

## Sermonnotes: Sunday, November 18, 2007

Notes to better help you understand Sunday's sermon text

Text: Malachi 3:8-12

Title: *Testing God*

The name 'Malachi' means *my king*. Some scholars believe that it is a pen name for Ezra, the priest, who was instrumental in the spiritual renewal of Israel as and after they returned from exile in Babylon. Reading Ezra and Malachi together lends credence to this suggestion! If they are not the same person they were certainly cut from the same piece of clothe.

In 3:8-12, Malachi surprises the people with the accusation that they have been 'robbing God.' On the surface of it, that seems impossible. His point however is simple: you have used that which God has entrusted to your care for yourself first, neglecting to return the first and best ten percent to His Temple storehouse.

Putting his finger on a real and serious problem that, in the long run, will do great damage to the people, Malachi commands them in the name of the Lord to stop what they are doing and again return their tithes and offerings to the Lord.

But then he says something almost more startling: test God in this! If you have a concordance (especially if its loaded onto your computer) and look at how that word 'test' is used in the Bible, you will see that God tests us, but we do not test God. Indeed we are warned specifically not to test God. But here the opposite is thrown out as a challenge. 'Test me,' God says, 'and see whether I will not open the floodgates of heaven' and pour out blessings on you as great as the spring rains.

That is quite a challenge!

But notice finally that this is no arduous work on our part. In fact it is the way to joy and blessing. **Joy** when we realize the ways God uses mere money to further the eternally valuable work of bringing people to saving faith in Jesus Christ, and **blessing** as we become a blessing to others. When the watching world sees generous followers of Christ, the too easy criticism – "Those Christians are a bunch of hypocrites ..." becomes harder and harder to make. There really is nothing quite like putting our money where our faith is to convince people that God can change us from the inside out.