

Commitment: Are You All In?
Who Are You Reflecting?
Malachi 3
3/26/17

- I want us to imagine for a moment that we work at McDonalds – all of us. Some are crew members – cashiers, food preparers, etc. Several are assistant managers. A few are managers and two are co-owners. You get to decide who you are.
 - When you arrive at work right before the lunch rush, outside of the restaurant, you notice some trash just lying about and someone has obviously spilled a drink right outside the door.
 - If you are crew member, what would you do? Probably, unless one of the managers tells you to take care of it, you don't think much about it. You walk right past, go inside, clock in and do your minimum wage job, giving minimum wage effort.
 - If you are an assistant manager, you might do the same. You already have enough on your plate, after all, and you know that today you are going to be short-staffed plus the lunch rush is about to begin.
 - If you are a manager, you might quickly pick up the trash and then go in to find someone else who can clean up the messy spill. But, with the lunch rush coming, that becomes less of a priority. Everyone else is doing something that needs to be done for lunch prep and you don't want to go out there to do it yourself.
 - But, if you are the owner, what would you do? You would make sure that got cleaned up, especially because the lunch rush is coming. And, if there is no one else who can get it done, you, as the owner, will go out there and get things cleaned up. You know that the way your restaurant looks makes a difference as to whether or not people will return. No one wants to step in a spilled sticky drink and walk around like that.

- What is the difference between the workers at McDonalds? Level of commitment. A crew member is not all that committed beyond getting a paycheck. Management level is more committed, but not enough to do the job themselves.
 - But, an owner is committed – committed enough to do the job, even a job that is not their responsibility or below their pay grade or one that they could delegate to someone else. They have a whole different level of investment.
 - An owner is invested in the restaurant doing well and it will do well depending on how people perceive it and through the experience they have while there. So, trash blowing around is a negative reflection. Spilled drinks, even outside, is a negative reflection. You don't want people to go away with that in their minds.
 - Ultimately, an owner knows that their restaurant is a reflection on them.

- When it comes to your commitment to God and to God's church, which level would you say you reflect? Are you more of a crew member, an assistant manager, a manager or an owner? That's our question this morning.
 - For the last two weeks, we've been looking at the book of Malachi. The video we saw during the offering gave us an overview of the whole book.
 - We saw in chapter 1 that Malachi reminds the people of God's love and compares God's love for them to their leftover love for God. Malachi condemns their half-hearted attempts to worship God with their "leftovers." They saved the best for themselves and then gave God the leftovers, what they didn't want.
 - In chapter 2, we see that the priests were no better than the people, because they viewed their ministry as drudgery they had to endure. They were just going through the motions; they lost the heart and the passion of worship.
 - This morning, Malachi 3 is going to help us answer the question of whether our commitment to God is more like a crew member, assistant manager, manager or owners.

- I want us to skip around a little bit in Malachi 3 because I want to start with **Malachi 3:6-7**. Let's read that together.
 - Here is a proclamation from God – "I do not change." That means that God's character doesn't change. God's Word doesn't change.
 - Sometimes, people read that and they think that means that God is against change or against change in the church. That's not it at all. Methods change. Methods are how we do things or even how God does things.
 - No one can argue that God changed the method by which we come to him. In Malachi's day, people came to God through animal sacrifice. The blood of an animal was given to atone for their sin. But, God sent Jesus who became the sacrifice and whose blood atones for our sin when we ask for forgiveness and accept him as our Lord. God made another way for us.
 - The unchanging part is the He is Lord! He wants a relationship with his people. He wants his people to be committed to him. That will never, never change.
 - The way we do things in church might change from generation to generation. The songs we sing may change. How we do things in the church today is vastly different from the times when they did Gregorian chants. Aren't you glad? Some of us here like hymns, others like more current music and worship, but I think we can all agree is that either one is better than chanting!
 - What doesn't change is who God is and that what we do as a church should all be done for his glory and for his worship.

- What also doesn't change is the propensity for our human nature to be drawn to sin. In verse 6, God reminds us that from the beginning of time, humans have scorned his commands and failed to obey him. The cycle of sin is here to stay.
 - But, the unchanging God is always there to relentlessly pursue his people and to forgive them because of his unending love. So that when we finally see that sin is

leading us nowhere, verse 7 tells us that we can return to God and what happens? God will return to us.

- He will forgive us, he will accept us, he will save us. That is who God is and that will never change. Aren't you glad? Aren't you thankful for that?
 - 'Cause I've messed up – more than once or twice – I've messed up a lot and God returns to me every time I return to him because that's who he is. Who else can give that testimony this morning. If so, shout out – “Thank you, God!”
- In the rest of Malachi 3, there lists a couple of other things about God that don't change. Those unchanging things about God, if we commit to, will take us from being crew members to management and on to owners in our commitment to Him.
- Let's read **Malachi 3:1-5**
- Here we find that the first thing about God that doesn't change is that God has a passion for purity. Purity is a good thing. Think about the water you drink: you don't want little black specks floating around in your water.
- Just ask the people of Flint. They want clear, pure water. And they get pretty worked up to get pure water. Constant features on the national news circuit because their water was not pure.
 - Having pure water is an international issue and really an international crisis. If you have been to Haiti, you know that no one there, whether Haitian or someone from another country, should drink the tap water there. It's not pure. Potable water in Haiti is not as easy as turning on the faucet.
 - Just as purity in water is important, our spiritual purity is important.
- In Malachi, the spiritual state of the people was anything but pure. They weren't out and out worshiping idols, but they weren't worshiping God purely. They were giving leftovers, they were complaining about how serving the Lord was too hard, they were getting divorces because they thought someone else would be better and the priests, the spiritual leaders, were turning their heads to all of this.
- On top of that, they were upset with God! Rather than putting blame on who deserves blame, (which was their own selves) they were pointing their fingers at God. Isn't that just like us as humans? We don't do the right thing, we give God whatever we want, but we expect God to give us his best. Our selfish nature is always at work.
 - In Malachi 2, verse 17, the people were asking “Where is the God of justice?” They wanted God to come and set things right, to make them a great nation, to bless them, to destroy their enemies. Regardless of their leftover worship to God, they wanted God to show up for them and do what was right in their eyes. They were God's chosen people, after all. He should be doing something for them!
 - It even says in this verse that these cries and demands wearied God!! He was tired of it!

- So, he tells the people what he is going to do. We just read what he said in Malachi 3:1-5. He promises to send his messenger to prepare the way for the Lord. Then, the Lord will come. God is going to set things right!
 - Here, God is referring to John the Baptist, who came to prepare the way for Jesus.
 - But, Jesus is not coming to do what the people thought – to console them or give them victory and blessings, but to purify them!
 - Malachi says you think that because you are the “chosen” people, you can do whatever you want and demand of me. You are going to get more than you bargained for because I’m not about having worshippers just to have worshippers or to have people just to have people. I want people who are pure.

- Look at verse 2 - But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? The answer is nobody! The Jews often looked forward to the Day of the Lord, when the Messiah would come, because they viewed it as a day that God came to bless His people and give them victory over their enemies and make them better than any other nation.
 - But the prophet Amos warned, Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light.
 - As we know from the New Testament, the people who Jesus confronted the most were the religious leaders who thought they deserved something for keeping a bunch of rules, but their hearts weren’t pure. They didn’t love purely, they didn’t worship purely, they didn’t serve purely. They did it all out of selfish ambition.
 - Jesus doesn’t come to pat them on the back---He comes to purify them, like a refiner’s fire, like launderer’s soap. He comes to purify His people like a metal worker, to clean His house spick and span.

- God gives us some very strong visual images, word pictures, to understand His passion for purity. He will be like a refiner’s fire.
 - A group of women were studying the book of Malachi. As they were reading chapter three, they came across this verse, which intrigued the women and they wondered what this statement meant about the character and the nature of God. One of the women offered to look into the process of refining silver and get back to the group at their next Bible study.
 - That week she contacted a silver smith and made an appointment to meet with him and to watch him at work. She did not mention anything about the reason for her interest in silver beyond her curiosity about the process of refining silver.
 - As she watched the silver smith, he held a piece of silver over the fire and let it heat up. He explained that in refining silver, one needed to hold the silver in the middle of the fire where the flames were the hottest so to burn away all the impurities. The woman thought about God holding us in such a way over the fire then she thought again about the verse, "He sits as a refiner and purifier of silver."

- She asked the silver smith if it was true that he had to sit there in front of the fire the whole time the silver was being refined. The man answered that yes, he not only had to sit there holding the silver, but he also had to keep his eyes on the silver for the entire time it was in the fire. If the silver was left even a moment too long in the flames, it would be destroyed.
 - The woman was silent for a moment. Then she asked the silver smith, "How do you know when the silver is fully refined?" He smiled at her and answered, "Oh, that's easy - when I see my image in it."
- The work of Jesus to purify wasn't just for the people of Malachi's day. He continues to purify any of us who claim to be God's people. But, it's more than just removing the impurities and the sin in us. See, Christ's continual work in us -is to make us less like us and more like him.
- 2 Corinthians 3:18 says, ...And the Lord...makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.
 - And, Romans 8:29 says, "We are to be conformed to the image of his Son"
 - This process is a lifelong process as Jesus watches us carefully and guides us lovingly when we go through fires that bring out our selfish character, our sinful nature and makes sure that we go through them enough to burn those off, but never enough to destroy us. He is watching and looking for his image.
- Check out what God says in verse 3 he will start in the church - he will start with the priests from the tribe of Levi – the spiritual leaders.
- We see this same pattern in the New Testament. Peter tells us in 1 Peter 4:17 - For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household. Let's not try to take the speck out of our brother's eye until we get the telephone poles out of our own eyes.
 - Church of God, let's invite God to come to us and purify us. I think people are scared to death to ask God to examine them and purify them because we are so afraid of what will happen. Listen, I'll be honest - it might not be a comfortable process. Going through fires rarely is comfortable.
 - But, the results are amazing! Looking more like Jesus is the result. Looking more like the God who never changes, whose love is everlasting, who promises life to the full, whose blessings will never cease.
- And, another result is that God is pleased! God says in vs 3,4 that once God begins His work of purifying, it will change the way people view their offerings. We will begin offering the right type of offering with the right motives, and God will be pleased and will begin accepting and blessing theirour offerings once again.
- See, when God purifies us, we will show it in the area of our giving. When we are being transformed more into the image of Christ, we can tell it most in the area of our giving.
 - That's because another character trait of God that will never change is that he is a gracious giver. Therefore, he desires he people to be gracious givers like him.

- Let's read **Malachi 3:8-12**.
- This passage is used most often to promote tithing in the church. Today, I want it to not only promote tithing, but to show us that it's more than that. It is about reflecting the gracious giving of our Lord as we become more like him.
 - God says in verse 8 that the people were failing to be gracious givers. In fact, they were cheating Him, and as a result they were only hurting themselves.
- Let me share an illustration that might help us see this. Let's say I want to give Josiah a special treat. So, I ask, Josiah, what would you like to do. Josiah says he wants some french fries. So together we hop in the car and drive to McDonald's. Let's keep on the McDonalds theme this morning.
 - On the way, Josiah's mouth is watering - he can just taste those hot salty fries. When we get there, I order some fries for Josiah, and I even make it a super sized order of fries.
 - I take the money out of my wallet to pay for the fries and a drink. We sit down, and Josiah digs into the fries. As a mother, I'm so happy to see my little boy so happy over something so simple.
 - I decide to join in the fun. I reach over to get a couple of fries. To my surprise, Josiah quickly puts his arms around his fries as though building a fort and pulls them toward himself and exclaims, "No, these are mine!"
- I sit in a state of shock for a moment. I can't believe what has just happened. I'm thinking...
 - My son failed to realize that I am the source of those French fries. At the counter, I was the one who gave the cashier the money from my wallet. I did not give him the size fry he was expecting, but blessed him with something twice as big. Yet here he is talking about his French fries.
 - Not only am I the source of the French fries, Josiah has forgotten that I have the power to take all the fries despite Josiah's arms surrounding them as a fort. Or that if I wanted to, could go back to the counter and bring Josiah so many fries that he could never eat them all.
 - Josiah also does not understand that I don't need his French fries. I could go back to the counter and get as many fries as I wanted. One or two fries really would not have made much of a difference to me. What I wanted was for Josiah to invite me into the wonderful little world I had made possible for my son. I wanted my son to be willing to share the very blessing that I had provided.
- God takes us to McDonald's on a regular basis in our lives. God blesses us. He blesses you and God blesses me. He's given us all some French fries. Some have small bags, others medium, others large and some super size. Some are narrow and light in color like McDonald's others are thicker like Wendy's or at the bowling alley. Some are straight and some are curly. But God has given us all some fries.

- And, because our unchanging God is always wanting to be in relationship with us in all things, God desires to sit down at the table with us for some fellowship. He wants to be involved in that which is important to us and he wants us to be involved in what is important to him.
 - When God reaches over to use some of the blessings he has given to us to do what is important to him, far too often we say “No God, these are mine. No, No, No. Go and get your own.” We try building our own little forts around our blessings.
- Now, I doubt that there are few here, if any, that don't understand that God is the source of all we receive. I doubt that there are few here, if any, that don't understand that God is the source of all we receive. Sure, we may have worked hard to get our paycheck, but we can only go to work because of the help and strength that God gives us every day.
- God has the ability to take away everything we think is ours and God has the ability to give us far more than what we have.
 - God does not need our French fries, but it is an honor and a privilege to be able to share our fries with God. God does not ask us to give because God is hurting and in desperate need. God asks us to give because God wants us to be like Him. God has a giving attitude and He wants that giving attitude modeled in his children.
 - Throughout the Bible, you find that God is always giving. In our own lives, let's realize that we cannot underestimate God's ability to provide for us in ways that we had not thought possible.
- God gives us all these French fries and we're sitting around saying, “oh no, no, no these are mine.” God as our Father is hurt because we have such a limited understanding that everything we have was God's and still is God's. If you really think something belongs to you, die and try to keep somebody else from taking it.
- The moment God puts money into our hands, we declare this is mine. I'll only give what I want to give. Up goes the fortress around our fries. We have no idea of how blessed we are and of all the things that God has done for us.
 - And it is that selfishness, that failure to acknowledge that everything is God's and that failure to give back to Him that robs us of the greater blessings we could have.
- A minister took his son with him one night to a small church where he'd been invited to preach. At the entrance of the church building, they passed a little table with a box on it and a sign which read “Donations for the Needy.” Reaching into his pocket, the preacher took out \$10 and dropped it in.
- When the service was over, one of the deacons approached. "Preacher," he said, "we have a custom in this church of paying our evening minister the contents of the donation box." Whereupon he removed the lid, poured the money into the preacher's hand, and out it came: One lone \$10 bill.

- As they made their way to the car, the boy turned to his father and said, "Hey, dad, I just thought of something. If you'd put more in, you'd have got more out."
- Malachi here is basically telling the Jews, if they would put into their relationship with God, they'd get more out. God wants us to give - NOT out of obligation or necessity - God focuses on the heart - God wants a hilarious giver. God wants us to be excited to give, because we have purified hearts. When we give like he does, it shows that we are becoming more like him.
 - I've heard that giving comes down to two things: who you love, and who you trust. We give to God because we love Him and because we trust Him; we are confident that our God will take care of us.
 - But, I think it's something more than that. Giving boils down to who you are a reflection of as well. It shows that you want to reflect Jesus and how you give reflects on whose you are and the nature of God.
- Let me share a story about French fries that actually happened. When I have taken the boys to McDonalds, we have a little game that my parents used to do with us on the rare occasion that we went to McDonalds. It's the "who has the biggest French fry game."
 - One time, we were comparing French fries and Josiah pulls out a doosie of a fry. It was probably about as perfect as it could be. It was longer than both our hands and on top of that, you could tell it was going to be one of those fries that is crispy on the outside, but potatoey soft on the inside.
 - Josiah says, "Oh, look at this one!" I said, "Wow! That looks like a good one." Josiah put it to the side, wanting to relish his winner fry. Suddenly, he picks it up and hands it toward me and says, "Here Mommy, you can have it." I look at him and say, "That's OK, Josiah. It's your fry." He responds, "But, I want you to have it because you got all of these fries for me." Again, I say, "No, you eat it. I have plenty of fries. You eat that special fry because you are so special to think of giving it to me."
 - With a smile on his face, he ate the fry. I bet that fry tasted even better because he was willing to give it to me. I'll tell you this, I was so very touched in that moment in his willingness to share with me his biggest French fry game victory.
- It's the same with God. When we give to him our best because we are reflecting his image as a giver and because we understand and are grateful of all that he has given to us, what we do have is even better and what he gives us is even more appreciated.
 - Likewise, our grateful, cheerful, giving that is a reflection of how he gives touches the very heart of God.
 - It touches it enough that he remembers it.
 - Let's finish **Malachi 3:16-18**.
- Another unchanging thing about God is that he remembers the righteous.

- Just like the people in Malachi's day, in our day today, many people think God owes them because they grew up in the church, prayed before meals, gave some in the offering plate, served at times and were just good decent people.
 - But, God looks on the heart and if our nature is reflecting his nature. When he sees a right heart and a transformed nature, verse 16 tells us that the righteous - those with pure, right hearts are given special notice by God.
 - One of the themes we see displayed throughout the scripture is that God remembers the righteous and rewards them for their faithfulness. The righteous – those who value the Lord's purification, those who are being transformed into his image, those whose character reflects the unchanging character of God, Malachi 3 says are God's special treasure. The KJV has the term "jewels" here.
- So, let's go back to our original question about whether you are a crew member, manager or owner toward your commitment to God? How you answer that is really based on who you are reflecting.
- In Malachi's day, the crew members were the people who were just giving the bare minimum, even cheating God if they could. The managers were those in leadership, the priests, who were allowing the people to cheat God and who no better at how they treated God themselves.
 - But, the owners were those who were willing to go through purification, who wanted to be more like their Lord, who graciously gave him their all, who reflected God's unchanging character and nature.
- Who are you reflecting this morning? Are you reflecting your own selfish nature? It's the nature that keeps your arms around what you have, guarding it for yourself. It's the nature that keep you jealous of your time, not wanting to give it to God's service because you have better, more enjoyable things to do with your limited time. It's the nature that shakes your fist at God when he doesn't do what you demand of him or bless you for giving the little leftovers that you give.
- God wants more for you than that. He wants you to see the value of being more like him. He doesn't want crew members and managers. He wants you to experience his all, his best for you. That only comes when you are all in.
- Or, are you reflecting Jesus and his unchangeable nature of love, purity and gracious giving? Let me tell you, those whose hearts desire is to reflect Jesus, those whose prayer is less of me and more of you - today, God views you as His priceless, special treasure, his precious jewels.
- Take heart in knowing that even when you go through the fire, God remembers you! As you remain all in, others will see Jesus in you and know Jesus because of your reflection of him.
 - It is my prayer that everyone in the sound of my voice might be all in to be experiencing day by day the transformation to look more like Jesus. May it be so in the name of our unchanging, all-powerful, life-giving Savior.