Malachi 3:1-10 (NIV)

**3**“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.

**2**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.

**3**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,

**4**and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the Lord, as in days gone by, as in former years.

**5**“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.

Breaking Covenant by Withholding Tithes

**6**“I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. **7**Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?

’**8**“Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, ‘How are we robbing you?’

“In tithes and offerings. **9**You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me.

**10**Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.

Good Morning First Baptist Family, and Friends. It was great to be away and spend time enjoying the splendor of the Grand Canyon, Verde Canyon and the mysteries of the deserts of Arizona. There are many ways that you can see the hand of God at work, but I doubt there are but a few that can take your breath away and lead you into song. I sang “How Great Thou Art”; I thought about the words of “American the Beautiful” and I pondered “How Great Is Our God”. I spent a bit of time with family and old friends, but I spent most of my time thinking about and praying for you and you and me. As I prayed – me talking to God – I also mediated – me listening to answers from God.

 On Sunday we worshipped with a colleague who goes back to our Baptist Youth Fellowship days in the mid 60’s. The worship format was one I had not experienced and it took me a while to adapt. But as the praise team begin to sing *Yes, Lord, Yes* I begin to understand that God was in the midst of using these people to answer a prayer request.

 For at least the last five years we have been asking God to **transform** us. Some of us prepared for our transformation by studying: prayer, stewardship, and evangelism. Even more of us prepared for transformation by seeking to improve our health and the health of the congregation through applying biblical principals to our cooking and consuming choices. And for the first three quarters of this year we have been asking God to transform us into a church united.

 So I have been asking God why are we experiencing more confusion and hard feelings – why are we continuing the cycles of speaking before asking and listening – why are we not growing as Christians or as a congregation and more.

Those were the “we” questions. But there were also some “I” questions.

**Will I be guided by the wants of a few or the needs of the many?**

**Will I do what people want me to do or what I believe God has told me to do?**

**Will I be like Malachi and John and continue to preach the coming of the Lord or will I be like Jonah and head to Nivea?**

Allow me to reassure you that I am not looking for another church to pastor; I have not heard from God it is time to retire; and I plan to be here until I hear from heaven. As we move into the last quarter of 2015 I am praying to be able to demonstrate more clearly for you the Word I am hearing from the Lord.

With that as introduction will you turn your hearts and your minds to?

 6 ***Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the Lord Almighty.***

 ***“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?***

skip to verse 10

 ***10Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that there will not be room enough to store it.***

As this is a 5th Sunday I want to preach a message that will resonate and stay with our young people. So I acknowledge and thank Rick Gillespie-Mobley for his contribution to this sermon. Please pray with me and for me around this theme:

**"Whose Fries Are These?"**

SHALL WE PRAY!

Father God I believe that we want to be changed, we want to grow, we want to be more like your Son – but this world distracts us. We see advertisements and we want more than our budget will allow. We watch others with their toys and we want the same toys and better toys. We listen to stories from those who are able to travel to foreign and exotic places and we want the same. We want, we want and we want, and when our wants are not met we search for answers. Father, help us to understand that you have already provided the answer. Give us the courage, the conviction, to change and do what you have called us to do. So that we might receive the blessings you have already prepared. In the name of your Son, Jesus the Christ we pray, AMEN and AMEN.

**"Whose Fries Are These?"**

 One day a father (we will call him…) wanted to do something special with his five year old son (let’s call him…. He asked “Jimmy, is there anything you’d like to do right now?” Jimmy said, “I want some McDonald French Fries.” His father said, okay. They got into the car and headed toward McDonald’s. His father made the order, and Jimmy’s heart pounded when his father said make it a super size fry. James took the money out of his wallet to pay for the fries and a drink. Jimmy’s little teeth were ready to sink into those hot golden fries, before they made it to the table. When they sat down, grace consisted of “God bless this food amen”, but it seemed like way too many words to Jimmy who was eager to eat with this huge blessing of French fries.
 James was happy to see his little boy so happy over something so simple. He decided to join in the fun. He reached over to get a couple of Jimmy’s fries for himself. To his surprise, his son quickly put his arms around his fries as though building a fort and pulled them toward himself and said, “No, these are mine.” His dad was in a state of shock for a moment. He could not believe what had happened. James pulled back his hand and began to reflect about his son’s attitude toward the fries.

Let’s walk together through the things that went through his mind.

**He was 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 get him the size fry he was expecting, but something twice as big. Yet here he is talking about **his French fries**.

James continues with his thoughts: **Has he forgotten who I am?**

Not only was I the source of the French fries, he has forgotten that I have the **powe**r to take all the fries despite his little arms surrounding them as a fort. Or that if I **wanted to**, I could go back to the counter and bring him so many fries that he could never eat them all. He 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.”

As the Dad thought about it, one or two fries really would not have made much of a difference for him that day. What he wanted was for his son Jimmy, to invite him into the wonderful little world he had made possible for his son. He wanted his son to be willing to share the very blessing that he had provided.

Allow me to extend the story – the metaphor if you will. God, our Father, our Dad, provides French fries every day. 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 straight and light in color like McDonald’s. Some are dark and curly like Arby’s. Some are made from white potatoes and some from sweet potatoes. But God has given us all some fries.

Like Jimmy’s father, God desires to sit down at the table with us for some fellowship. When God reaches over to use some of the blessings he has given to us, 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.

**Is there anybody here this morning that understands that God is the source of all that we receive?**

**Sure we may have gone to work, but how many know you’ve got to have something within you that you didn’t put in you to have the ability to get up and go to work.**
Is there anybody here today that understands, 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. Is there anybody here that recognizes God does not need our French fries, and that 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. The first verse many people learn is John 3:16 which begins, for God so love the world that he what….He gave His only Son.

Throughout the Bible, you find that God is always giving. In your own lives, how many of you know that you cannot underestimate God’s ability to provide for you in ways that you had not thought possible. God is very interested in your response to the blessings He sends our way and what we choose to do with them.

There is nothing we have that God ultimately has not provided. We are growing in Christ when we realize that God gives to us and delights in us giving to others and giving back to God. Doesn’t it amaze you that we would act like Jimmy with the French fries with God.

God gives us all these French fries and we’re sitting around saying, “oh no, no, no these are mine.” God as a parent 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.

In our Old Testament reading, God asked the people to bring in a tithe and see if He will not bless them for it. A tithe is nothing more than a penny out of a dime, or a dime out of dollar.

If God sat with you at a table, and gave you 10 dimes, what would cause you to say no if God asked for one of them back? Yet 90% of all people who say they love God will say no God, this is mine.

We get upset about paying 10% when God is entitled to the full 100% to do as he pleases. 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.

God loves us so much, that He has not even given up on us yet even though we make it plain, I’m not letting you have my fries. Do you know what gratitude is. Gratitude is having an understanding and appreciation of the blessings that we have in life. Some of you here would like to show God your gratitude, but like Jimmy, you’re not sure you will have enough fries to meet all your needs and desires.

There are three things we should know about God when we are afraid to believe that God will meet our needs financially if we become tithers.

The first deals with God’s power. By this I mean God’s ability. Does God have the ability to give us what we need, if we give to the work of God in this life?

The second thing we need to know about God is God’s provisions. God’s provision is God’s willingness to give. God is willing to give you today what you need. God is so willing to give, that the Bible tells us He causes his blessings to flow on those who don’t serve him as well as on those who do.

The third thing we should know about God is that God wants to work in partnership with us in reaching people.

The growth of this church is going to bring new life into the lives of many people as we lead them to Jesus Christ. God needs people who are willing to reach out and touch others as well as people who realized they need to be touched.

We need you to make a difference. There is a tremendous future ahead for this church.

What role is God going to have you fulfill to equip and enable you to be a giver of new life.”

God wants to transform this church and the transformation begins with you.