

## Jason Upchurch - Malachi 3.6-12 - Return to Giving - Part 3

This morning we are wrapping up our look at tithing to God. We did something of a rabbit trail for a few weeks on the issue to consider what the OT and the NT say about tithing.

And I appreciate the feedback I've received from you guys. Two quick encouragements before we dive into the text. For those of you who are tithing, I want to encourage you to not become arrogant in giving. I'm glad you're giving and following the Lord in obedience in this area of your life. I just know for myself that it can sometimes be a little bit of a "Well, I checked that spiritual box so I'm doing good" kind of feel.

And especially since we don't put a big emphasis on passing a plate or that giving really is part of corporate worship, it can almost feel like just paying the power bill or phone bill rather than what it is: an act of worship of the one true and living God.

So I would encourage you that as you write your check or deposit cash or whatever you do, to ensure that you remember it's a act of worship. It should be prayerful and humble and thankful.

So that's encouragement 1: make sure to guard your heart from self-justification and remember that giving is a sacred act of worship.

The 2nd encouragement is to those who might not be giving or not giving as much as you'd like. It's easy to go through a passage like this and feel guilty or shame because you're not giving what you should. I don't want to pull any punches here, but my goal is not guilt. My goal is to teach the passage and let the chips fall where they may.

I mentioned that we've been in tough situations before and gave less than 10%. But I want to encourage you to be working toward a financial situation where you do tithe and you are generally generous.

And if you need help financially please let me or one of the elders know. Whether that's help paying a bill, help putting together a budget, help deciding on a major financial purchase or decision. As I mentioned last week, the elders here do want your success in life: spiritual, financial, health, relational - the whole gamut. And although we're not certified financial planners, I think it's safe to say that we've had enough experience where we could be an asset to you as you consider how to please God with financial decisions.

So without further adieu: Big Picture: Bring in the full tithe trusting that God will bless you.

Let's break this down into 5 parts.

### 1) The Grace of God when we don't give. Read 6-7

So if you remember from a month ago, we talked about **Vs. 6** and the immutability of God. God never changes. That's our only hope in life and death that the God who made a promise to the patriarchs to send Jesus to bless all nations will never change his mind. He'll never go back on his promise.

And the connection here is that God's people aren't giving the full tithe. The whole nation is shorting God. But here's the glorious promise: God won't go back on his promises even though his people aren't giving. You're not going to hell just because you might not be giving what you should be giving. God's not kicking you out of the Kingdom or throwing you in some fictional purgatory until you've paid the last penny.

You should giving, but your salvation isn't based on your giving. And God isn't nursing some big grudge against you if you're not.

There's this restaurant I go to when we go to the Tri Cities. And it's a place where you order at the counter and go sit down and they bring the food out to you. But when you pay they ask for a tip. And I'm thinking, "You didn't do anything more than the guy at McDonald's and he doesn't ask for a tip." And they haven't even provided a service to me and they're asking for a tip. And sorry if this offends you, but I don't tip them. And I sign for no tip and I think one of these days they're just going to spit in my food or kick me out or forget my order or spite me somehow. I'm just waiting for the backlash because I didn't hit the little 10% button.

Can I tell you something? I think that's how we often think of God. He's just looking for a reason to kick us out. To spit in our spiritual food. "Oh you're not giving me anything? See ya."

You guys, God's not like that. He's not going to spit in your spiritual direction because you're not giving. He's not kicking you out because of this. Why? Because he doesn't change. Your salvation was never based on what you do or what you've done. It was never based on the amount you tithe and it never will be.

Your salvation is based purely on faith in the finished work of Jesus dying for sins on the cross and rising again for justification. We're not saved by faith plus baptism, faith plus Bible reading, faith plus tithing, faith plus anything.

Will true saving faith manifest in those things? Sure. But they don't cause salvation.

And to be sure, we know God's heart is kind in this area because even after generations of his people not giving what does he say? **Read 7**

He says return to me. Come back. And if he didn't write off Israel when they weren't giving, he won't write us off either. But his heart is that we come back to faithfulness in giving.

So God gives grace even when we don't give.

## 2) The history of Robbing God.

Now, with that introduction, God puts forth a very candid evaluation of the situation. I think we need to consider this soberly. **Read 7-8**

So what we see here is that there is a history of Israel robbing God. This isn't the first time they've done this. This is a pattern in their history.

God wants his people to give to him and he's always wanted his people to give to him. And he will always want people to give to him.

And although God doesn't change it seems like the people of Israel do change. They waffle back and forth on the issue of giving. And they've waffled since they were a people.

**Vs. 7** says since the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes. Who are the fathers? It's probably the patriarchs. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Jacob's 12 sons. But it occasionally is used to refer generically of previous generations. And I think that's probably the issue here because I'm not aware of specific times where Abraham, Isaac or Jacob withheld tithes to God.

But there are plenty of other times in Israel's history where that happened.

Starting in the book of Joshua, remember when Achan and his family stole silver from the battle of Jericho? And he brought a curse on Israel and they lost the battle of Ai because of it. God says that Achan stole from him and lied about it. **Josh. 7:1, 11**

Throughout the book of Judges people stole from God. What would happen is that Israel would follow God, then he would bless them. They'd get fat and happy and begin worshipping other gods, making offerings to the Baals and Ashterah's. Those offerings belonged to God but they were given to an idol. So God would bring judgment on the people, they'd repent, God would bless.

Round and round it would go. This is literally the story of the book of Judges, and the book of Samuel through Kings. Israel did this all the time. God eventually hauls them off the land, brings them back 70 years later and they're now doing the same thing. There's nothing new under the sun. The people of Israel had robbed God for centuries.

And this is an ever present danger. We have to be careful too. When we're reading the OT and we see the people of Israel fall into sin, our first reflex should be to ask: am I doing that too? Am I falling in the way of Israel?

Our first instinct shouldn't be to condemn Israel and feel self-assured. It's to realize that there is no temptation except that which is common to man. What they were tempted with, we are tempted with.

And here, the simple application is that we are going to be tempted to not give to God. It's a temptation. I mean, after our mortgage and our food bill, it's about our largest expenditure. And it would be easy to use it in some other way, even a way that seems to be wise or appropriate.

Well, I'll invest it and give the growth on investment to God. I'll just pay this thing off faster and then I can give back to God. I'm going to buy this thing, and even though I can't give to God it'll be okay. We start playing games and at the end it's the same games Israel played.

Remember, in the OC God did give provision for trading out gifts. But there was a transaction fee so-to-speak to make sure Israel's heart was right. God is generous and gracious, but people had taken advantage of it.

Side note: God talks about the fathers doing this and now these guys are. And although he's talking about ancestors, one thing parents need to do is talk to their kids about giving just like you'd talk to them about any other aspect of worship. They should give when they earn money. They should save, they should spend. That's part of the discipleship process. We teach them songs, and the Bible and everything else. We should also teach them the how and why of giving.

So Israel has a generational habit of robbing God.

### 3) The Seriousness of not giving. **Read 8-9**

So to not give is to rob God. That's serious. When you rob someone, you are taking what is rightfully theirs and seizing it as your own.

And that's how God viewed Israel when they were withholding the tithe and offerings. They were not bringing to God his own things. They were keeping his things from him.

We've seen how God makes a rightful claim on the tithe of his people. It's his not theirs. So to not give him what is rightfully his is robbing.

And sometimes it's just helpful to put it in perspective. Many years ago I was an outside salesman and I had a list of customers I called on. One customer always paid in cash but I noticed my commission check never accounted for their sales. And every time I looked into the accounting it always looked super hosed up - I never really understood why because paying cash for items is pretty simple.

Until one day the police were called to our office and they arrested our accountant for theft and for fraud. Since this customer was the only one who paid cash - and they paid a lot - she would help herself to the money as long as the accounting looked complicated. She had stolen around ten thousand dollars from the company to pay off gambling debts and credit card debt.

She had taken what belonged to the owner of our company and used it for herself. It was never hers. In fact, she was entrusted with it because he thought she was a worthy accountant, but in the end she was robbing the owner.

That's how it is when we don't give. It's robbing God of what he's entrusted us with.

I know these might be hard words for us to hear. But they are the Lord's words. **Read 9-10**

God says Israel is cursed with a curse because they are robbing him. I don't think this meant eternal damnation. I think this is going back to the principle of Deuteronomy blessings for obedience, Cursings for disobedience. That God was disciplining Israel for their sin. He was making life hard for them.

If you read **Deut 28** there's a whole list of financial consequences for disobedience. There's pestilence, drought - things that would affect their field. Their plow ox would die - this is like your car's engine blowing up. The nation would be subject to heavy taxes and fines.

God tells his people to bring the full tithe into the storehouse. In the OT the people would bring their tithes into barns basically, to be stored for the priests throughout the year. And it seems like they were bringing something, it was just not the full amount and God knew it. But they were intentionally shorting God in the tithe.

We just need to bring in the full tithe. There's always going to be a reason not to, a reason to short God. But we should be moving quickly to get to a situation where we're honoring God.

#### 4) The Blessing for Giving.

Here's the amazing thing: God doesn't just say "cough it up and give me what is mine." He could, it's his. But what he does is promise to bless his people. And I think these promises of blessing are still true for us in the NC. **Read 10-12**

So here's what God says: you honor me with the first fruits, and I'll make sure you're taken care of. This isn't a promise that some long lost aunt will die and leave you a million. Or that you'll find a winning lottery ticket and be jet set the rest of your life. It's a promise that God will provide for you.

I think if we're honest that's usually the reason we don't give what we should. We don't trust that God will meet our needs. **Turn to Matt 6:25-34.** So we have the section about anxiety. Anxiety is usually fear that God won't take care of us - our basic needs. We won't be able to eat, we won't be clothed. We'll lose the home. We won't make rent.

It's not usually that we won't get the nice vacation on the Mediterranean, it's the basics. The essentials. What does Jesus promise? **Read 25-34**

Jesus promises that our Father will give the basics. He promises that God will clothe us and feed us. These are basic needs.

There have been some times in my life where I really struggled with anxiety because I didn't know how I was going to provide for me and my family. How am I going to put food on the table and pay all my bills. And what I was really doing was looking to myself to provide. Now there is a sense in which it's on us to provide - especially the men.

But I remember one time walking down the road and I thought "You know, if God would just call out from heaven and say he'll make sure to provide for me I'd be fine." That's exactly what he does right here.

All we have to do is pursue the Kingdom - pursue Jesus and a faithful life - and God will give us what we need.

Has anyone here ever starved to death?

Has anyone frozen to death from exposure?

No, God is faithful to this promise! And that's what he gets to back in Malachi 3. **Read 10**

Usually we're not to put the Lord to the test. That's dangerous. But here God says do it: put him to the test. Bring in the full tithe and see what he does.

When we first got married we were making almost nothing. And I remember listening to Dave Ramsey and he said the tithe was always the first thing, it always came at the beginning of the budget, for two reasons. First, biblically, it's the first thing you do with your crop - you tithe off of the very first fruits so you do it before anything else. Second, if you wait til the end of the budget to give to God there will never be enough.

So we tried it. We put the tithe at the very top of our little spreadsheet. We put God to the test. We put him to the test through some very lean times. I mentioned before we didn't always get a full 10%. But here we are 21 years later and I can tell you he's taken care of us.

**Prov. 3:9-10:** Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the first fruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty. And your vats will be bursting with wine.

So God says test him. What's the test? The test is give and see if he provides more than what you need. **Read 10**

You guys, if we're honest this is kind of crazy. God's like "test me!" See if I'm faithful or not." Have you ever done this? Have you ever tested God?

I remember doing a ropes course with my youth group in high school and there's this event called the trust fall. It's where you stand on a table height stump and people line up behind you and you just lean back and trust that they catch you. It's kind of crazy to entrust a bunch of ridiculous teenagers with my life.

And all of us are thinking: we're going to be the one that no one catches! We're going to go splat on the ground just call the gurney now. And for some it was harder than others. Some people were like "if I perish I perish" others were shaking and crying. But do you know what? Every single one of us made it through. We all lived to tell the tale.

God says trust me. Test me. See if I don't provide what you need. **Read 11**

Part of what we need to understand is that God's means of provision is that he is sovereign over every aspect of creation. And God often provides in different ways. It's not always serendipitous. Sometimes it's what we would call normal circumstances.

Here the normal circumstances are the plant will yield crop and the devourer won't eat. The devourer is a locust. So God will provide a strong crop and no bug will eat it. Those are pretty unremarkable provisions. But God is in control.

The way God might provide for you is through an extra shift, a small pay raise that offsets your giving. It could be that circumstances change. A larger tax return than you expected. All kinds of things.

It could also be that you realize life is just a little tighter and that's okay.

I remember one time when I was in seminary we had like nothing. Nothing. We were so poor you guys we were arguing over whether to buy the \$4 box of Bisquick or the \$2 box of Bisquick because we had like \$30 for food for 2 weeks. And I remember there were times when we just really didn't have much to eat. I don't know how many baked potatoes and canned chili meals we had those first years. And I remember wanting just a nice treat but we couldn't afford it.

And I remember one night out of the blue a gal from a couple apartments over brought us a plate full of pancakes. Like for no reason and it was amazing. God provided not just what we needed, but he provided a pleasant surprise. And that's how it often is.

I don't know how many times our income was like if we made a little more, we couldn't get that deduction, if we made less we wouldn't qualify for that thing. Because we did this and this, we avoided this penalty. Our income threaded this crazy needle where we were amply taken care of.

5) God wants you to delight in him with your money. **Read 12**

This is the end goal, you guys. God doesn't want a bunch of misers or people who begrudgingly give to him. He wants people so cheerful that every recognizes your delight in the Lord. He wants people who other people see are blessed.

He wants us to trust him and praise him when he provides.

**Pray**