



7 Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return? 8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts. 12 And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts. (Mal 3:7-12)

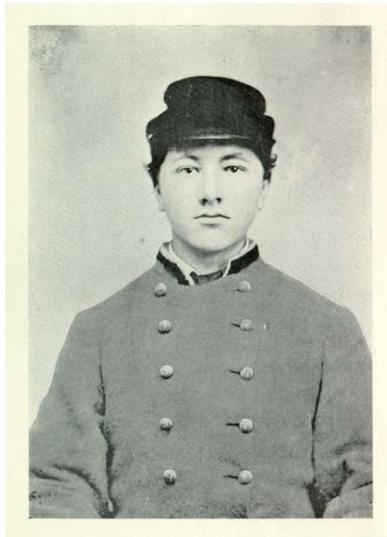
God rebukes those, who claim Him as Lord, for their disobedience from long past. In fact, that disobedience began with Adam and has continued in his bloodline of Adam from that time until the present. None are righteous! "*There is none righteous, no, not one.*" (Romans 3:10) Do you trust in your own goodness? Do you claim your vain public babblings to be a gift of God? God is not the author of confusion, and neither is man righteous in his own right. If, from the early beginning in the Garden, the heart of man has been incapable of obedience to the Law, how can we be saved? Only through the substitute sacrifice of Christ who paid our penalty for sin on the cross! This has been the case from the Fall of Adam. It was the case with Abraham (who could not be perfect), it was true of Moses, of Aaron, of David, and all who follow in the line of Promise made sure by Christ. So why are some accounted righteous, and others remain steeped in their sins? Because all before Christ who believed and looked to the Promise of His Coming, were accounted righteous under the redemptive blood He shed at Calvary. All today who look back upon that accomplished event, and believe on Him whom they pierced, are likewise under that redemptive blood that was shed for them. **THERE IS NO OTHER WAY!**

In today's passage, we see the prideful declarations of self and arrogance in the words of those who believe themselves to be righteous. Their sins have become such an integral part of their souls that they do not recognize sin in their hearts. They have

become calloused to compassion and virtue. 7 "*Even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts. But ye said, Wherein shall we return?*"

These have gone astray from God even from the early days of their fathers. So has every man who lives in sin. They have gone astray from the days of their father, Adam, whose sin-contaminated blood courses through their veins. Frankly, if our blood is contaminated with disease, there is only one solution - a blood transfusion that replaces that diseased blood with pure and wholesome blood. That transfusion comes by way of the Cross of Christ. It is His blood that washes away our sins, continually purifies, and makes us righteous before God. The precise accuracy of Holy Scripture is amazing to me. I never fail to look with wonder at the manner in which God so concisely and accurately articulates His Will in it. "*Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the LORD of hosts.*" Please note the order of subjects and verbs in this sentence of Malachi. Why does God command that we return unto Him, first, rather than His returning to us first? It is because God never changed His position since the Garden at Eden. It was Adam and Eve who departed from God. Sin separates us from God, and sin is all of our own works without God. God is fixed in purpose and will. As we read yesterday, "*For I am the LORD, I change not.*" (Mal 3:6) If we discover ourselves separated from God, who do you suppose moved?

There is a story of a young sixteen-year-old David Emmons Johnston (1845-1917)



Ensign Bearer of the Southern Army at the Battle of Shiloh (April 1862) in Tennessee during the War Between the States. The Southern Army was advancing across an open plain exposed to a withering fire of musketry from an entrenched enemy. As the lines began to waver, the advancing elements fell to the ground behind a small berm for a respite from the continuous fusillade of fire that dominated the level terrain. The Color Bearer was up front and fifty yards ahead of the stymied Southern line. Those who had taken shelter behind the berm shouted to the Color Bearer who was approaching the enemy entrenchments, "Come back! Bring the Colors back to the Line where we are!" to which the young color Bearer responded, "No, men, you come up to the Colors, for the Colors are fixed and planted at the forward point of battle." The Ensign of God is fixed and planted as well. He cannot fall back to our lines of sin and immorality. If we

will be with God, we must move up to that blessed Ensign planted by Christ at Calvary!

" *But ye said, Wherein shall we return?* The modern church looks aloofly at those who chastise their sins and light-hearted faith and say, "Wherein are we amiss? God has blessed us with a splendid edifice (and that is all it is for it does not define a church). We are well-fed and proudly serving. Wherein have we failed?" "You are squalid and without resources! a Holy God declares!" "Who are YOU to correct us," the church responds. The modern church believes God OWES them blessings rather than themselves owing God reverence and obeisance. How does God address the arrogant modern church? "*Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.*" (Rev 3:17) There is another Church whom God loves and exonerates - Smyrna. What kind of Church was Smyrna? It was a church poor in resources, but wealthy in love and truth. "*I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but*

are the synagogue of Satan. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life."
(Rev 2:9-10)

8 "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." First of all, we can truly give NOTHING to God. He needs nothing that we own, for we OWN nothing. All things come from God - the Giver of Life and Father of Lights. All that we hold in our skinny fingers are on loan from God. The Creation is His, and every creature belongs to Him. God entrusts us with resources whereby we may live and share. If we hoard those resources in greed, we shall release them at the moment of death and our bank account in Heaven will be devoid of treasures. What are tithes and offerings? God required the first tenth of all of the increase in crops or harvest. That was the minimum responsibility. Offerings came at the tug of the spirit in the heart of the compassionate to share even more of that which God had loaned them in this life to the feeding of widows and orphans and other needy causes. The point that most forget today, and forgot in the days of Malachi, is that God demands as well a tithing of our time and effort. Do we spend a minimum of one-tenth of our daily time in prayer, worship, and study of the Word? Do we look to the Lord's Day only as our Sabbath, or do we recognize that seven days per week is the Sabbath of the Lord? Do we believe that the one, or two hours, we spend per week in church satisfies the Law of Sabbath and of tithing?

9 "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Adam would have settled for the sweets of the world over the delicacies of Heaven. Therefore the world was cursed! God said to Adam: "...*cursed is the ground for thy sake.*" (Gen 3:17) Please note here how an entire nation (*even this whole nation*) can be cursed for turning away from God. Woe unto the land that flows with milk and honey whose God WAS the Lord! American should repent in sackcloth and ashes as did that Great City of Nineveh! We face not only the 'silence of the lambs', but the silence of the shepherds in America today.

10 "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." The Christian life is not without sacrifice. If you would see the blessing of God on your life and upon your family, you must step out in courageous faith and bear "*the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune*" as Mr. Shakespeare says, in carrying one's cross for Christ. Men are looking for cheap miracles and signs, today in the comfort of their armchairs, but the signs and miracles are upon the field of Battle over which the Sun of Righteous reigns. Do not be puzzled, my fellows, at the immensity of blessings illustrated here. The "Windows of Heaven" have before been opened upon the fruited plains and purple mountain majesties of our own beloved land. Have we kept the legacy? Not at all. We have squandered the blessings of God Almighty on fleshly and unseemly pursuits. The borders of America were silent sentinel to more blessings than the land could hold. It was a beacon light to oppressed people the world over who sought the Liberty and Freedom of the God-blessed land. But, now what? Old Israel was not unlike modern-day America. God was their Shield and Protector. He poured out blessings untold on that tiny nation above all nations of the earth. When they were fat and clothed in silks, they turned away from the God of their youth and whored after other gods. Satan is having a heyday in America today, as well. He is devouring our children and breaching our moral code. Can we be saved?

11 "And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts." Friends, we cannot restore America under the power of our own sails, we must fill our sails with the Wind of the Holy Spirit, and enjoin the Captain of our souls to man the helm. He will rebuke the devourer that has been let loose in our midst. He will restore the fallen walls and ramparts of our beloved land. He will recover the hearts and souls of our dear children - if we turn to Him in prayerful repentance. How shall we TRY the Lord? We may do so by simply being a nation obedient once more to His Laws and His Ways. If we once again present our hearts as the lambskin of our faith before God, He will repair and amend them - and our once-great nation. With what result do we turn to the Lord?

12 "And all nations shall call you blessed: for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith the LORD of hosts." If we do those things that the Lord has commanded from the beginning, we shall be restored to the land of our forefathers. We will once more be called a "delightsome land." This comes as the evidence of faith and faithful living to God. In one hundred years, historians will look upon the landscape of America and see either a land teeming with the products of honest labor and faithful dependence upon their God; or, they shall look upon a land and people destitute of moral strength, weeping in the gutters of her fallen temples. They will have become, as deserters of their God, a people who have hung their harps, once the source of Godly hymns, by the Rivers of Babylon. Do not allow this sad benediction to be pronounced upon the land upon which God has so warmly smiled: "*By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion.*" (Psalms 137:1-3)