

Seize The Opportunity: To Tithe – Mal 3:8-11

We're in the middle of a little mini-series called "Seize the Opportunity" this month . . .

Looking at some of the opportunities we have to bless the Lord and further his work of ministry; Opportunities like serving that we looked at last week

And I want to thank you for your response; *Many* of you turned in your bulletin insert and indicated your willingness and desire to serve . . .

In spite of your fears, doubts, and weakness as we talked about; God bless you for that
It was very encouraging, and I'm hopeful that more of you will do the same after thinking and praying about it

- This week we turn to a second opportunity to bless the Lord, and that's tithing – Seize the Opportunity: To Tithe (**Intro**)

And I want to start by commending you for your faithfulness to do so last year
God bless you for that

We exceeded our budgeted need; We exceeded our *actual* need; We were able to meet unforeseen needs; And even set aside some surplus for future needs
All of which has enabled us to once again, plan ahead with excitement and expectation
So thank you for your faithfulness in that

But if that doesn't really apply to you, if you aren't among those who were faithful to tithe last year – now is as good a time as any to make a change and start this year
To learn and accept what God teaches in this respect, and then put it into practice
It's an opp waiting to be seized, and an admonition found in Malachi 3:8-11 (p.802)

- Malachi is in the middle of recording a hypothetical conversation between God and his people; And in v8, God is speaking, and says . . .
Will man rob God? [it's a rhetorical question to say, "surely not, it's unthinkable"] *Yet you are robbing me. But you say* [the people 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. [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.*

The point of this passage is found in the first sentence of v10 – *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse*; It's a command; And it means at least 4 things for us
The first of which, is give 10% of your income

Tithe, as in . . .

Give 10% of your income (v10)

10%, or a tenth, because that's what the word *tithe* means

Which you can see explicitly in **Lev 27:32**

God is speaking to Moses, giving him instructions about the Law, and says . . .

Every tithe of herds and flocks [and then he clarifies it], *every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman's staff, shall be holy to the LORD* [dedicated to the Lord].

Indicating that *tithe* and *tenth* are used interchangeably

And it applies to every dime you earn – *every tenth animal* it says, is to be *holy to the Lord*; Set apart for his use*****

So when God says *bring the full tithe* in v10, he's saying give a full tenth of *all* you earn

If you earn \$10, give a \$1; When you get a paycheck or a bonus, give a tenth

If you cash in a stock or bond, give 10% of your *gain*

If you sell a piece of land or a business, tithe your *profit*

If you receive a monetary *gift*, give a tenth to the Lord; Give 10% of your income

And do so . . .

Off the top (Prov 3:9)

Prov 3:9 – *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce*
Firstfruits meaning the first of the fruit that ripened; The first of the grain that was harvested; The first of the oil that was squeezed

The first of the animals that were born

It's a principle repeated over and over again in the Scriptures

Like when God said to Moses in **Ex 23:19** – *The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.*

And several hundred years later **2 Chron 31:5** says – *As soon as the command was spread abroad, the people of Israel gave in abundance the firstfruits of grain, wine, oil, honey, and of all the produce of the field. And they brought in abundantly the tithe of everything.*

And in Nehemiah's day, a contemporary of Malachi, the Israelites said (**Ne 10:35,39**) . . .
We obligate ourselves to bring the firstfruits of our ground and the firstfruits of all fruit of every tree, year by year, to the house of the LORD . . . We will not neglect the house of our God.

Over and over again in the Bible, the command and example is to give off the top

- And I find it interesting that **Gen 4:3-5** says – *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* [interesting contrast]. *And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, but for Cain and his offering he had no regard* [he didn't accept it].

And I wonder if part of the problem was that Cain's offering wasn't off the top, but came from his leftovers, after he used some for himself*****

In any case, tithing *first*, off the top of your income, has been God's design since the beginning of time – and still is; Which means we should tithe on our gross
Before you pay your taxes, before you contribute to your 401k, before you do anything else – give to the Lord; Give of your firstfruits

That's the second principle; Third, is to tithe . . .

To our church (v10)

That's the idea of the *storehouse* here in v10; *Bring the full tithes into the storehouse* God says; Which in Malachi's day was a literal room connected to the side of the *temple* . .

Used to store the tithes of grain, oil, and money

So God was essentially saying, bring your tithes to the *temple*

Or as we saw in the previous verses – to *the house of the Lord*

And just like the *temple* was God's primary source of discipleship and ministry *then* . . .
The *church* is God's primary source of discipleship and ministry now
It's an analogy you can't avoid

So when God says bring your tithe into the *storehouse*, the most direct application for us –
is to give a tenth of your income *to our church*
The primary place of spiritual sustenance, ministry, fellowship, and discipleship this side
of the cross

Tithe to our church, and then fourth, do so . . .

For the sake of ministry (v10)

The reason God tells us to tithe to his our place of worship, is to perpetuate and advance
the work of ministry; Or as he says it in v10 – *that there may be food in my house*
Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house
Which most likely means both the *physical* food to sustain the priest and temple
workers, and the *spiritual* food to sustain the people

And the same is true today; Our tithes are necessary to support the work of ministry
around here, and provide for those who lead it
And if you're wondering what that means exactly – here's a quick breakdown of our
budget

50% - Salaries and Benefits – supporting a staff of about 35; those who lead the work
13% - Facilities – about 2/3 of which is our mortgage, or 8.2% of our total budget
12% - Outreach – the vast majority of which is money we give away to others locally,
nationally, and globally
10% - Ministry Expenses – covering the nuts and bolts of everything from Children's
Ministry to Adult Bible Studies
10% - Reserve Funds – for things like replacing the roof, establishing more satellites,
and augmenting the build-out
5% - Office Expenses – covering everything from computers/phones, to paper/printers

That's the work of ministry that your tithes go to support (**Summary**)
Whether it's paying the heating bill in order to *accommodate* the work of ministry, or
paying a pastor to lead it . . .
It's all for the sake of *reaching* people for Christ, and *discipling* people for Christ (**Sum**)

That's tithing – give 10% of your income, off the top, to our church, for the sake of
ministry

And I want to encourage you to **Seize the Opportunity, because . . .**

Anything else robs God (v8)

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.

Twice in 2 verses he says they were robbing him; Why? B/c they weren't bringing the
full tithes into the storehouse; They were nickel and diming him

“You mean I can't drop a few dollars in the offering every now and then, and call it
even?” No; Not in God's eyes; It's contrary to his design, and he considers it robbery
Which makes you a thief

• And the *really* messed up part, is that you're w/holding money that's not yours anyway
In **Job 41:11**, God says – *Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.*
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 is still God's
Which means we're in no position to withhold it from him*****

And he knows it if we do; You may be able to rob a store and get away with it, or cheat on
your taxes – but you can't rob God and get away with it
He knows, and takes it very seriously
Which is why we should seize the opportunity to do what's right

Second, the second reason to seize the opp to tithe, is that anything less . . .

Leads to trouble (v9)

Some of you fail to tithe as a matter of course, despite the fact that in giving your life to
Jesus, he expects you to live his way, and give his way, according to his word
And failure to do so, is sin; Failing to do what God says, whatever it is, is wrong
And if you continue in that, you continue in sin
Unfortunately, that's where some of you are in this

And then you wonder why your life is so plagued with turmoil and unrest
You wonder why you cast about, and have so little peace
You wonder why you're constantly searching for something you can't find
You wonder why a lack of contentment reigns in your heart
You wonder why you're dealing with the same issues over and over and over again
And why your joy, if it exists at all, is so fleeting

I'll tell you why – it's because *you're cursed with a curse*; That's v9 – *You are cursed*
with a curse, for you are robbing me God says
IOW God is inflicting hardship on you, discipline – to punish your disobedience, get
your attention, and win your obedience; The connection is very clear
You can't expect to withhold your money from God, and avoid his discipline, his curse
It only leads to trouble; And it's the second reason to seize the opportunity to tithe

Third, is that anything else . . .

Leaves you short (Prov 11:24)

Seize the opportunity to tithe b/c anything else robs God, leads to trouble, and leaves you
short; And while that's implied here in Malachi . . .
It's 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; By withholding your tithe*****
It doesn't make sense, but in God's economy, in God's kingdom, that's how it works
It's a recipe for suffering want, and leaves you short

Better to give freely, better to give *what* you should *where* you should – and reap the
benefits; The benefits of God's *abundance* in your life

And then last, seize the opportunity to tithe, b/c anything else . . .

And diminishes the blessing (v10-11)

It robs God, leads to trouble, leaves you short, and diminishes the blessing

Look at v10 again – *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.*

This is God’s explicit guarantee that he will be faithful to provide, when *you* are faithful to tithe; And he’s so adamant about it, that he says – *put me to the test*

Which you won’t find him saying anywhere else in the Bible

He’s like – “Go ahead; Make *my* day, and I’ll make yours”

That doesn’t mean give a dollar, get a dollar; Nor do we give *to* get – that should *never* be our motive; What it means, is that if you give God’s *way*, you’ll reap God’s *blessing*

- Like the blessing of *provision* and *protection*
Provision to meet your needs; Not your “greeds” but your 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*; IOW your means of income, your vine, will sustain you

Or as we saw in **Prov 3:9-10** – *Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce; then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.* Generally speaking, that’s true – it’s a proverb

When you tithe, you can trust God to provide*****

Including his provision of discipline and the desire you need, to live on what remains

That’s part of his provision and blessing; And you’ll need it

This isn’t some magical sort of fairytale thing, where God just plops additional money into your account every time you put some in his

Rather, he equips you with the ability, desire, and discipline to live on less, when you give him more; When you tithe; That’s part of his blessing

But fail to do so, and you diminish it

- Just like you do his *protection*
11a – *I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil*
IOW I won’t let pest or pestilence destroy your crops; I’ll protect your livelihood

Does that mean you’ll never get laid off, or never have a bad year in business if you tithe?

No; But it does mean he’ll *minimize* the hardship; He’ll lessen the impact

And over the course of your life bless you with protection

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

But fail to do so, and you diminish it; You diminish those blessings; Maybe even eliminating them altogether; It’s the 4th reason to seize the opportunity to tithe

Pray – Thank you Lord, for giving so faithfully of yourself, so that we’d even have the *opportunity* to faithfully give our tithes; Find us seizing it, even now, for your glory and our joy