans 12:1 says. May we honor God and receive His blessings.