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## Sermon

### ***Faithful God- Faithful people***

**Malachi 3:6-12, 2 Corinthians 9:6-15, Luke 6:36-38**

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Trust is an all-important element in our every day lives. Without it Society would collapse and be frozen into immobility.

Imagine not be able to trust your bus driver, shop keeper, aircraft pilot, husband or wife. How would it be if we could not trust ANY of the drivers who share the road with us day in and day out.

There are times of course when our trust is misplaced, and this can lead to at the least a minor inconvenience to the disaster of a broken heart through the horrors and pain of divorce.

Trust is precious and should be given wisely. Trusting someone inevitably leaves us open to being hurt. BUT let us not make the mistake of not giving it at all. Without it we will shrivel up as a human being and live a miserable life.

It should come then as no surprise that trust is a central part of our relationship with God. We are made in His image. We will relate to both God and humanity in similar ways. The question before us today is, "Is God trustworthy?"

Now the immediate answer is obvious. Of course He is. So, the question now comes to, "Do we live as if He is"?

When I "retired" from my role as national Director of Church Army I was really surprised at the emotional roller-coaster that I was on. Was my Faith base on the fact that I could serve in the Church? Would I now be able to fulfil my calling to preach? And ultimately was my Faith limited to the fact that I was a leader in the Church? Would I love the Lord with all my heart soul mind and strength and my neighbour as myself if I was now simply a member of a congregation? I was surprised how quickly my Faith was challenged. I was blessed with a very able Spiritual Director at the time. At one point I said that I was terrified because I was looking down the barrel of walking away from my Faith. Her response was a stunner! "Good", she said. GOOD??? Yes, as long as you are terrified you will find a way through this.

When Malachi was preaching, the people of God were faced with harder questions even than these. Were all the promises of God valueless? We have come back from 70 years in Exile. We have rebuilt the Temple. Yet we are still under attack. The Temple services are simply routine and there is no sense of God's presence with us. Have we gone through all of this for naught?? Nothing is happening, God! Where are you!!!?

God's answer through Malachi is stunning to say the least. In summary it comes out in an old bumper sticker saying.

## **If you don't feel close to God, guess who moved.**

The truth of the matter is that God is utterly faithful and has shown that to His people time and time again. By contrast God's people have been faithless to a greater or lesser degree throughout the history of their relationship.

These are the things that Malachi is concerned about:

God is trustworthy even when we offer worship that is perfunctory.

God is faithful even when we act in ways that destroy our marriages. The Marriage Covenant is not honoured, and it is the women who are suffering.

God is faithful even when Tithes and offerings are not being given and the Temple cannot function as it should.

God is faithful even though we blame God for all the injustice we see around us.

The question for us is, will we continue to trust God despite all these things? Will we show our trust in doing all we can to sort out the things He has raised?

I will focus mainly on giving but let me deal briefly with two of the others first:

Will you offer the best you have in worship? Will you seek to love the people of this Church despite all their short-comings? If you lead in anyway on a Sunday morning, will you seek God's grace to offer the best possible service you can?

Will you do all you can to uphold marriage in our Church? When you see someone struggling will you, with great compassion and understanding, pray for them and not blame?

Will you give a tithe of your income for the work of God? And will you do this with joy and delight so that you can advance the kingdom ministries of this Church? Can you trust God with a tenth of your income?

Many have asked when faced with the question of tithing, "Is that a tenth of my gross or net income?" My answer is always the same, "Yes"! Because what we are dealing with here is NOT do I do this or that. The real issue is doing things with the right ATTITUDE

In 2 Corinthians 9: 7, Paul says this, "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind....." Or in other words what is God asking of you? If He calls you to tithe on your gross income that is between you and the Lord. If He asks you to tithe on the net that too is between you and the Lord. Notice how Paul goes on, "..... not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

What do I do if I do not have income of my own? What if I have an unbelieving spouse? Again, seek the Lord. What does He say you are to do? Talk it over with Christian friends but follow wise counsel. Your relationship with your husband/wife is precious. Treat it with the respect it is due. If you conclude that you can not give anything, accept that graciously and let those of us who can support you.

All other questions can be answered in the same way. The real question is, "What is my attitude as I do this?" Have you set your heart on giving whatever you can joyfully?

Please don't imagine it will always be easy. Trusting God always carries risk. After Lorraine left the Parish of Birkdale/BeachHaven and I was no longer receiving a salary I suddenly panicked as I saw the bills come in and the income shrink. Lorraine was the faithful one. She knew from past experience that God is utterly trustworthy. And so it turned out to be.

Time and time again we have proven God's faithfulness to us. You would think that I would be able to trust Him. Sadly, I failed. Despite my lack of Faith, we learned yet again the truth of St Paul's words, "And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that you may share abundantly in every good work."

Verse 11 to 15 round it all off with the blessings that cheerful giving supply.

Finally, the Gospel reading lets us into another aspect of the need to trust God.

Our Lord is showing that despite the cost of living the life of the Kingdom of God it is well worth it.

Rather than being judged and condemned we have been accept as Sons and Daughters of the King. Accept others in the same way.

We have been lavishly loved by the King of kings. All our sins are forgiven. Just as lavishly forgive others.

Give in the same manner you have been given and you will not be able to contain the quality and quantity of the love that is given back to you. Did you notice why? "...for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

If we have an attitude of generous self-giving; if we have consecrated every part of our lives to the service of the living God; if we hold nothing back from Him because all we have comes from Him anyway; we can TRUST Him to gives us back equally generously and beyond.

Today you were given a response form that asks you to review your giving to the ministry of this Church. Will you use this in a way that leads you to look not at your finances but to your attitude towards ALL that you have been so graciously given.

One dear saint I was privileged to know once told me," It is not a matter of how much of my money I give to God. It is a matter of how much of God's good gifts do I keep for myself."