

August 30, 2020

Majoring in the Minors  
Malachi: Our Unchanging God  
Malachi 3:1-6

**Opening words:** In Western Europe, the Dark Ages lasted for a thousand years. It started with the decline of the Roman Empire in the Fifth Century and did not end until the raise of the Renaissance in the fifteenth century. During that period humanity seemed to stand still. Few advances were made in any area. There were few advances in medicine. There were few advances in advances in agriculture. There were few advances in any of the sciences and there were few advances in life, itself. Every generation had the same experience because nothing changed. There is a reason that one-thousand-year period is called the Dark Ages. This is the good news for today. Our society is always changing. Sadly, that is the bad news too. Our society is always changing. How much has the world changed in your lifetime? The scripture lesson for today tells us God does not change. That is important to remember.

This is the last sermon in my thirteen-part sermon series, *Majoring in the Minors*. I have said it each week. They are not considered minor because they are unimportant. They are considered minor because they are brief. Never forget, the Minor Prophets remind us of the great qualities of God. To date, we have looked at Joel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, and Zechariah. Today, we look at Malachi. He reminds us God does not change. God is immutable. Our scripture reading for today is Malachi 3:1-6. I have called this message *Our Unchanging God*.

**Malachi 3:1-6** "I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>2</sup> But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner's fire or a launderer's soap. <sup>3</sup> He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, <sup>4</sup> and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years. <sup>5</sup> "So I will come to put you on trial. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive the foreigners among you of justice, but do not fear me," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>6</sup> "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Many years ago, before man walked on the moon, before a civil war threatened to divide America, or before Columbus discovered a New World, there was a man who spoke for God. His name meant "my messenger," but we just call him Malachi. He lived

approximately the year 400 BC. That means he lived 100 years after Haggai and Zechariah, the Minor Prophets we looked at the last two weeks. Time did change certain things. The reconstruction of the temple was complete. However, certain things did not change. The spiritual renewal that Haggai and Zechariah desired never happened. God's Chosen People were stuck in a spiritual funk. The book of Malachi echoes their spiritual condition. It is a dialogue between God and His Chosen People. Malachi acts as the go between. God is concerned about the unfaithfulness of both the priests and the people, themselves. Yet, God does not give up on his people. The book ends with a word of hope. Someday the Messiah would come. Jesus would be born four hundred years later. The background is interesting, but one verse stands above the rest.

Last Sunday evening, I googled the question, *what is the most important verse in Malachi*. The answer did not surprise me. The answer came back, Malachi 3:6, "I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed." That verse grabbed both my attention and imagination. In a world that is constantly changing, it is refreshing to find something that remains the same.

On month from today I will be in Yellowstone National Park. Due to the pandemic, Kathryn and I have not been out of the area since last October. We are going to be gone for two weeks. It will be a great trip. We start off at Mount Rushmore near Rapid City, South Dakota. Then, we travel to Billings. Montana. We will spend three days in Yellowstone, travel to Jackson Hole, Wyoming and end up in Salt Lake City. It was supposed to be a bus trip, but the company canceled the tour when the coronavirus invaded. We are renting a car and following the same route. I am excited about the trip because I have never been to that part of the country.

I am really looking forward to seeing Old Faithful in Yellowstone National Park. It has always fascinated me. It was named by explorers in September 1870. In the early days of the park it was used as a laundry because of the ample hot water. It erupts approximately every ninety minutes and shoots up to 8,400 gallons of hot water into the air some 150 feet. Historians tell us there are records of Old Faithful erupting 500 years ago. Old Faithful has erupted more than 1,000,000 times. It is safe to say it is as old as the earth, itself. Old Faithful is the same, but the world has changed over that period. Only a fool would say our world has not changed since Old Faithful erupted the first time!

One of my favorite places in Ohio is Johnson Island. It is located off the Marblehead Peninsula in Ottawa County. Over the last few years, the rich have come to develop it, but for many years it was rustic. On the north coast of that island is a Civil War cemetery. It is filled with former Confederate officers from the deep south. It is all that remains of a former prisoner of war camp. The Union built it there because it was so remote. The Daughters of the Confederacy maintain it. I love to take that short walk to the shore of Lake Erie. If you look out across the water, you can see Cedar Point

Amusement Park. If you turn around you can see the graves. The contrast is shocking. Do you believe our world has changed since the Civil War? Would you like to be operated on using Civil War era medicine or knowledge? Only a fool would think our world has not changed since the Civil War!

How much has the world changed in your lifetime? I was born in 1957. When my parents moved to Warren, they lived in an apartment at first. When my sisters were born, they bought one of the few houses for sale in town. They paid \$5,400. According to Zillow, that house is now worth \$60,000. When I was very young my parents only had one car. I remember riding the bus occasionally. Our black and white television set got three stations. I remember the day we got our first color television. I remember the color knob to adjust the color from red to green. The first movie we watched in color was Alfred Hitchcock's *The Birds*. I remember the day they got an antenna that moved so we could watch Cleveland or Pittsburgh. We thought we were flying. I remember the day John Kennedy was shot. The announcement came out of the school's public address system. I remember my teacher, Mr. Fuller, went to the hall and cried. I remember the day Martin Luther King getting shot and my dad wondered how the world could get any worse. It did. I remember the milk man coming to the house. He left the milk in a small silver box on the front porch. His name was Gilbert. He sold pop-cycles on the side for a nickel. How much has the world changed in your lifetime? Only a fool would think our world has not changed!

How much has our world changed in the past twenty years? The people at *Insider* released a list of ways our world has changed since 2000. It was only twenty years ago much has changed. This is their list of ten changes:

1. **The internet has taken over. It is no longer a novelty. It is a requirement.**
2. **Landline telephones are disappearing. Everyone has a cell phone.**
3. **Smoking in restaurants is history. There is no longer a smoking section.**
4. **Streaming services, like Netflix, have become the rage.**
5. **It is impossible to get away on vacation. The internet will find you.**
6. **People now fear terrorism and mass shootings.**
7. **People are more likely to text than leave a voice mail.**
8. **Online dating is the norm.**
9. **Airport security has redefined travel.**
10. **More pictures are being taken by cellphones than cameras.**

All those changes have taken place in the last twenty years. How has your life changed in the last twenty years? How will our change in the next twenty years? Only a fool would say our world has not changed!

How much has our world changed since the pandemic began? In March of this year, *The Washington Post* predicted the pandemic would change our world in several significant ways. This is their list:

1. **Mass gatherings are a thing of the past.**
2. **Political melodrama will escalate.**
3. **In person doctor's appointment will end.**
4. **Working from home will be the new normal.**
5. **Handshaking is obsolete.**

How much has your life changed since March? It has been reported, 99% of all Americans have experienced change due to the pandemic. I would like to meet the 1% who have not experienced change. They must not have understood the question. Only a fool would say our lives have not changed since the pandemic began. If you will admit your world has changed say, "**Amen!**" This is the point.

Our world has been changing for a long time, but God remains the same. This message is not called *Our Changing World*. This message is called *Our Unchanging God*. This message is not about volatility, it is about stability. We hear it in the Malachi reading, "*The Lord do not change.*" We hear it in the ninetieth Psalm says, "*From everlasting to everlasting, you are God.*" This is not a new concept or discovery. It should be a foundational piece of your understanding of God.

One of the reasons you come to church is not to expound on your understanding of God. You come to church to learn about God. Churches teach about God in a variety of ways, sometimes from the pulpit, sometimes from the classroom, sometimes in our music. Hymns are not just a collection of pleasing notes. Hymns teach us theology. They teach us about the basic elements of the Christian faith. Let me give you an example. In 1867, a new hymn came out. It was called *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*. It was written by Walter C. Smith. It is a loved hymn in traditional worship. We have sung it countless times. There is a stanza in that hymn about the unchanging character of God. Do you remember it? It goes:

*We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,  
And wither and perish – but naught changieth Thee!*

In other words, we change regularly, but God remains the same. God is God and God does not change. Whatever God is, God always has been, and God always will be. That is important to remember in our changing world.

Theologians call it **immutability**. The word is not connected to physical appearance. It does not mean God does not get gray or God does not need hip surgery. The word means the character of God does not change. Our reading for today, Malachi 3:6, is one of several verses which attests to the immutability of God. So, in what ways does God not change? This is the list.

God is:

- Always wise
- Always powerful

Always holy  
Always just  
Always good  
Always true  
Always gracious  
Always present  
Always knowledgeable.  
Always sovereign  
Always loving

God is unchanging! If you are thankful God is unchanging in our constantly changing world say, **"Amen!"** Let me end with public service announcement.

It was in the newspaper last weekend. The Niles First Presbyterian Church will be hosting their last worship service tonight, August 30, 2020, at 6:00. It has been located at the corner of Robbins Avenue and Summit Street for more than sixty years. If you are interested, they are serving refreshments at the conclusion of the service. I have never attended a worship service in that church, but I find myself mourning at its closure. It is sad to see any church close. I am sure the people were nice. I am sure the congregation was committed. I am sure the building was well maintained. I am sure the pastors for the past fifty years were assigned the task to rebuild the congregation. It is hard to do in an area with a shrinking population base.

A closing church is a sign that the world is changing. I am not saying the world is getting worse or the church was bad. I am not saying the members of every closing church were not gifted. I am not saying younger generations are not spiritual or religious. All I am saying is the world is changing. That should not be a big surprise because the world has always been changing. The problem is people are reluctant to change. That is why God is so appealing to us. God never changes. Malachi knew it. He quoted God, *I the Lord do not change*. Isn't that refreshing? And all of God's people said, **"Amen!"**