

“Baggage” Part 8
Reverse the Curse
Malachi 3:6-12

Baggage has a way of keeping us from the things we actually love the most....

Do you love your church?.....

Is there baggage in your life that is in the way of what you love?.....

Countless individuals who call themselves Christians live a seemingly picture perfect existence that appears to be marked by blessings, joys, serendipities, pleasures, and grace gifts;

But in reality—from God’s perspective, the Word’s promise, and eternity’s point of view, they are stifled, held back, and handcuffed by the misery of their “Baggage” - a curse.

There is a story told of a man who stole an enormous amount of money but was captured by the authorities in the process of the robbery. He didn’t have the money with him, so in their question and query they asked him where he had hid the money. However, it turned out that the man spoke another language, so they had to send for an interpreter. When the interpreter came, the authorities said, ‘Ask him where he hid the money. The interpreter asked the thief the question in his own language and the thief replied. The authorities asked ‘What did he say?’ The interpreter replied ‘He’s not telling!’ The authorities insisted shouting, ‘Tell him we want to know where the money is, and we want to know now!’ The interpreter repeated the question to the thief and got the same reply ‘He said he’s not telling!’ The chief head of the authorities thought he would try to scare the thief into telling, so he said to the interpreter, ‘Tell him that if he doesn’t tell us where the money is, we are going to kill his family, and blow out his brains!’ The interpreter repeated the threat to the thief who became frightened and told the interpreter step by step exactly where he could find the money. The authorities listened to the conversation and then asked the interpreter, ‘Well...what did he say?’ To which the interpreter replied, ‘He said he isn’t going to tell you anything.’ Eventually, in exasperation, the authorities convicted the thief while the interpreter found the money and became and inheritor of great wealth.

MOST of us would look upon that interpreter with disgust, disdain, and revulsion.
However, we do the very same to God every day of our lives.

There is baggage that stands between the authority of the believer and the wealth of God, it is our faulty interpretation of the Word of God about tithing.

And it is through that thievish mentality and faulty interpretation that robs the believer of possessing the wealth and blessing of God in our lives.

Why? Because we have settled for selling ourselves short, blocked our blessing, and are content with our “Baggage” – the curse

When it comes to the issue of money and stewardship and giving and increase—our interpretations and motives often become mixed up by human limitations, spiritual short-sightedness and ultimately a lack of faith to take God at His Word.

We develop and construct a Satanic ideology in our brain that says that all of our money and everything that we possess is for the sole purpose for our ungodly motives, selfish gain, and fleshly/carnal ambitions.

But according to the biblical order of God, God blesses those who do it HIS way, and He curses the one who refuses to follow His plan, flow in His purpose, and walk in their inheritance.

It is terrible and tragic to have access to your blessing yet you are blocked by your curse.

And there are countless people who call themselves Christians—who come to church Sunday after Sunday, looking and smelling good—who have settled for selling themselves short, blocked their own blessing, and are content with continually living with their curse.

- Making a living but because of your disobedience the curse is forbidding you to make a LIFE.
- Living and dressing and driving good but you one day find yourself a day late and a dollar short with your STUFF—because you have refused to honor the Lord with your ALL.
- You have a good job and live in a nice home but can’t make ends meet because of a curse on your 90% for the continual refusal of your faith to give Him the 10% that He asks for—even though He’d be justified in asking for it all.

I’ve just come to encourage, exhort somebody that your tomorrow can be brighter than your yesterday
your destiny can be greater than your history
your dreams can be fonder than your memories
if you let God speak to your heart today—and do it HIS way!!

The curse can be reversed – You don't have to carry the baggage of the curse!

The curse can be broken in your life forever

• **God desires that you move Him from being your last resort to your first priority**

• **It is the will of God that you move the Word of God from being your spare tire and make it your steering wheel**

And that is where we are in the story—At the time of the text about a hundred years had passed since God had set the Israelites free from their Babylonian Captivity.

It has been approximately a century since God used a pagan king, Cyrus of Persia, to overthrow the Babylonian Empire, set the Jewish people free and even order them to go home to rebuild God's holy city of Jerusalem.

Those first days back home were marked by spiritual renewal and a breathing afresh.

The holy temple was restored by Ezra, the city walls were rebuilt by Nehemiah, and the people's hearts were revived.

However, not long after being home, not long after the revival had broken out, not long after God had done so much for them, the Israelites fall once more into cold, callous, and carnal religiosity.

And the fires of revival began to phase out and cool off.

And once again the Israelites began to turn their hearts away from the God of Yahweh and began to do it their own way.

Now the Bible is clear in Psalm 103:8 that God is slow to anger. But if you are slow to do right, His anger will eventually catch up with you.

And when God sees that the people have yet once more, for yet another generation, proven themselves to diss God and do it their own way, God's patience is worn and He decides to give Israel ONE MORE CHANCE.

And this one more chance is extended to them through the prophet and the prophecy of Malachi.

But take note here that the prophecy of Malachi is not just the last call for Israel spiritually but also historically.

Chronologically, the book of Malachi is last in the Old Testament and that is not accidental.

When you finish the book of Malachi and you flip over you will find yourself in the New Testament book of Matthew.

For consequently, from the end of Malachi to the beginning of Matthew there is a gap that we call the intertestamental period.

And it was a period that lasted over 400 years. And for over 400 years there was not a voice heard from a prophet.

That is as if after Malachi speaks then through their disobedience God just shuts up and has nothing else to say to Israel. God just stops talking to Israel over 400 years.

And the next time a prophet is heard, it is 400 years later when God raises up John the Baptist as a forerunner for the Messiah.

And the coming of the Messiah reveals that God is no longer counting on Israel to do what is right.

When the Messiah comes he shuts the door on calling Israel the chosen and promised people of God.

And when the Messiah comes he opens the door and the floodgates for a strange group of people that the Bible calls "whosoever will....".

And before the Messiah comes and before He shuts His mouth, God, through His grace, gives Israel just one more chance.

In fact there is just a bottom line to the book of Malachi and here it is: STOP PLAYING CHURCH BEFORE ITS TOO LATE.

Why? Because it's one thing to come to church; but it's another thing to BE the church.

Its one thing to go to worship; but it's another thing to have worship go through you.

Its one thing to boast and brag about how long the Lord has been working ON you; but it's another thing to reach a point where the Lord is working IN you and THROUGH to work on somebody else.

Its one thing to come to church, sit, look sleep and then make your exit; but it's another thing when your mind has been renewed, your soul has been redeemed, your commitment has been reaffirmed—where every day of your life—the Spirit of God is using the Word of God to make you look like the Son of God.

Where there is a changing and re-arranging of your priorities IN God and a re-charging of your commitment BEFORE God.

I. The Danger of Disobedience (vs. 6 – 9)

a. Rebellion ‘...you have gone away...’

Gone away (cuwr): to neglect, hide, removal or restraint.

Ordinance (khome): that which is limited, set apart, or boundary

- Your actions have abandoned your identity
- Your calling has departed from what I have called you to and destined your for
- Your carnal and fleshly desire to please self have neglected the worship that I desire from you to be set apart for Me in your heart.

b. Robbery ‘...you have robbed me.’

There is a difference between a thief and a robber.

A thief waits until you walk away and not looking and then steals what you have by stealth.

But a robber takes a gun or a knife or a weapon and stands in your face and takes what you have by force.

God didn’t say we are thieves, He said that we are robbers...this is not embezzlement but a carjacking.

There is tension between God and Israel.

And Israel is so hard-hearted and stiffnecked that they can’t even recognize that it is their sin that is causing separation with God.

They think that the reason there is tension is because of some inconsistency and unfaithfulness on God’s part.

And so God clears that up in verse 6 when he says, ‘I am the Lord...I do not change’.

In other words He does not change...He does not change like the shifting shadows.

(Hebrews 11) God is eternally consistent. He does not change.

What that means is that if God DOES seem distant and far away...guess who moved?

But God says in the text, let me tell you what the real issue is, you need to return to me.

Watch the hard-hearted Israelites in verse 7, ‘return, in what way?’

I like the way Malachi gives rhetorical questions to add tension to the text...they are asking ‘return?’ (2:17 he say ‘you are making God weary’.

Making Him weary, in what way?

...they are playing the okey doke and acting brand new like they don’t know where Malachi is coming from...like a whole lot of us...because in our mind...we don’t have a problem...

- i. You rob God
- ii. You rob the church
- iii. You rob yourself

• The average Christian is not honoring the Lord in their giving.

We have a lot of people who have not committed themselves to the study of the Word of God, won’t come to Bible study, won’t frequent Sunday School—but when it comes to the issues of giving, they become theological.

And make their excuses on why they are not giving and cannot give.

When we are disobedient, here is our favorite theological premise that we like to hold on to: GOD UNDERSTANDS.

- It’s been a long month, got great bills to pay, got a large family, overwhelmed with debt, got goals to reach...God understands. Well, I don’t know because God gave you what you started with. And because of your mismanagement of the 90 in your finances it ain’t God’s fault when you don’t have anything left at the end to give to Him in return.

- Something gotta give!!! And when it comes the mistakes you’ve made and the blessing from Him that you NEED and can’t live without—you can’t afford NOT to give back to God what He so graciously gave to you to begin with.

I am afraid that God does not understand.

When we don’t give like we ought to give God does not understand.

And the reality of my not giving back to Him is conceived as spiritual robbery.

c. Result ‘...you are cursed with a curse...’ “Baggage”

He says that every Sunday morning, you march right up into my house in my face driving cars that you drove with stolen money/wearing clothes that you purchased with stolen money/shoes that you bought with stolen money...right in my face...you are cursed with a curse.

II. The Grace of Giving (vs. 7 – 10a)

a. The grace of giving is based on your **Position** ‘return...’ John 1:9

b. The grace of giving is based on **Privilege** ‘bring you **all** the tithe...’

c. The grace of giving is based on **Purpose** ‘that there may be meat...’

III. The Outcome to Obedience (vs. 10b – 12)

- a. God promises to reward our faith ‘I will open...not be room enough...’
- b. God promises to rebuke our foes ‘I will rebuke the devourer...’
- c. God promises to renew our fruitfulness ‘...all the nations...delightful land...’

In Israel there are two different body of waters but they have the same water supply—the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea.

Actually it comes from Mt. Hermon when it is snowcapped; when that snow begins to melt on Mt. Herman, it rushes violently down Mt. Herman into the Northern inlet of the Jordan River; and then it flows straight through the Jordan River out through the Southern outlet of the Jordan into the Northern inlet of the Sea of Galilee;

that same water keeps flowing through the Sea of Galilee out its Southern outlet into the Northern inlet of the Dead Sea;

but once it gets to the Dead Sea, there it stands stagnant because the Dead Sea has no Southern outlet.

The Dead Sea has a Northern inlet but no Southern outlet so the same water that flows INTO the Jordan and OUT the Jordan, INTO the Sea of Galilee and OUT the Sea of Galilee, INTO the Dead Sea, the cycle is suspended and aborted and there it stands and remains in the Dead Sea.

But yet, the waters of the Sea of Galilee and the waters of the Dead Sea are different because the Sea of Galilee is rich and refreshing—things grow in it and flow in it; but the Dead Sea is cited as the Dead Sea for a reason. Why?

Because nothing can FLOW there and consequently nothing can GROW there. Why?
Because it is DEAD.

Now how can these two different bodies of water get their water supply from the same source and one is rich and refreshing and the other is dead?

That is because the Sea of Galilee receives and releases and therefore it GROWS and FLOWS there.

But the Dead Sea has a receptive mentality but no release—it takes in but doesn’t let anything GO; and that’s why it is dead.

Now I’m bringing this up—because, more than likely, there are 2 different Christians in here today.

And of course, you get your blessings from the same supply and the same source because, according to James 1:17, every good and perfect gift comes from above—from the Lord our God Who is our Maker, Sustainer, Savior, and Redeemer.

Then how can one Christian’s life be rich and refreshing with things growing and flowing and then the other Christian—getting their blessings and ‘good gifts’ from the same Sovereign Source—but their life is DEAD and meaningless where nothing is FLOWING and GROWING. Why?

That’s because if you have a receptive mentality but no release—if all you want to do is RECEIVE God’s blessings but do not RELEASE God’s blessings

I don’t care how long you’ve been coming to church, how big your Bible is, how cute you look when you get to church—things will not work, flow, function and grow in your life.

Why? Because whatever God can send THROUGH a person last, God will send TO that person first.

Why? Because if God can not send it THROUGH you, God won’t waste His time sending it TO you.

Get this—When God is meeting your needs He’s really on His way to meeting somebody else’s needs.

(Here is where I would like for us to spend some time talking about FFM’s vision of touch the community and the nations.....)

Why meeting out budget is important

Tithing helps them be part of the mission)

A lot of times when God is blessing you, He’s really on His way to blessing somebody else. The modus operandi of God works this way: He’s sending it TO you, hoping that is channels THROUGH you to bless somebody else that He’s trying to touch.

But when you STOP the flow of what God is DOING—then God stops sending it your way.

- As Christian believers, we don’t live our lives the way that the world lives theirs.
- As Christians, we don’t have the same mentality that the world uses to think the way that they think.

There is a way to get into the FLOW of God

There is a way to be USED of God

There is a way to GROW in God.

And it is connected to a fundamental, theological, biblical truth and here it is: God’s glory is connected to OUR giving.

Do you love your church or your Baggage?