

## Giving God's Way (Part 2) – Mal 3:7-12

Malachi 3:7-12. If you're joining us for the first time, welcome. We're glad you're here.

If you're watching via livestream (9am – especially at our West Campus), I trust God will use this in *your* life as well. And that you'll join us if you're able. **(Intro)**

- We've been journeying through the book of Acts, and most recently left off in chapter 5. Where by way of example, we saw God's passion for crazy generosity. What we didn't see, was God's equal passion for *consistent* generosity. Consistent giving. What the Bible calls tithing.

So we started a mini-series last week called *Giving God's Way*. A topic I haven't covered for 2½ years. But one that *needs* addressing, because of how much God says about it. And how prone we are to *love* our money instead of *give* our money. Not that these sermons are intended to condemn you, but teach you, instruct you; as to what God desires and requires in this respect.

So let me encourage you to embrace it.

The worst thing you can do is look for a way around it; find a way to rationalize it. Let the Scripture speak. And let the Spirit convict. Because there's not only great *joy* in giving God's way, but great confidence. That you're "smack dab" in the center of God's will.

- That said, I started last week with this **pie graph**. Showing the giving in our *church*. Which is *discouraging* because of the *lack* of giving, but *encouraging* because of the increase – the increase in percentages on the *right* hand side of the chart. Indicating that more people are giving *more*; even while many are giving little or nothing at all. It's good news, bad news.

So we turned to Malachi because it was a problem in his day as well. And found . . .

### When I Give God's Way . . .

#### 1. I give 10% of my income (v10)

Because that's what the word *tithe* means – a tenth. And I give it . . .

#### • Off the top (Prov 3:9)

Off my gross. And I give it . . .

#### • To my church (v10)

As God's designated place of worship, teaching, and discipleship. Just like the temple was in the Old Testament. And I do all that because . . .

#### • It's what God commands

#### • It's how God provides

#### • It's what God blesses

So let's read it once more, and go from there. V7. God is speaking, and says . . .

[7] *From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes [my guidelines, my commands] and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts.*

*But you say [the people], 'How shall we return?'*

[And God says . . .] *Will man rob God? [It's unthinkable.] Yet you are robbing me.*

*But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' [And God says] In your tithes and contributions.*

[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, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

[11] *I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil, and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the LORD of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts.*

When I give God's way I give 10% of my income, and . . .

### 2. I don't withhold anything

We saw what happened in Acts when people withheld. They died. And that was *voluntary* giving. Offerings. On a *special* occasion.

This is commanded. Consistently. *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse.*

I don't withhold anything because it's *commanded* that I tithe.

But there are at least 4 *more* reasons. Starting with the fact that . . .

#### • It robs God (v8)

I don't withhold anything, because it robs God. Look at v8-9 again.

*Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?'*

[And God responds] *In your tithes and contributions. [9] You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.*

3 times in 2 verses he says they were *stealing* from him.

Why? Because they weren't bringing the *full* tithes into the storehouse.

They were nickel and diming him. Giving partially, and withholding the rest.

"You mean I can't drop a few dollars in the offering every now and then and call it even?"

Or give 5% as long as it's a lot? A big check at year-end or something?"

No, you can't. Not in God's eyes. He considers it robbery. Which makes you a thief.

- And the *really* messed up part, is that you're withholding money that's not yours anyway.

In **Job 41:11**, God says – *Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine*. His. Everything. Right now.

And David prays in **1 Chron 29:12,14** – *Both riches and honor come from you . . . For all things come from you.*

Everything we have *came* from God, and still *is* God's.

Which means we're in no position to withhold *anything* from him\*\*\*\*\*

2<sup>nd</sup>, I don't withhold because . . .

#### • It leads to trouble (v9)

Some of you fail to tithe, and at the same time wonder why your life is so plagued with turmoil and unrest. Or why you cast about and have so little peace.

Why you're constantly searching for something you can't find.

Why a lack of contentment reigns in your heart.

Why you're dealing with the same issues over and over again.

Why your joy, if it exists at all, is so fleeting.

I'll tell you why. *You're cursed with a curse.* V9.

Not the voodoo kind, or the condemnation kind that destines you to hell, but the discipline kind. Hebrews 12 kind of discipline. That kind of a curse. In other words, you're susceptible to difficulty, hardship, and problems. That's the idea. *You are cursed with a curse* in that you're susceptible to trouble.

When we withhold from God and fail to give his way, it's not just that he withholds blessing, but imparts discipline.

Not without mercy, and patience, and love; but not without correction either. Consequences. Trouble.

All of which is designed to get our attention, change our heart, and win our obedience.

You can't expect to withhold your tithe, and reap no consequences. The connection is clear. It leads to trouble.

➤ Like it did for instance, with Cain. **Gen 4:3-5**.

*In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground [not the firstfruit, just the fruit], [4] and Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat portions [the firstborn; contrasted with just the fruit]. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering [he accepted it; and Abel himself], but for Cain and his offering he had no regard [he didn't accept it].*

It wasn't like Cain brought nothing, he just didn't give off the top. He didn't give God's way. Reflecting a hard heart and poor attitude.

And God didn't accept it. Resulting in Cain becoming angry and discouraged. Troubled.\*\*\*\*\*

➤ Sound familiar? Have you ever connected the dots between your difficulty and your withholding?

Like the relational messes you can't seem to avoid. Or the strife in your life. The anger, anxiety, discouragement, lack.

I'm not saying you *won't* have those things if you tithe, I'm saying you're particularly susceptible if you *don't*.

I'm saying God might be using those things to get your attention.

Whatever the case, don't withhold. It only leads to trouble.

3<sup>rd</sup> . . .

• **It leaves me short (Mal 3:10-11; Prov 11:24)**

That's the implication of v10-11. If we give God's way, he will bless and provide. If we don't, he won't. He *won't* pour down until there's no more need.

He *won't* rebuke the devourer. The vine *will* fail to bear. That's the implication.

Made explicit in passages like **Prov 11:24**.

*One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want.* Only comes up short at the end of the month.

It's counter-intuitive, but true.

You defeat your purpose of getting ahead and having enough, by hanging *on* to your money, instead of giving it. *Withholding* your tithe instead of bringing it.

It doesn't make *sense*, but that's how it works in God's economy.\*\*\*\*\*

It's a recipe for suffering want, and leaves you short.

And then 4<sup>th</sup> here, I don't withhold anything because . . .

• **It diminishes my blessing (v10-11)**

It robs God, leads to trouble, leaves me short, and diminishes my blessing.

Like the blessing of God's **provision** in my life.

When we give God's way, he promises to *provide* for our needs. Not our "greeds," but our *needs*.

Like he says in **10b** – *I will . . . open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need.*

**11b** – *Your vine in the field will not fail to bear.* That's provision.

And the condition, is tithing. Give God's way, and he'll provide.

*Your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine* Proverbs says (3:10). Sometimes literally, and always spiritually.

When you tithe, you can trust God to provide.

Including his provision of discipline and contentment to live on what remains.

This isn't some sort of magical thing where God plops additional money in your account every time you put some in his.

He equips you with the discipline to *live* on less. And gives you the contentment to be happy about it. That's *part* of his provision. Part of his blessing.

And is that not worth more than all the money in the world?

Who *cares* how much money you have if you're not *happy*? Who *cares* how much you own if you're not *content*?

Fail to *give* God's way, and you'll fail to receive God's best. The best of his *provision*.

➤ And, the best of his **protection**. Our provision will be diminished, and so will our protection. **11a**.

*I will rebuke the devourer for you* [God says], *so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil.*

In other words, if you give *my* way, I won't let pest or pestilence have *their* way. I'll protect you. And protect your livelihood.

Does that mean if I tithe I'll never get laid off or have a bad year? No.

But it does mean my hardship will be *minimized*. Mitigated.

It does mean God will *lessen* the impact, ease the difficulty.

It does mean he'll keep me in perfect peace in the midst of it.

When I give God's way, God blesses with provision *and* protection. When I don't, it's diminished.

➤ Now, you might be thinking, "How can you be so sure, pastor?"

Well, because he's faithful. To the point of saying, "*Test me in this.*" V10. "Try me."

The exact *opposite* of how Ananias and Sapphira tested him in Acts 5. Peter even used that word. *How is it that you have agreed together to test the Spirit of the Lord?* (5:9)

*They tested God by seeing how much they could keep, while we're to test him by how we tithe. (Summary)*

When you tithe, you can trust God for the blessing of protection and provision.

But *fail* to do so, withhold from him, and you'll diminish it. Maybe even eliminate it.

And then 3<sup>rd</sup> when I give God's way . . .

### 3. My heart is in it (Mt 6:19-21)

Which is both a requirement and a **result**.

When you give *God's way*, your heart *needs* to be in it, and *will* be in it.

Because Jesus said – *Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also*. It's a result.

**Mt 6:19-21** – “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal [i.e. don't invest in temporal things, things that are here today and gone tomorrow], [20] but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal [IOW invest in things of *eternal* value, things that last]. [21] For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Where you invest, and in *what*, determines to a large degree, what you *love*. What you're devoted to. What you're passionate about.

If you *give* sparingly to our church, your *love* for our church will be sparing.

If you give *in-consistently*, your *love* will be inconsistent.

If you give *randomly*, your *love* will be random.

But if you *tithe*, fully so, your *love* will be *full*. Your devotion, full. Your heart, full.

*For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*\*\*\*\*\*

It's one of the *results* of giving God's way.

- But it's also a **requirement**. Your heart *will* be in it, and your heart *needs* to be in it. Because God loves a *cheerful* giver, a willing giver, an eager giver. Not a grudging or reluctant one. Grudging obedience is *never* godly obedience. It doesn't matter how much you give. So giving God's way *requires* that our heart be in it, and *results* in our heart being in it.

- When the Crusades were being fought during the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the crusaders often employed mercenaries to fight on their behalf. *Hired* guns. And being a “religious” war, the crusaders insisted that the mercenaries be *baptized* before they fought. They didn't want *anything* to get in the way of their purpose.

But some of the mercenaries had a different perspective.

Knowing that some opportunities for wealth and *plunder* might present themselves, and that they might be required to use violent force to *get* it . . .

They held their sword *out* of the water while being baptized. In effect saying,

“You can have everything but that, God. Everything but my greed.”

Which is exactly what some people do with their money (billfold).

“Anything but that, God. That's off limits.”

How about you? Do you put yellow tape around certain portions of your heart? Your life.

Or do you give *God's way*? All in, with your *whole* heart. (**Summary**)

- I received an email from a couple in our church this week that I want to share with you.

Pastor Rob,

Thank you, once again, for boldly preaching on a “hard topic” with grace and truth.

*I wanted to take a moment and share with you one way your efforts have changed and directed our lives for the better.*

*In 2007, Chad (now my husband), was attending the “Truth Project” that Pastor Garth was leading. During that time, Chad and I met online, and after talking on the phone and deciding to meet in person, Chad asked if I would like to join him at the Bible study. So the first time we saw each other was in the Harvest parking lot.*

*After that, we joined the Young Adult Small Group where you visited one time, and answered a question about tithing. It stuck with us. But we continued attending a mainline denominational church on the weekends, and directed our “tithe” to outside organizations because of doctrinal issues and leadership concerns.*

*Eventually however, we made Harvest our church home and started attending regularly. Ever since, we have joyfully and freely given God's way, both tithes and offerings. We view everything we have as God's. We are his stewards, and though not perfect, we try to follow his guidance.*

*More than monetarily, God has blessed us spiritually and emotionally. Over the past five months we have been living the most difficult season of our lives. We have been in a deep valley of turmoil and will continue to be as we find our new normal. But through it all, God has been faithful and we have seen him working for our good. I say this to affirm what you mentioned about the “prosperity gospel” – that just because we give God's way doesn't mean our lives will be void of trouble.*

*I don't say all of this to pat ourselves on the back about tithing, because we certainly did it wrong for a while. And there are other areas of our lives that need to be worked on as well. I simply write this to encourage you to keep on boldly speaking truth, because seeds are always being planted.*

Super encouraging. For a whole host of reasons. Including the different ways God works in our lives. And that his word doesn't return void.

And that he really does pour out his blessing when we give his way.

*Put me to the test*, God says. 10%, all in, heart and soul. (10)

Pray – Father, forgive us for robbing you. And thank you for your mercy. Find us faithful now to follow through and give your way. Faithful to make a change that lasts. For your glory and our joy, both individually and as a church. We pray in Jesus' name.