

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 3.6 - Systematic Theology - Theology Proper - Attributes - Immutable

Alright, this morning we are getting near to the end of our study of Malachi. And as we come to our passage this morning I want to confess that it is a difficult passage on a few levels.

First, it's not entirely clear if **Vs. 6** is the ending of **Vss. 1-5** or if it's actually the beginning of a new thought in **Vss. 6-12**. Maybe that's not a big deal, but here we have the issue of God not changing and the question is: what does that have to do with Israel tithing? It's a tough connection to make. But it's also not clear that it belongs with the previous verses. So it's probably a transition verse.

Remember that the prophets are pronouncing incoming judgement, they're not always concerned about air tight grammar. They're concerned about lives that are lived to the glory of God.

Second, God calls Israel to return to him. And specifically he calls them to return to giving to him. He wants them to return to tithing to him. This is probably very unusual language for us to think about forsaking God specifically through not giving. But just like any sin is, in some sense a forsaking of God, not giving to God is a forsaking of him as well.

If we're not honoring God with our money then there's a spiritual issue we need to work through.

Third, we have the actual issue of tithing and giving gifts to God. Which brings up two issues: should Christians tithe? Is that just an OT issue or do we do that in the NC as well? And second, God seems to make a connection that if you tithe he will provide. That sounds very health and wealth oriented.

We're going to get to the issue of tithing and giving next week. This morning I want to kill two birds with one stone and actually use these two passages to push forward in our systematic theology.

The transition is difficult to understand, but one thing we know for certain is that Malachi makes it clear that God never, never changes. So since we're here in Malachi, that's what we're going to focus on this morning. And then when we come back next week, we'll tie that into giving and tithing.

Big Picture: Our salvation is secure because God never changes. And we see those 2 truths in **Vss. 6**.

Truth 1: God is immutable. Read 6

God is immutable. What does that mean? It means that God does not change. More than that, God cannot change. If something mutates, it changes. The Teenage **Mutant** Ninja Turtles we're mutant because they changed from small little turtles to these human sized bipeds after they walked through some ooze. They mutated, they changed.

Immutability is just the opposite: something does not change. One of the reasons gold has been such a valuable money since the dawn of creation is because gold does not change. It does not corrode, it doesn't bond with something else and turn into another material, it doesn't evaporate. For the most part it is immutable throughout time.

Here we see that God is immutable, he cannot change. Why can't God change? Well, if God were to change it would mean either he changes for the better or he changes for the worse. There are really only two options.

If he changes for the worse, then somehow God is getting worse over time. He's not as pure or powerful or holy. He is deteriorating and we could expect him to continually devolve going forward. Almost like a atom with a half life, eventually he would completely deteriorate to basically nothingness in power and morally.

If he changed for the better, that would mean that he wasn't so great to begin with and somehow he's improving over time. That's actually a heresy called process theology. Process theology says that God is in slow state of improvement over time. He's in process. These people would say that as God interacts with his creation he is constantly evolving as he responds to it. Process theologians would say God is good, it's just that he's always getting better.

It's like putting out upgraded software versions all the time - god started at 1.0, we're at god 5.0, and one day we'll have a really the really cool god 19.2 version that will solve all our problems.

This is heretical because what it means is that God is not actually God. But people actually do believe God is in process and improving and that's heretical to the divine nature. This is actually something similar to what Mormons believe.

Heb. 13:8 Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever.

In his divine nature - not human nature, but divine nature - Jesus is unchanging.

Jas. 1:17: Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.

God doesn't change. He's not like shadows that move around.

Num. 23:19 God is not man, that he should lie or a son of man that he should change his mind. Has he said, and will he not do it? Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfill it.

So God never changes and never changes his mind. What he has decreed will always come to pass. And he will never lie because everything he says he will do will happen.

God never changes and God cannot change.

Now, let me address 2 things here. First, what do we do of the statements where God does seem to change his mind?

Remember when he told Hezekiah to set his house in order because he would die? And then Hezekiah prays to God and God gives him 15 more years? Was God lying? Or did God actually change his mind?

And I'm just going to admit that sometimes there are easy answers. But other times these are very difficult questions because it seems like either God did change his mind or it seems as though God is a liar. Well, we know God doesn't lie and he doesn't change his mind. So how do we resolve this?

Let me put it this way: God never changes but situations often do. And when the situation changes, God acts consistently. So in the case of Hezekiah God had decreed in eternity past all things that would come to pass, including the number of minutes Hezekiah would live. But God threatened Hezekiah with death and as a result Hezekiah changed. Hezekiah pleaded with God for long life. God didn't change, Hezekiah changed.

That might seem like twisting words, but let me give you another example. There's a general principle in Scripture that God will destroy the wicked and save the righteous. Is that a fair statement? Yes.

So Jonah goes to Nineveh and proclaims what? "Yet 40 days and Nineveh will be destroyed." God's righteous character is such that he would destroy these pagans in 40 days. Jonah preaches that and what happens? They change. They amend their ways and so the holy God relents from the disaster he had prepared.

Now, did God change or did the people of Nineveh change? The people of Nineveh changed. God never changed. If in some alternate universe the people of Nineveh refused to change then God would have wiped them off the face of the planet. But they changed their ways and so the immutable God did not destroy them.

So even when it appears that God has changed, actually what happens is the situation has changed. **Look at Eze. 18:21-24** for a minute. Here we see God's explanation. **Read 21-24**

This is the situation. God is completely just, he never changes. So when he warns it's not that he changes, he wants others to change their ways. **Read 25-32**

This is the chief principle in the Bible: God does not change, but commands us to change. Commands us to repent.

Now, while we're here, the second difficulty with the immutability of God usually is about specifically the second person of the Trinity: the Son of God, Jesus. Didn't Jesus change? I mean, God became man. As a man he grew, he learned, he got hungry and tired. Isn't he changing? And the answer is yes: according to his human nature. Humans, by definition, are creatures that change. When the Son of God took on flesh he began as a single cell and rapidly began multiplying cells. The Bible is clear he increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.

So there's a sense in which according to his fully human nature he changed.

But according to his divine nature Jesus has never changed. He was always omnipresent, omniscient, holy, good, just, wise, so forth. We've wrestled with these issues before: how do we reconcile the limitations of Jesus's human nature with the infinite attributes of his divine nature. And the answer is we can't. It's a mystery to us.

When Jesus was 3 months gestation he still held the universe together by the Word of his power like **Colossians 1** says.

When Jesus was 9 months old sitting on his mother's lap nursing he was actively giving life and breath to every creature in the universe.

How does that all work? We don't know. But in his divine nature he does not and cannot change.

Okay, so that's truth 1. God cannot change. That's what it means to be God.

Back in Malachi 3 we see the 2nd truth. Now, before I unfold that, let me just say that with every theological truth there are a variety of applications.

God doesn't change so we can trust him. He tells us what he'll do and he does it. He tells us who he is and we can know him.

God doesn't change so we know that there is objective truth. Think about that: If God were changing how would we know what is true about him. Maybe he's all powerful today, but in two weeks he's a little less powerful. Maybe he's loving this week, but not so much in 10 years.

God doesn't change so we can actually know him. For those of you who are older, there are probably people you knew a long time ago that you don't know as well any more. I had best friends in high school and I haven't talked to them in decades. I don't really know who they are because they've changed. In just 20 short years. Well, the God we know right now is the same exact God that Enoch and Jacob and David and Isaiah knew. There's nothing different about him at all. He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

God doesn't change so Christianity really is the only true religion. If God changed, our whole system of beliefs would have to change. The Bible would have to be updated with every new update in God.

You get the idea. We would live in Alice in Wonderland if God was in process.

But here God gives us one of the main applications of his immutability.

Truth 2: Immutability is our only hope of salvation. **Read 6**

So what do we do with the immutability of God? We can rest that we won't be destroyed. That God will not consume us in his fury of wrath.

That's what God is saying to Israel. You know why God didn't just utterly wipe Israel off the face of the planet? Why he didn't just send a meteor and obliterate the Jewish race? It wasn't because Israel was so righteous.

The entire story of the biblical text is that Israel is more pagan than the pagan nations around them. You thought Sodom and Gomorrah was bad? By the end of the book of Judges the whole tribe of Benjamin is worse than Sodom and Gomorrah.

You thought sacrificing children was bad? By the end of Kings the Temple is used as a shrine to idols and the kings are burning their sons by fire in the Valley below Jerusalem at the dump.

Why doesn't God just eliminate the Jews? Because God doesn't change. He gave an oath to the Patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He gave an oath to David and Solomon. These were unconditional promises to bless that would come to pass no matter who the people were or what they were doing.

And so what the story of the OT is is a story of God never changing his promise. He never goes back on his word. He said something and stands firm to his promise no matter what.

And his patience is absolutely stunning. Thousands of years of sin. Millions of people who he blesses and they forsake him. Second chances, third chances, millionth chances. Why?

Because as **Exodus 34:6-7**: I am Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But who will by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and fourth generation.

Why doesn't God obliterate his people? Because of his steadfast love - his chesed. He says it twice. His chesed is his covenant keeping love. It's the love you express to your wife when you made the vow to marry her. Covenant keeping, for all time. What's interesting is that humans go back on their vows all the time.

But God will never ever go back on his vows. That's what actually kept Israel from being consumed instantaneously by God. They deserved it over and over. They should have been wiped off the planet many times. They were hard-hearted, stubborn, sinful, rebellious and idolatrous.

God says in Ezekiel the only difference between Israel and a prostitute is that a prostitute charged money. Israel was unfaithful for free.

What kept them from utter destruction? The steadfast covenant faithfulness of God.

And I just want to be really clear: we are very much the same. The only thing that keeps us from being consumed by God in an instant is his own steadfast covenant love. **Look over at Heb 6:13-20** for a minute.

The author here is talking about the faithfulness of God to Abraham. And how Abraham patiently waited for God to deliver on his promises of a son. **Read 13-18**

So this pretty incredible. God gave 2 assurances to Abraham. First, he promised. God said he'd do something. That should be enough. If God says he'll do something, he'll do it.

But then God swore an oath. This is interesting. Swearing an oath increases the obligation. It's like having collateral in a loan.

Say you want to borrow \$1000 from someone. What happens if you don't pay? Well, you say "I've got this dirt bike you can have if I don't pay." That's collateral. You've made a promise to repay, but if you don't there's a second promise - an oath - that will ensure the promises is kept.

That's what God is doing. He's promising, then he's putting up collateral. What's the collateral? What's the asset? God is putting up himself as the asset. That's why the author says there is no one greater that he could swear by. There's no greater asset that he can put up for collateral than himself.

So God is swearing an oath. "Surely I will bless you." Or literally in Hebrew, "blessing I will bless you." And he swears by his own name. Because there's nothing higher than him.

Go back to our loan example, forget the dirt bike. It's like saying "If I don't pay, I'm giving you my life." I have nothing greater to give. That's what God is doing. He's swearing by his own existence to Abraham to bring these things to pass. **Read 13-20**

What's the result? The result was Abraham trusted God. And here's the application: we can trust God when he says he saved us.

Do you ever fear that God might cast you into hell anyway? That you'll have walked the Christian life, loving Jesus, hoping in him and then you'll end up at the judgment only to be cast into hell anyway? I have feared that too.

Do you know the reason God doesn't cast you into hell forever the next time you sin? Because he promised he wouldn't.

Do you know the reason God is infinitely patient with you in your struggle to put off sin? Because God promised to be patient.

Brothers and sisters, if you've been justified by faith alone in Jesus, the reason you're still justified isn't because you're getting better. It's not because you're holding on. It's because God who never ever changes and who never ever lies has given an oath in Christ to bless you. He's going to hang onto you.

When I go to Costco I have my little kids hold my hand to keep them safe. And when a car comes by I can feel their hand squeeze my hand a little tighter. They're scared and so they hold fast.

But listen, what keeps them safe in the parking lot is not their grip on me. What is it? It's my grip on them. That I can snatch them into safety in an instant and protect them from danger. They might think it's their power, but it's my power the whole time.

That's how it is with the promises we have in Christ Jesus. It's not you who keep you safe spiritually.

It's not you who keep you in the covenant.

It's not you who holds you fast. It's God who holds you fast. It's his unchanging nature that keeps him from reneging on his promises.

Notice the result.

1. God becomes our eternal refuge. **Read 18**

If you're a child of God, you can always run to him for refuge. No matter what you've done, no matter what's going on in life, no matter how far you've fallen, how much you've backslidden, you can go to him.

That's why the Bible calls him the Rock, the Strong Tower, the Wall, Fortress, the King. And if you're a child of the King you can go back to him over and over.

You remember the prodigal son? How he came back? And how he didn't even spit out the words of repentance and the King - his own father - received him back and celebrated.

You think God only celebrates the one time? No, if you're in the family it's a continual celebration of what God in Christ has done for you. He is our refuge.

2. This should encourage your heart. **Read 18**

Brothers and sisters, your heart should be encouraged. Your God doesn't change. We change, and we sin and we fail and we repent. But the reason we can come back to him is because he never ever ever changes.

Rejoice in that! Be encouraged! This is scandalous. We keep getting off scott free. Every time. Every time we come to the Lord's Table we're reminded again that we hit the eternal jackpot. All our sins were placed on Christ. And all our wrath was exhausted on him. And all his righteousness is placed on us and all his blessing we inherit.

Take encouragement.

3. This is our anchor. **Read 19**

I've been around boats enough to have had a few anchors fail in my day. You find yourself drifting along. This promise we have is the anchor of our soul.

God has promised by his own Son to eternally bless you in the beloved. If God came down from heaven right now in full glory and power speaking in a way that made the hills melt and you fear for your life because the power was so great and said "You're mine! I will bless you and keep you because I never change." You'd believe it.

Yet these words right here are from God. They are his words. They are your anchor.

4. Our hope is in Christ. **Read 19**

In the OT the priests went into the Holy of Holies to make atonement for sins. But it didn't really work and they had to do it over and over. And the priest, no matter how good he was died and someone else had to try it over and over. And it didn't work.

We have a priest who has gone into the very throne room of heaven, where the Father sits in all his holy, perfect, awesome glory. And Christ has gone in boldly as God the Son to the Father for us. To present himself as our High Priest.

He doesn't cover a few times or even a few hundred times. He is our High Priest forever - ever interceding for us. Ever washing away our sins by his once for all sacrifice on the cross.

And that never changes. He goes on our behalf for all time. And therefore, we are not consumed.

Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Pray