

Giving God's Way (Part 1) – Mal 3:7-12

It's good to be in the house of the Lord together.

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.

➤ Malachi 3:7-12. (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. (Sold homes)

What we didn't see, was God's *equal* passion for *consistent* generosity. Consistent giving.

It's not just crazy generosity from those who are *wealthy* that's necessary for a healthy church, but regular and *faithful* generosity from *everyone*. What the Bible calls tithing. So I thought it would be a good time to jump off for a few weeks and talk about it.

➤ But before we do, let me cite a few caveats:

1. I haven't preached on giving for 2½ years.

So if you think that "all they talk about in church is money," it doesn't apply here.

Please don't let that get in the way of hearing and applying God's Word in your life.

2. If you don't give, this is not intended to make you feel like a worm. It's not intended to condemn. It *is* intended to teach you what God desires and requires . . .

So you can live his way in *this* respect, just like all the others.

3. If you're convicted by this, the worst thing you can do is look for a viewpoint that allows you to avoid it. Because you'll find it. And they sound good.

But I believe all of them to be a misuse of Scripture, or the result of a faulty or inconsistent method of interpretation.

Let the plain meaning of the Scripture speak. And listen with an attitude of ascent instead of an attitude of suspicion. Instead of trying to get around it, embrace it.

There's not only great joy in doing so, but great confidence. That you're in the center of God's will.

➤ That said, let's start with a bit of reality.

According to nonprofitsource.com, Christians give less now, than they did in the Great Depression of the 1930's.

On average, we give 2.5% of our income now, versus 3.3% then. When unemployment was like 25%.

Not that 3.3% is laudable, but that 2.5% is deplorable. Especially when we're more affluent and have more discretionary income than ever.

And in *our* church, the reality isn't much better. (**Pie Graph**)

In 2017, 1 out of every 4 households who attended on a regular basis, gave nothing.

And another 25% gave only slightly more.

The *good* news, is that the \$1-500 group is *smaller* than previous years – 25% of our congregation vs 32%. And the other categories are the same or *higher*.

In other words, as a percentage of our attendance, more people are giving more. Praise the Lord. But when 2/3 aren't giving *God's* way, it's still a problem. That's the reality.

And it's not new w/ us. The same was true in Malachi's day. (**When I Give God's Way**)

Malachi was a prophet who wrote just prior to the 400 silent years before Jesus came.

And here in chapter 3, he's in the middle of recording a hypothetical conversation between God and his people at that time. With God saying in v7 . . .

[7] From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. [Does that apply to you when it comes to giving?] 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 a rhetorical question to say, "Surely not. It's unthinkable."] 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.

[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.

The point of this passage is found in the very first sentence of v10 – *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse*. And tells me first of all, that . . .

When I Give God's Way . . .

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

10%. A tenth. Because that's what the word tithe *means*. And that's how it's *used* in Scripture. 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* tenth animal. *Every* herd. *Every* harvest. *Every* source of income. *****

If I earn \$10, I should give \$1. If I get a paycheck or a bonus, I should give a tenth.

If I cash in a stock or bond, I should give 10% of my *gain*.

If I sell a piece of land or get out of a business, I should tithe my *profit*.

If I receive a monetary *gift*, I should give a tenth of that.

That's why my Mom used to give our girls \$23 for their birthday. Because she wanted them to have a full \$20 left after they tithe it.

When I give *God's* way, I give 10% of my income. A *full* tithe.

And I do so . . .

• Off the top (**Prov 3:9**)

Before I pass go, before I collect \$200, before I do anything, I give.

Prov 3:9 says – *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** [the best of them] you shall bring into the house of the LORD your God.

Not the worst of the first, the leftovers, but the best.

And several hundred years later in Hezekiah's day, **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.

Our tithe should come from the firstfruits. Off the top.

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 tithe off the top of our income.*****

Which in our day, means tithing on our gross.

Before I pay taxes, before I contribute to my retirement, or my HSA, or anything else – I give. Off the top.

➤ When Becky and I were first married, and I was still trying to *keep* as much as I could, I tried to rationalize that. Get around it.

I was making a whopping \$21,000 a year, and 10% of that just seemed like a lot. I didn't *want* to give that much.

And thankfully, Becky graciously but firmly held her ground, and convinced me otherwise. And I say, "thankfully" . . .

Because had we not given off the top when we were making a *pittance*, we probably wouldn't have done so when we made more.

And probably would have missed out on God's *best* over the years. Or suffered under his correction. Who knows, I might not even be standing here.

When I give God's way, I tithe first. 10%, off the top.

And I give it . . .

• **To my church (v10)**

That's the idea of the *storehouse* here in v10. *Bring the full tithe into the storehouse.*

In Malachi's day, that was a literal room connected to the side of the *temple*, that was used to store the tithes of grain, oil, and money.

Grain, oil, and money that was used for the work of *ministry* and those who did it. Like the Levites and singers and priests (Neh 13:5).

So God is saying, bring a tenth of your income to the place he has designed and designated for discipleship, worship, and ministry.

The primary place where you're fed and led spiritually.

Which in *our* day, is the local church. It's an analogy you can't avoid.

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*.

Which leads me to the conclusion, that when I give God's way, I give 10%, off the top, to my church. It's called storehouse tithing, and comes directly from Scripture.

3rd . . .

• **It's what God commands (v10)**

Giving 10% off the top, to my church, is what God commands.

Bring the full tithe into the storehouse. (10)

It's a command. And one that still applies. For 5 reasons. 5 reasons that the Old Testament command to tithe still applies.

1. **Tithing is part of Scripture.**

And 2 Tim 3:16 says that *all* Scripture is profitable. Even the Old Testament Law. Of which tithing is a part.

Tithing is part of the Old Testament Law, and the Old Testament Law is part of Scripture. Which makes it *profitable* according to the New Testament . . .

For training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. Including the good work of tithing.

So the command to tithe still applies, because it's part of Scripture, and *all* Scripture is *useful*. If all Scripture is useful, how can tithing be passé?

2. **The Law was written for our sake.**

Tithing is a part of the Old Testament Law, and the Law was written for our sake. Those of us on *this* side of the cross. That's what the Apostle Paul said. 1 Cor 9.

Speaking of an Old Testament law God put in place, Paul asks, "*Does he not certainly speak for our sake?* As opposed to those on the other side of the cross? He does.

And then, just to make sure we get it, he says – *It was written for our sake.* For us. (v10) Not as a means to be *justified* before God (Gal 3:11), but as a standard to live by, and *honor* God. The command to tithe still applies . . .

Because it's part of the Law, and the Law was written for us.

3. **The Law is still operative in some sense.**

Like in **Lk 16:17** where Jesus says – *It is easier for heaven and earth to pass away than for one dot of the Law to become void.*

In other words, it still applies in some sense. We don't know *how* from that statement, but we *do* know that it's not null and void.*****

The "how" comes from the Apostle Paul. Which is the next reason tithing still applies.

4. **Paul applied the Law in principle.**

That's the sense in which it's still operative.

Like in 1 Cor 9:8-10 when he applied the law about not muzzling an ox while it treads out grain, to paying pastors for their labor in ministry.

He applied a law in principle, as an example for how to apply the Law in general.

Now, does that mean we have to abide by all the *particulars* of the laws? Not at all.

Because most of the time we can honor the principle *without* the particulars.

Just like I can honor the principle of the *Sabbath*, and still work on Sunday. Because I take *Monday* off. 6 days I work, and a 7th I rest (Ex 20:8-11).

Honoring the principle without the particulars.

But sometimes, it's impossible to separate the two. And tithing is one of them.

You can't separate the particulars from the principle, and still give God's way.

Because the principle is to provide for the work of ministry by giving a fixed, equitable, and consistent percentage of your income. In this case, a tenth.

So if you fail to honor the particulars, you fail to honor the principle.

And then last, tithing is a command that still applies, because . . .

5. Jesus affirmed tithing specifically.

He said in **Mt 23:23** – *Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin [tiny seeds and herbs], and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.”*

You ought to have observed God's standards of justice and mercy and faithfulness, without neglecting his other standards like tithing.*****

Far from doing away with the tithe, Jesus actually affirmed it. (**Summary**)

5 reasons that tithing is what God commands.

Not only that, but . . .

• It's how God provides (v10)

[10] Bring the full tithe into the storehouse [he says], that there may be food in my house.

Tithing is how God puts food on the table.

Which in Malachi's day, meant both *physical* food to sustain the priests and temple workers, and *spiritual* food to sustain the people.

And the same is true in our day. Right here in *our* church.

Our tithes, are God's means of providing for the work of ministry, and those who lead it.

It's how he ensures that the gospel goes forward. And the Bible is taught. People are discipled. Worship is offered.

It's how he provides for and perpetuates his primary means of reaching and impacting the world. It's how he sustains and blesses his bride.

Whether it's paying the heating bill in order to *accommodate* the work of ministry or paying pastors to lead it, our tithes are how God provides.

How he ensures that there's food in his house.

And last, giving God's way by tithing to my church, is what he blesses.

• It's what God blesses (v10)

[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.

“Go ahead” God says, “Make my day. And I'll make yours”

Tithing is a major aspect of our obedience that God blesses.

Sometimes monetarily, and sometimes spiritually.

Sometimes materially, and sometimes emotionally.

Sometimes it's an abundance of relationships. Or one really good one. Or an abundance of peace. Or a lack of difficulty in our lives.

Whatever the case, God's blessing for giving his way, is not necessarily a tit-for-tat thing.

“You give me money and I'll give you more.”

But it is *real*. And significant. And good. And timely.

It's not *why* we give, it's not *why* we tithe, we don't give to *get*; but God sure does bless it. From the storehouse of heaven and the goodness of his heart. (**Summary**)

Don't miss that. Rationalize no more. Reject it no longer.

Make whatever adjustments are necessary in your budget or lifestyle, and give *God's* way. It's what he commands, it's how he provides, and it's what he blesses.

Prayer – God, help us in this. Crucify our greed and desire for control. Sanctify our hearts to conform to your Word. And purify our lives to give your way.