

Jason Upchurch - Malachi 3.6-12 - Return to Giving

So far throughout our study of the book of Malachi we've seen a variety of ways in which Israel had forsaken the Lord. All of these ways they were tempted into sin are ways we need to be on guard for as well.

The apostle Paul says in **1 Cor. 10:6**: these things took place as examples for us that we might not desire evil as they did. He was speaking specifically of the generation of the Exodus, but it's fair to look at all of the OT - and NT - and learn from the OT believers what we should do and should not do.

And Malachi gives us plenty of things to not do. Which is really astonishing if you think about it.

Israel had been given every blessing and spiritual opportunity - as well as every physical and material blessing - during the reigns of David and Solomon. But eventually fell into sin and idolatry so bad that God exiled and destroyed the northern 10 tribes of Israel with the Assyrians. Later he brought in the Babylonians to haul Judah into captivity for 70 years. Eventually, by his grace, he allowed them to return to Judah to rebuild the city of Jerusalem. But within just a few generations the wickedness was just as bad as it had been before the exile.

And Malachi is an indictment of the worst of those sins. We've seen the people rejected the idea that God even loved them. And while they were denying God's love for them, they were bringing maimed and disgusting animals to offer as sacrifice to the Temple; animals so disgusting they'd never dare offer them to their governor, but they offered it to God with a straight face. We've seen the religious leaders were corrupt, there was rampant intermarriage with pagans, there was rampant divorce, and accusing God of injustice.

Israel hadn't changed - they were in the same mess they were in before the exile and although there was reform for a season that was all gone.

And here this morning the issue is that Israel was robbing God. I don't know if you've ever stopped and thought about that but that is a serious charge. Robbery in America is a felony. It is very serious and is widely considered a serious crime throughout the world.

This particular word is used only one other place in **Prov 22:22-23**: Do not rob the poor, because he is poor. Or crush the afflicted at the gate, for the Lord will plead their cause and rob of life those who rob them.

If you rob poor people of their possessions, God will rob you of life. That's a threat if ever there was one. Here, the Jews weren't robbing the poor - they were robbing God.

They had forsaken God by not giving what was owed to him. They weren't giving or tithing as they should have been.

Now, the issue of giving is often a difficult one. And for some reason pastors often have a difficult time preaching on the topic of giving. I know some churches have an elder teach on the subject if and when it comes up or have a guest preacher come. It seems to some that there's a conflict of interest.

So let me just say a few things here. I've talked about everything else under the sun and in the Scriptures, so we're not going to avoid the issue of tithing either. You should be giving - tithing - whatever you want to call it. This is an issue of faithfulness between you and God and my goal is to present every man complete when he stands before the Lord Jesus in judgement. Part of that completion is to ensure that you are not robbing God while you're here on this earth.

I'm also not paid on commission so what you give to our church is between you and God. The only people who know are you, God and the couple of people who count the offering each week. I don't know what you give, the elders don't know. Even the treasurer doesn't know. There are a lot of things in your life that only God knows. What you're looking at on your phone, how you talk to your husband or kids, if there's anger inside of your heart, if you're harboring any sinful ways.

But with everything in the Christian life - giving included - we have to be taught what God wants. My friend Dan Jarms at Faith Bible Church says everything in the Christian life needs to be taught. Every aspect of the Christian life, including giving to God.

So what I want to do actually spend some time on the topic of giving over the next few weeks. Our budget is fine, I'm not passively aggressively hinting at anything. But in the 7 years we've been a church I don't believe we've had a deep dive on giving and I think this is as good a time as any.

Malachi is rebuking the sin of not giving, so I think it's appropriate to know positively what we should be doing. We want to know what faithfulness looks like. And I want to do that by looking at the OT this week and the NT next week. And I think what we'll see is that there is a lot of overlap at least in principles of giving.

So let me just tip my hand up front. Christians should give. We could even say Christians should tithe - if you want to use that language. I believe that the biblical pattern is that the people of God give at least ten percent of their earnings to God. In the OT that was to the Temple but also to the local priests. In NT that means to the local church. If you want to give above and beyond that to missionaries or ministries or as your own benevolence that's fine. But we should be giving.

As an introduction, let me give you 4 quick reasons for giving and then we'll dive in.

1. We give as an act of thanks to God. One of the things we see throughout the Bible is that giving to God is actually an act of thanking God for his provision. We see this foremost in the offering of the first fruits. When farmers would have a crop, they would give the first 10% of the crop to the Lord as a preemptive thanks to God for what was to come.

Interestingly, I think kids understand this intrinsically. I don't know how many times over the years my kids will ask me for candy or some special treat and when I buy it for them they want to give some back to me. If I buy them a bag of M&Ms they inevitably offer me some. They're so thankful for the blessing they want to bless me with it too. I don't need them, I didn't require it of them. But they desire to give back.

We should be the same toward our Heavenly Father. He gives so generously to us, we should desire to give back.

2. We give as an act of trust to God. This was really the issue for the Israelites - they gave before they even had the whole crop and what it showed was that they trusted God to give what they needed. There is an act of trust when we give. Will God take care of us? Will God provide for us? If we're talking about tithing, ten percent ends up being a lot over time. It's easy to think about all the things we could do with that money. We could invest or pay off or whatever or go on vacation or whatever.

But God says something that's totally counterintuitive: give generously to him and he'll open up the storehouses for you. Which can sound very prosperity gospel. But we are given assurances throughout the Bible that God will provide for us. And he'll provide abundantly to those who are generous. Part of giving is simply trusting that that's true.

3. We give to participate in the work of God. You probably know this but the Kingdom is furthered by preaching the gospel, but the gospel requires finances to go forward. That's true with foreign missions, but it's also true with the local church.

We sit here in a heated building because our tithes pay the electric bill. Our tithes paid for the plumbing work that keeps our pipes from freezing. Our tithes paid for the gravel you park on, the gates that keep punk teenagers from tearing up that gravel, the paint on the building.

Your tithes pay for Dave and Tomo Robison to continue working in Japan. Your tithes pay for Dirk and Michele Darrow to operate at camp. Your tithes pay for books, for lunches, for counseling, for encouragement for me and the elders to continue doing the work of the ministry. Your tithes pay for musical instruments, speakers, microphones. Your tithes pay for using the community center, giving honorariums to guest speakers so on.

Maybe you've always wanted to be more active in ministry or help more. But if you're giving know that you are already an integral part of the work of God.

I remember talking to a guy who claimed to be a Christian but he refused to give any kind of money. I asked him: how do you think we bought the chairs you sit on? And the tables we use? And the water you drink? And the soap to wash your hands? And the gravel so your truck doesn't sink into the marshy spring dirt? He just couldn't wrap his mind around the idea that everything he did at church - and even in the homes of other believers - was funded by unrighteousness mammon so we can lay up treasures in heaven.

So we give as thanks, as an act of trust, to participate in the work of God.

4. We give to support those who minister to us. This sounds self serving, but it's the principle we see throughout the Bible: the people give so that those whom God has appointed into full time ministry functions can do so.

I give you spiritual food, you give me physical food. That's actually the phrase Paul uses in the NT.

We see that with the OT priesthood, we see that with NT preachers, we see that with Jesus and the apostles, so on.

Unless a church has a mortgage, usually the largest part of their budget goes to paying salaries for pastors and support staff. That's our church as well. Our budget is on the back wall, you're free to look at it. It's no secret.

The collective tithes that we receive go to pay for ministries, support and salary. Interestingly there's been a point in life where most of my kids start understanding how church finances work. People give and that goes to pay for my salary. And our family gives and they ask: Why do we give if it just comes back to us? And the answer is for all the other reasons. On some level it's an act of trust to God, a way for us to participate in ministries and just a simple thanks to God as well.

And just as a side note, most churches our size usually have a bivocational pastor. Someone who has to work a second job to provide. And although I do have 2 other jobs I am blessed with the provision here at RBC. A church should seek to bless their pastor. You'd be amazed at the ridiculous games churches and church leaders play to keep from giving their pastor a decent salary. It's really criminal and shameful. So we are thankful for God's provision here at RBC.

Turn back to Gen. 4. We see the principle of giving in the opening pages of Genesis. A lot of people say the issue of giving and is just Old Testament - specifically when you use the word "tithing." "That was just the Law of Moses, we're not under that Law any more, so we can do whatever." Well that's just not true. Thousands of years before Moses people were giving to God. There's a consistent pattern of generosity and often when a number is mentioned it's 10 percent.

Here we have Cain and Abel - the first murder. And what motivated the murder was jealousy. But if you remember, the reason for the jealousy had to do with what they were giving back to God. It was over tithes and offerings. **Read 1-7**

So Cain gives fruit of the ground - fruit or vegetables. Abel gives the firstborn from the fat of his flock. Now, we don't know why God was displeased with Cain's offering. Was he supposed to offer only animals? Maybe. Or maybe it was just that he didn't bring the best to God, maybe he brought mediocre fruit and vegetables. We really don't know. But we know a few things.

First, we know that God had expectations that the people would give. God never says "Oh you shouldn't have!" No, he had an expectation and Cain didn't meet it and Abel did. And when God rebuked Cain for this offering, he didn't take the rebuke.

Cain is the 3rd person on planet earth and there's an expectation of giving to God. That's how early this is. And if you do the math that Moses was 1400BC give or take, this is 2,600 years before Moses. The people of God

were giving to God almost 3 millennia before the Law was ever written down. This is also before the flood. And that's important because God is concerned about offering to him. **Look at 7:1-5. Read**

Think about that. When we think of the ark, we think the animals went in two-by-two, right? Well, some of them did. Which ones? The unclean animals went in two-by-two. But clean animals - at least some of them - went in 7-by-7. Now that might seem like random trivia, but fast forward to the flood being over and notice what happens. This is just after the flood has subsided and they're off the Ark. **Read 8:20-22**

Just put yourself in the place of Noah. All of the animals on the planet are within a small distance of his boat. That's not a massive amount. Offer too many of those and there might not be any more animals. Life and death is on the line. But Noah offers them to God.

"But Baby, how are we going to eat, how are we going to till the land if we're cutting up all these animals?"
"God will provide."

Just to give you an idea how much God did provide: There are somewhere in the neighborhood of 1 billion dogs on the planet. Somewhere in the neighborhood of 1 billion cats, 1-2 million eagle species, 50-60 million penguins, so on. Cutting into Noah's precious and fragile food supply didn't keep God from increasing the animal population one bit.

Turn to Gen. 14. This is where Abraham goes and rescues Lot after he's captured. You remember that? And they're coming back from the battle and what do they do? **Read 17-24**

Abraham is 2,000BC and he's honoring a priest, Melchizedek, with a tenth of the spoil. Where does that number come from? It seems like it came from God. It was good and right.

Turn to Gen 28:18-22. This is Jacob running away from Esau. Remember he had just stolen the blessing from Esau and is on the run for his life. He has the dream of angels going up and down on the staircase and he realizes the dream is from God. **Read 17-22**

This is an interesting passage because at this point Jacob has basically nothing. He's destitute, running hundreds of miles away to his uncle to escape his brother's wrath. But he makes a vow to God that if God will take care of him, he will return a tenth back to God. It's a promise to tithe what he's been given.

So tithing is a thing we see for thousands of years before the Law. It was common knowledge, common practice by the people of God.

Turn to Leviticus 27:30-33. This is the first place in the Law of Moses where tithing is discussed. And I want us to notice a few things here. **Read 30-33**

First, the tithe - the actual crop or produce or animals - are actually God's. It was never the person's it was always God's. He owns everything including including the other 90%. But **Vs. 30** makes it clear it's God's.

And the same is true of us. Every dollar in your bank account is God's. It all belongs to him, we'll give an account of every penny we have and how we deployed it. But especially when it comes to giving to God that money you give isn't actually yours. It's God's. You're a steward of the money, you're managing it and you're called to manage it in such a way that he would be honored by its use.

Second, God makes provision for a trade out. I think this is really interesting. What if you're a farmer and you've got a flock of goats and a flock of sheep. But your flock of sheep is really small and you want to build it up but if you sacrifice a tenth you won't really get anywhere? This is awesome: God says just trade it out.

Just sacrifice more goats in the sheep's place - but - you need to add a fifth to it. Why? Why is there an exchange rate? We're not told exactly but I think we can make a guess.

I think if we're honest with ourselves we'll always try to find reasons - even legit reasons - to not give to God what's his. We love loopholes in contracts.

And so I think this provision prevents that. Or at least tries to. If you want build up the sheep and trade out goats, fine. But make sure that it's a good faith trade out and not some sort of way to get ahead of God and cheat God out of what he's owed.

As **Rom 2:4** says we don't want to presume on the riches and kindness of God. God's trying to be gracious to his people even when they owe him - don't get greedy.

One way to curb a heart of greed is to ask: Is it really worth the trade out? Is it really worth the premium? If it is, you're probably not trying to take advantage of God.

How might that apply to us? Maybe you're tight in life and you're not giving what you'd want or what you think you should to the local church. God doesn't want you to live in poverty or squalor. But maybe you make an oath to God to give when you get that bonus or tax return or whatever.

Some of you guys have given electrical services, painting services, cleaning services. You could give tax services so on. Just to be clear, I'm not suggesting anything wink, wink here. I think this is actually a freeing thing where if you feel bad for not being able to help financially, the Lord gives precedent for other ways to give.

We've been at spots in our marriage where we were super poor and we could give \$50 a month. That was it. I think had I understood this principle I would have asked my pastor if there was a way to give to the church non-financially.

Turn to Leviticus 18:21-32. Here we see a couple of principles at work. God outlines the duties of the Levites - the guys from the tribe of Levi. And as a result of being dedicated to the work of Tabernacle and Temple ministry, they receive the tithes to sustain them. That's what we see: the tithes the people pay support the spiritual leaders. We'll see this in the NT as well. But I think it's worth just seeing this because although people say "well, this is just OT what is clear is that this is the timeless principle of God." **Read 21-24**

So just to connect the dots. The tithes that the Israelites bring go to the Levites who care for them spiritually. The people bring material goods in exchange for spiritual care. That's the principle.

So remember in Malachi when the people are robbing God, who gets robbed? The priests. And when the priests are corrupt, who are they affecting? The people. There's an symbiotic relationship there.

Now watch also what the Levites are to do. **Read 25-32**

The Levites are not exempt from tithing either. They are to tithe. They are to give back to the Temple operation. And not just give back anything but give back the best. And this is how God ensures his ministers are taken care of physically and how his people are taken care of spiritually. **Turn to Deut 14:22-29**

Now something to keep in mind as we turn is that the Jews didn't tithe just 10%. There was the initial 10% but when you add up everything the Jews were to give it comes closer to 25%. And they were to be open and kind and hospitable to those who were traveling through their towns.

I say that, because here we see an interesting tithe that happens every 3 years. This is often called the Tithe Festival and the idea is that every 3 years the Jews brought another tithe to Jerusalem - or their local town - and basically had a massive party and invited everyone to take part. **Read 22-29**

Now, your teetotaling baptist youth pastor probably skipped this verse in youth group. But basically the idea is every 3 years go have a massive community party funded by tithes. David brings the wine, Jacob brings the beer - the hard drink, Jeremiah brings the grain and we all eat and drink in the sight of the Temple. Why in the sight of the Temple? So you remember who gave you the good stuff you're eating and drinking. God gave it.

Make sure you're passing out drinks to the Levites and the poor people, the widows, fatherless, out of towners. Drink and be filled and praise the Lord!

If you live too far away, sell you're stuff and buy it in Jerusalem and party there. The principle there is that God actually wants us to use our gifts for enjoyment. God is lavish with us. He wants us to enjoy life.

Ecc. 2:24: There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.

And sometimes God makes us do that.

You guys, I think there should be part of every family's budget that is dedicated to sharing the bounty God has given us. Not just for those in dire need, but just in celebration and enjoyment. We should enjoy the goodness God has given us with one another.

You guys, don't be so stingy that you never enjoy food or drink or wealth. Yes it's good to save and squirrel away. But what are you saving for? If you're never going to enjoy it I think you're missing the whole point. Yes there's a savings for rainy days, but there's also savings for sunny days too where we praise the Lord for the good bounty he's given us. And when you celebrate those sunny days make sure you're celebrating with others as well.

So giving 10 percent is before the Law, in the Law and many of the principles of the Law are still applicable.

Next week, we'll look at what the NT has to say about giving.

Pray