

Giving God's Way – Humbly and Obediently (Part 1)

Mal 3:5-12

1 Tim 6; We're stating a mini-series on Giving God's Way this weekend . . .

And let me just say from the top – if you're visiting with us, or you've been coming for a short time, or maybe even a long time . . .

And you have issues with churches b/c they're "always asking for money" . . .

I want you to know, at least with respect to our church, that you're wrong – we don't always ask for money

In fact, I haven't preached a message about giving for 3 years (**Intro**)

That's in spite of the fact, that 16 of the 38 parables that Jesus told, deal with money or possessions

And the Bible as a whole contains some 2350 verses *about* stewardship – verses about how to consider and handle our money and possessions

On top of that, 2 of the 10 commandments deal with money . . .

And the apostle Paul devotes almost 2 whole chapters to the issue in 2 Cor, referring to giving as a *grace*, on par with faith and love (2 Cor 8:7)

So even if I *had* preached on giving recently, or was "always asking for money" – it would be warranted

But I haven't; In spite of the fact that we have a problem; Which is where I want to start

The Problem (1 Tim 6:10)

1 Tim 6:6-10; *Pangs* – pains or issues

Here's the problem – we love our money; that's the problem

And it leads to all kinds of evils (10) – *the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils*

One of which, is failing to faithfully give to the Lord's work – far too many of you are Fairweather Fans in that respect; and it's a problem

- Shown by a report we ran a few months ago, about our giving as a church

I was curious b/c I had seen a similar report from another church on the west coast, and didn't think very highly of it – in fact I thought it was kind of lame

And I was pretty sure that our church was *different* – that our giving was way better

Which is why, when Meri Vickery, our Financial Coordinator, first gave me the report, I didn't believe it

I was like, "There's no way this is correct. Go back, check your #'s, and run it again."

Which, very patiently she did, double checking her data and method and assumptions – only to come to the same conclusions

One of which, is that a ton of you are not tithing

In fact, 1/3 of you aren't giving anything at all

Here's the data (**Chart – 2009 Giving By Household**) – see for yourself

- In 2009, out of a total of 1544 households, 495 of them gave nothing to the work of ministry around here; Zero

That's 32% of our church

Meanwhile, another 464 households, 30% of our church, gave between \$1-500

That's over the course of a whole year – less than \$500; Not much better

And 190 more gave between \$500 and \$1500 in 2009

Which is better than nothing, but I refuse to believe that represents a tithe, or a tenth of the annual income for the vast majority in that group

That leaves the top 2 brackets, representing 25% of our church – contributing *91%* of the giving

Now here's the thing – that's not a problem if the other 75% is tithing

That would simply mean that 25% of the households in our church have substantially higher incomes than the rest, and give accordingly

But given the amounts of the lower 75% – that's obviously not the case

What *is* the case, is that 3/4 of you are not tithing, and 1/3 of u are giving nothing at all

And that's a problem – for both you *and* us

You, b/c you're subject to God's discipline, and missing out on God's blessing . . .

And us, b/c we're inhibited as a church from doing the work God wants, and taking advantage of the opp's he gives

- I can't tell you how frustrating it is to pinch pennies around here and figure out how to do things on a shoestring, in light of charts like that
That's like a house wife trying to put food on the table when her husband blows half of his check on booze and gambling
It's disturbing; And when I first saw it, I despaired; And still do sometimes

B/c I thought we were better than that

I really thought we were different than other churches

I thought we had *way* more participants than that; as opposed to spectators

I thought we had way more Faithful Followers

And I thought the church-world statistic that only 27% of evangelical believers tithed, was nowhere near our percentage – and yet ours is 25%, if that

Worse yet, I thought that the median annual giving of \$200 for an American Christian was *laughable* – and then I saw that ours is \$130, and almost cried

I thought we were better than that, and I was wrong

And it disturbs me greatly; And it should you as well, b/c it's a problem

For which, I think there are several reasons

(The Reasons)

5 of them in fact; 5 reasons for why the giving of so many of you, is so paltry

[I think there are several reasons for why the giving of so many of you, is so paltry]

1. You're self-absorbed – or as 2 Tim 3 says it, you're a *lover of self*

You're totally wrapped up in your own thing, with no sense of fairness or equity or thought that you're not contributing like you should

You're self-absorbed and you could care less about the work of God

2. You're selfish – you love your money, like we saw from 1 Tim 6

You love it more than God, and the *people* of God, and the *purposes* of God

And you'd just as soon keep it for yourself; You're selfish

3. You're presumptuous

You haven't yet grown out of your childish assumption that someone else will take care of it, someone else will cover it . . .
Someone else will do it, or someone else will pay for it
And when they do, and it happens to dawn on you, you act like they should
"They have plenty of money, let them give"; You're presumptuous

4. You're undisciplined

You lack the discipline and self-control to set aside the money you should *give*, and use it instead to satisfy your whims
Instead of giving first, saving second, and spending third – you spend first, save little, and give nothing

5. You're uninformed

I don't think it's pervasive, but some of you don't tithe, b/c you don't know you're supposed to
You know you should give by virtue of the offering we take week in and week out . . .
But you may not know that you should tithe – which we'll come to next week
And though innocent, and worthy of grace – it's still part of the problem

So the question is, which one describes you? Or which *ones*?

Are you self-absorbed, or just plain selfish? Are you presumptuous, or undisciplined?
And more importantly, will you admit it, and embrace . . .

The Solution (Mal 3:5-12)

Which is found in Mal 3:5-12 (cover first part only this weekend)

Then – in the midst of his action to save and refine his people, which he just talked about in the previous verses . . .

This passage is part of a larger section within which God is responding to the whining of his people

Whining that living for him makes no difference in life

And God basically says – "If you would just trust me, you'd see"

"If you'll live my way, and give my way – you'll see the difference"

"You'll see that I'm good on my word"

But you can't, and you won't, as long as you're living, and giving, *your* way

As long as you're far from my side and out of my will

Which means that the first step in the solution for *giving* God's way, is to . . .

• Get right with God

Or as God himself says it in v7b – *Return to me and I will return to you*

Just like God's people of old, some of you *have turned aside from* [His] *statutes and have not kept them* (7)

You've been *living* in sin by *giving* in sin, and the time has come to make things right

To rend your heart, confess your sin of selfishness/presumption, and draw near to Him

○ Otherwise, God will judge you (v5a)

V5a – *Then I will draw near to you for judgment*

IOW in the midst of saving the repentant, I will punish and discipline the rebellious

I will be a swift witness against those who are living in sin – including those who don't give my way

Don't miss the fact that rebellious givers follow right on the heels of the others who don't fear God

Against whom God says, I will take quick action

Why? B/c he doesn't change (v6a) – *For I the Lord do not change*

Holiness, and obedience, and justice, and worship have *always* been God's standard, and always will be – the Lord does not change in that respect

Which is why, if you don't get right w/ him, if u don't live his way and give his way . . .

You can expect a life full of correction/discipline, in order to conform you to his way

As a follower of Jesus Christ, he will not let you shame him forever

The first part of the solution to our problem, is for you to get right with God, or face judgment

And the good news is, you can, b/c he's merciful

○ Right after the first phrase of v6, he says – *Therefore you, O children of Jacob* [O people of God], *are not consumed*

"Yes, I will judge those who don't fear me, who don't worship me, who don't live for me – I don't change in that respect" . . .

"But neither do I change in my mercy"

"Just as I am full of justice," God is saying, "so too I'm full of mercy"

"Which keeps me from consuming those who fail to live my way, and give my way"

And allows *us* to turn and *re*-turn to him, despite the punishment/judgment we deserve

That's the beauty of God – while he doesn't change in his character or attributes, he does change in his response to us, when we change in our response to him

Get right with God, and second . . .

• Stop withholding your money from him

You know how you have imaginary conversations with people in your head, especially when you're mad at them?

That's kind of like this passage, where God is not happy with his people

And he aches for his relationship with them to be fully restored

So he has a little conversation with them where he represents both sides (v7-9)

○ The solution to which, if that's you, is to stop – stop robbing God

Stop withholding your money from his work of ministry

Which are one and the same

To withhold your money from God's church, is to withhold your money from God

B/c God's church is the focal point of his ministry on this side of the cross, just like his temple was the focal point on the other side

And when you get right down to it – the money you're withholding is not yours anyway

God says in **Job 41:11** – *Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.*

And David said in his prayer in **1 Chron 29:12,14** – *Both riches and honor come from you . . . For all things come from you, and of your own have we given you.*

IOW God gave u everything u have in your possession, as well as the ability to make more
And he still owns every last cent
So who are *you* to withhold it from *him*? *****

And yet some of you continue to do so just like your parents did
And just like the people in Malachi's day, and the generations before them
You're withholding your tithes and contributions, or a portion of them, from God and
his work . . .
And it's divine robbery

o And b/c of it, you're cursed
9 – *You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.*
The whole *goyim* of you – a derogatory and demeaning Hebrew word for sinful
pagans and heathens

You have no peace; You're in turmoil up to your neck
Some of you cast about, yearning for stability
Contentment eludes you; Struggle consumes you; Issues plague you
And joy, if it exists at all in your life, is fleeting
And you wonder why

I'll tell you why – it's because you're *cursed with a curse* (9)
Not only is God withholding his *blessing* in your life, which we'll see next week . . .
But he's inflicting *hardship* as well, to win your obedience

And if that's you, you have to stop – for your sake, *and* for our sake
You have to stop *withholding* your money, and start *giving* it (**Summary**)
It's the only solution to the problem . . .
And anything else is divine robbery that comes with a curse