

## Tithing, Give a portion back to the Lord.

### **TEXTS:**

#### **Malachi Chapter 3 :1-18**

1 See, I am sending my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple. The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight—indeed, he is coming, says the LORD of hosts. 2 But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears?

For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap; 3 he will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness. 4 Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years.

Mal. 3:5 Then I will draw near to you for judgment; I will be swift to bear witness against the sorcerers, against the adulterers, against those who swear falsely, against those who oppress the hired workers in their wages, the widow and the orphan, against those who thrust aside the alien, and do not fear me, says the LORD of hosts.

6 For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, have not perished. 7 Ever since the days of your ancestors you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, "How shall we return?"

8 Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, "How are we robbing you?" In your tithes and offerings! 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. 11 I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the LORD of hosts. 12 Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

13 You have spoken harsh words against me, says the LORD. Yet you say, "How have we spoken against you?" 14 You have said, "It is vain to serve God. What do we profit by keeping his command or by going about as mourners before the LORD of hosts?" 15 Now we count the arrogant happy; evildoers not only prosper, but when they put God to the test they escape."

16 Then those who revered the LORD spoke with one another. The LORD took note and listened, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who revered the LORD and thought on his name. 17 They shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, my special possession on the day when I act, and I will spare them as parents spare their children who serve them. 18 Then once more you shall see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between one who serves God and one who does not serve him.

#### **2 Corinthians 9:6-7**

2Cor. 9:6 The point is this: the one who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and the one who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. 7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to provide you with every blessing in abundance, so that by always having enough of everything, you may share abundantly in every good work.

#### **Luke 6:38**

Luke 6:38 give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back."

#### **1 Corinthians:**

1Cor. 6:20 For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.

1Cor. 7:23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.

### **Intro:**

A friend of mine in NZ was an organized preacher with a number of topics he would revisit each year. So once a year he (Ray) would teach on Christian Giving or what some churches call 'Stewardship'. After 10 years in one parish he was saying goodbye to people at the door for the last time at the end of his final service and one unimpressed parishioner said,

"Just as well you are leaving, all you spoke about was money!"

For that man once a year seemed to have become 'all the time' and he may have felt as if every week he was being asked to give to the point where he was annoyed. Perhaps he hoped that the next minister might focus on a less threatening subject? Giving to God involves money and money can be a very

sensitive subject! It has been two years since I last taught on giving so it is time to address that part of our discipleship again.

Martin Luther, the German Reformer, said that there were three conversions necessary for a Christian. He said,

“ There needs to be a conversion of the heart, a conversion of the mind and a conversion of the purse. When these three areas were converted the whole person was converted. ”

In saying this Luther was echoing the very clear teaching of Jesus,

“...you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” Mark 12:30

He was getting right to the nitty-gritty of what Jesus was talking about when he said:

“Where your treasure is there will your heart be also.” Matthew 6:20 & Luke 12:34

And he was slicing through the tendency towards split loyalties as Jesus had identified,

“You cannot serve God and Wealth.” Matthew 6:24c & Luke 16:11c

Giving to God is a discipleship issue that involves conversion of the heart and the mind so we will give of our strength.

Before going further I may need to first need to clear something up. I am going to be talking about giving to the Lord. This is not the same as giving to the church, or the poor or to good works. This sermon is about giving to the Lord.

Then in speaking about giving as a discipleship topic I assume that I am speaking to people baptized into Jesus Christ. If you are not baptized please listen with interest but understand that this is part of the discipleship of the baptized.

### **Body:**

The place I am going to start is with a simple but challenging question. Who owns you? *That's right,* Who OWNs you?

If you are a baptized Christian and honour your baptism then you belong to God through Jesus Christ.

In his first letter to the Corinthians St Paul was teaching them about clean living and right attitude to slave masters. Twice he reminds his readers (and us)

“ For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” 1Cor. 6:20

“ You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of human masters.” 1Cor. 7:23

The Gospel he is reminding them of is that through being ransomed and purchased, redeemed by God through the cross of Jesus Christ they (and us as baptised Christians) are freed from oppression through being taken over adopted as children of God. We have become his children through Christ and can enjoy God forever so don't abuse that freedom by re-submitting yourself to sexual immorality or economic slavery. Both of these issues are very relevant today.

You may be surprised to hear this but a baptized disciple of Jesus belongs to God as a possession for His glory. We are not longer our own property. The great Good News in this is that we are not the property of the powers of darkness. Our ransom has been paid.

That is the single biggest point I want to make this morning. As baptized disciples of Jesus Christ, we became possessions of God. Our lives are not our own. Our bodies are not our own and our wealth is not our own. It all belongs to God and we hold it in trust as his children managing and handling our heavenly Father's estate.

When someone lays their own life aside and says they want to live the life of Jesus they hand over every key to their life. As young Christians we sing the songs and wear the T-Shirt happily and then begin to realize that the process of discipleship is ... a process, and only leads slowly through every room in our house turning one door at a time.

God loves the devotion of our heart. We give him our deepest inner life and he meets us there. God delights in the repentance and transformation of our mind in the pattern of Jesus. But what about our wallets and bank accounts?

St Paul put it this way:

“God loves a cheerful giver.”

2 Corinthians. 9:7c

God rejoices in people who can give to Him in joy as that represents a depth of loving trust he seeks from His children who seek to share in their father's life and mission

Now I cannot ask you to lay your heart before God. It doesn't work that way does it? I cannot ask you to make your mind available for inspection and transformation either.

But we can get a bit concrete about giving to God. To get concrete here, if you have a wallet or a purse before you I invite you to place it in on the small book-shelf in front of you to focus our consideration.

Now looking at our purse or wallet with all the cards and cash it contains lets ask: If belong to God,

- Who does that wallet or purse belong to?
- Who sets policy for how that resource is managed?
- Who do I need to listen to when making money decisions?

That's right, If we as baptized disciples belong to God then so do our resources as represented by that wallet or purse.

But wait there is more to grasp on this! In Christ, God paid the full price for the whole of us. He wants all our heart, all our mind and all our strength. That means all our wealth and resources.

That was the understanding Israel had as God's covenanted people living in the Land of God's provision harvesting the produce of his blessing. It all belonged to God.

“The earth is the Lord and the fullness thereof.” (Psalm 24)

We certainly get to enjoy it but we do not own it. God does.

### **Exploration:**

With that clear we are ready to hear the clear word of prophesy spoken by Malachi as found in the second to last chapter of the Old Testament. (Malachi 3)

8 Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, “How are we robbing you?” In your tithes and offerings! 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house,

Through Malachi God is saying to his people that they, His people remember, are robbing Him. God owns all the land, all its produce, all the wealth and wants to bless his people with at least 90% of it all. God owns it all, including them as his people, but only expects a tribute of a 10% tithe or first portion to

be returned to God for His purposes. Unless this happens God is being robbed and His purposes not honoured. This becomes a breach of relationship.

Israel in this day is told to bring the tithe tribute into God's storehouse. This may have been in kind as crops or as cash for transport. The purpose of this is for people to remember and acknowledge whom they belong to and from where their wealth and security comes from.

Unless God's people do this they are robbing God of what should be in His storehouse and consequently there is a curse. A curse is a negative power or life draining dynamic. Because people do not honour God as He has specified they are missing out on the fullness of blessing and struggling when God's purpose is that they should be flourishing.

This message is so emphatic that something happens here, which I have been told, is unique in the whole of the Bible. God invites people to put Him to the test. God invites people to test whether or not they would flourish more making their tithes or not making their tithes. Malachi 3:10-12

10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. 11 I will rebuke the locust for you, so that it will not destroy the produce of your soil; and your vine in the field shall not be barren, says the LORD of hosts. 12 Then all nations will count you happy, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.

### Application:

Two questions that arise from this Old Testament passage and others like it are,

1. What does a tithe look like today? And further,
  - a. How does that relate to my complicated income package and all the taxes and compulsory premiums I have to pay?
  - b. What about baptized disciples with unbelieving spouses?
  - c. What if I think I cannot afford it?
  
2. Where is God's storehouse?

The first question about what a tithe looks like is relatively easy.

- My best answer (but this is only *my* answer) for the complicated payment package I receive is to give 10% is what I actually receive as my personal increase. That includes salary, tax rebates, windfalls etc. Whatever I gain 10% of it goes to the Lord. This is the same policy TCE operates in each year giving away for God's wider purposes 10% of what was received the year before. Collectively we *are* a tithing church and have been so for several years.
- If you share an income or an account with a non-believing spouse then you may want to consider tithing on your personal discretionary income but as in all things pray about it.
  - 2Cor. 9:7 Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.
- If you do not think you can afford to give the Lord 10% of your income then I suggest you start working out the faithfulness muscle at a lighter load and repent from there. Think about the gym with adjustable loads on exercise machines. Set yourself a goal in prayer and build up from there. You may choose for the next six months to give a 5% tithe. Then raise that to 6 or 7%. Eventually through God's faithfulness to you and your faithfulness to God you will reach 10% and it will be easy. We are to give joyfully in freedom without being legalistic but a Biblical tithe is 10%.

Friends, if you are a baptized disciple, Just do it! I have been doing it since I was 17 and God has been faithful in ways I could never have anticipated. So I drive an older car, I don't have so many toys and need to be careful, but my giving relationship with the Lord is a joy not a burden. God is blessing me financially in ways I could never have anticipated.

Then the second question is harder to answer, Where is God's storehouse?

What I can say is that God's strategy for extending his Kingdom on earth is focused on the Church of Jesus Christ, congregations like us made up of baptized disciples teaching, preaching and baptizing all around the world in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is God's one and only plan. The Holy Spirit filled Church of Jesus is the exclusive servant representative of God charged with the mission of God. There is no Plan B!

I know that churches have not always been good stewards or managers of God's storehouse.<sup>1</sup> There is a long sorry history of poor stewardship with the occasional sensational if not shocking embarrassment. I know that when it comes to effective mission it has been so called para-church organizations that have often been more effective, the mission societies of brave men and women who got out there and did it. However it is through the Church as being built by Jesus that God's Kingdom would rise again the gates of hell present here on earth.

All this still holds today so I have no hesitation in saying that the Church of Jesus' baptized disciples still qualifies as the storehouse of God. The Church is a valid place to bring tithes to the Lord. The discernment then is to bring it to a church that *is* doing the work of God and not simply feeding itself like a club. This should be the church you are part of and where you yourself are fed, formed and serving from. That can serve as the storehouse for your tithe unless the Holy Spirit directs otherwise.

I am aware that ex-pats sometimes want to continue supporting a church they came from by directing their tithe there. That is not ideal. Our tithe is part of our worship, tithe where you worship. If you really want to support your home church then stay there but if you come here to worship then this is the storehouse to bring your tithe to. If you are part of more than one church as some of us are then its complicated and you just need to pray about it.

### **Alms, Mercy gifts, etc.**

Giving of our strength starts with our tithe to the Lord but it need not end there. There is opportunity and freedom to give to people who are in need or simply as the Holy Spirit leads. This is something Jesus encourages. There is opportunity to exercise joy in giving out of thankfulness or sacrificial love and compassion. That is wonderful and a delight to God. My point is that this is above and beyond the basic tithe of worship to the Lord and not a substitute.

In April we will once again be electing a church council. In our church order it is the council who draw from God's storehouse in this place to do what they see as right and godly to promote God's Kingdom through the mission of the church in this place. That is one reason to be prayerful and discerning about who we elect to council. We elect them to manage God's storehouse.

### **Conclusion:**

I want to end by echoing the dare or challenge we heard for the prophet Malachi to test the Lord by providing the tithe he requires with an amplification from Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> A strange local example that catches my eye are the gargoyles (NL *monsterkop als waterspuwer*. or *gargouille* ) on the St Katharinakerk in central Eindhoven. Why did the church in 1870 use God's resources to mount these on a church building?

“...give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap; for the measure you give will be the measure you get back.”

Luke 6:38

If you belong to the Lord then you should be tithing into his storehouse to extend his Kingdom on earth. Do this and you can expect his blessing even to the point of abundance. Withhold your tithe and you can expect limited blessings.