

Text: Malachi 3:8-12

Title: Robbing God?

Truth: God's people must support God's work.

Date/Location: Sunday June 16, 2019 at FBC

Introduction

Last time, we studied 3:1-7 and we saw that God promised a “covenant messenger” to appear suddenly at the temple. He is to be preceded by another messenger who will prepare His way. Despite analogical similarities with the first coming of Jesus Christ, this prophecy is focused on the second coming. We know this because of the events accompanying His coming: fire, launderer's soap, pleasant offerings offered once again, and decisive judgment against sinners. None of these things are correlated to the first coming of Christ. They are all attached to the second coming. Therefore we know that Malachi is trying to convey God's plan about the ultimate return of Messiah. He did not see the details of the first coming in his vision.

The Lord's words should encourage believers and be a fright to unbelievers, because He does not change. He always has the same character, whether in the Old Testament or the New—**punishing** evildoers and **rewarding** the righteous. He keeps His promise to **save those who trust in Him**, and he keeps His promise to **judge those who don't**. He keeps His electing promises to both individuals and to the nation of Israel. It is because of God's faithfulness that He does not allow Israel to be entirely consumed. But they must repent. They must begin again to follow the Law of Moses. If they did so, they would once again enjoy covenant blessings.

All this was “back in the day” when God managed Israel's affairs through the divine law given on Mount Sinai (about 1440 B.C.). That Law is no longer in force anywhere in the world, including Israel, so we have to take great care in drawing applications from it for us today.

I. The Robbery

A. In answer to the people's question in verse 7, “In what way shall we return?” God immediately gives them an answer: Stop robbing me! God makes the charge through a question, answering their question with his own question: “Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!”

1. The juxtaposition of *man* and *God* points out how ridiculous their thinking is. Will they, mere flesh, take that which belongs to God and keep it for themselves?

2. This is like someone saying “No” to God. What?! God, the King of the universe and giver of life, tells you to do something, and you refuse? What hubris,chutzpah, and impudence, all rolled into one!
 3. Robbery should immediately evoke the ideas of money and property being taken from the person to whom they rightfully belong. Yet the people exposed once again how dull they are—which is no surprise to us at this point. They ask, “How have we robbed You?”
- B. The answer comes from Heaven: the robbery was in the area of tithes and offerings. They were neglecting their financial offerings to God and to support the work of the Jewish faith and state.
1. What was the money used for? If we were to analyze this in Scripture, we would see that the offerings were used to support the Levites—the priests and their Levitical brothers who helped them. It supported the work of the temple, its worship, its sacrifices, as well as the theocracy (as taxes). Levites had God-assigned tasks to do, and they had almost no inheritance in the land by which they could gain wealth for themselves (Joshua 14:4). A stoppage in offerings would be practically very difficult on the Levites—and was forbidden by God in Deut. 12:19. With little to no offerings, they had to find other gainful employment (bi-vocational farmer-ministers?). They were unable to focus on teaching and guiding the people. Thus, the conditions would spiral downward because the people were not supporting the ministers who could instruct them to do right before God.
 2. This was also spiritually devastating to the giver, not only because of the lack of spirituality in the nation generally, but because withholding in this way demonstrates spiritual darkness. Withholding from charity is bad enough. Even the world’s “good” people think you are a penny-pinching bad person if you do not give back to help others. But withholding from God is far worse. The stoppage of tithes and offerings was just one area of several that the Lord could have chosen. This is a good one because it is specific and measurable, and easy to demonstrate that it is true. It is not hidden in the heart.
 3. Why does God want offerings? It is not that God needs money! He can print as much as He wants ☺. He does, however, use human means to support His program. And since ministry costs money to do, God has ordained that money to be collected for this purpose.
 4. But offerings can also be viewed with respect to the offerer. Offering money is an act of worship. That’s why we do it every Sunday. It is something which shows the priorities of the giver. Since ministry

requires money, our giving it shows that we value what God values. We want to accomplish what God wants to accomplish. That pleases God. It is also an act which helps you loosen your grip on money. Money is a thing which is associated with great danger. Money is a thing which shows the condition of your heart, and giving it to the Lord's work is an important part of a pure heart.

5. A lack of offerings also shows this key truth: the "non-giver" doesn't understand that what He has is given by God. It *all* is from God. It is not ours. And it doesn't really belong to us. We are simply stewards.

II. The Punishment, v. 9

The entire nation was involved in this lack of giving, so the punishment was going to be leveled against the entire nation. God says, "You are cursed with a curse, because you have robbed Me..."

- A. The curse is not one specific consequence or action that will happen to the people. It is a generalized punishment, similar to the curses mentioned in Malachi 1:14 and 2:2.
- B. These curses hearken back to the curses promised earlier in the Old Testament. It is critical for us to understand the whole of divine revelation and be able to connect it together. We're not talking about some kind of a "hex" or "voodoo" curse here. This is a direct reference to the promises of the Old Covenant that God gave through Moses. See Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The terms and conditions of the covenant were clear; no one could legitimately claim ignorance. They were supposed to conduct themselves righteously; they were supposed to pass that heritage down to their children. They didn't.

III. The Restitution

- A. Bottom line: resume your giving as the law commands. Fill up the temple with what belongs to God. For the Israelite, this was not just a monetary offering. They would make it in terms of food, animals, etc.
- B. They were told to "test" God in this and see if he would not open the windows of heaven for them. If they repented and gave (putting God to the "test," so to speak), God would bless them so that they could give even more! This is like what God said in 2 Corinthians 9:8.
 1. The "windows of heaven" points to an agricultural blessing, v. 10. There would be no room to receive all of the crops.

2. The Lord would also stop anything that would eat up the crops, probably locusts and other bugs.
3. The vineyards would produce grapes in abundance.
4. The nations would treat Israel well. Throughout history, Israel has not been well in this department—and the explanation is that they refuse to follow God’s commands. Today they refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ the Messiah, and this compounds their problems. But when they look upon Him whom they pierced with grief in their hearts and repentance in their minds, *then* God will pour out a huge blessing.

All these blessings are stated in the Law of Moses, which was given one thousand years earlier. Again, there is nothing new here; Malachi is not inventing something. He is faithfully reporting “old news.”

IV. General Teaching of Giving and Blessing

A. **In the Old Covenant**, tithing was specifically part of the legal requirement under the law. There were three tithes:

1. Lev. 27:30, Deut. 14:22: The **tithe of produce**. Out of what the land, the flock or herd produced for the farmer, 10% was to be given to the Lord, or else redeemed with money for a 20% premium.
2. Num. 18:26-32: **The Levitical tithe**. This went to the Levites for their support. The Levites were themselves to offer a tenth of their tithe.
3. Deut. 14:28-29, 26:12: The **tithe of the third year**. It was stored in the cities and used as a “benevolence fund” or welfare program for the poor to have something to eat. The Levites were also able to eat out of it, since they had no inheritance in the land of Israel (Deut. 14:27).

If you gave as a Jewish believer, God promised general blessing. This blessing included fruitful crops, animals, wives, vineyards, etc. It included prosperous relations with neighbors and neighboring nations. If you did not obey, however, God promised curses in all of these departments. This was a nation-wide regime (again, Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28).

B. **In the Church**. Decades ago, my grandmother on my dad’s side emphasized to me that they faithfully gave their tithes. God blessed them. But when they did not give, they were not blessed. Another older saint just within the last few months said essentially the same thing to me. Is there truth in this? I would give a cautious affirmation to their belief.

1. The **caution** has to do with the percentage and the legality of giving—there is *no* specific percentage required in the church age, and there is *no* legal requirement. See 2 Corinthians 8–9.
2. On the **affirmative** side, we can say something despite the fact that the prosperity gospel doctrine has almost ruined our ability to appreciate the idea of blessing that results from giving. Obviously God does not promise you more money when you give money. That is a crass and strict quid-pro-quo arrangement. But a bad teaching shouldn't ruin a good one. God does tell us that the general rule is a general blessing to those whose minds are set on things above—and that is demonstrated by, among other things, how we use our money.
 1. Acts 20:35 tells us that it is more blessed to give than to receive.
 2. The command and consequence of Luke 6:38 is as true today as it was when Jesus spoke it.
 3. The principle of sowing and reaping is clearly delineated for New Testament Christians in 2 Corinthians 9:6.
 4. See also Proverbs 19:17, 22:9, 28:27; Psalm 112:5.

Conclusion

The Jewish people were able to cling to this general truth: obey, and you will *live*. Trust and you will be blessed. If you don't do those things, look out.

We don't have the specific promise of agricultural and other blessings. We might not be able to get our garden in this year because of the rain. But generally it is true that God blesses obedience. The blessings come in all kinds of ways. Giving is one big area where this is evidenced. Don't short-change God in your budget. You *want* the blessing of God, don't you?

MAP

V. Following are some questions and answers regarding tithing.

What are offerings used for in the church? A FEW THINGS.

In the Bible, the offerings are used for two main things: 1) the support of God's ministers: church pastors and missionaries; 2) the support of the poor, particularly inside of the church; then 3) ministries of the church that are difficult to do with the resources of one individual; and 4) instead of meeting in homes or other public places where rent would be charged, many churches use some portion of offering monies to maintain a building in which to meet.

This last one is a practical response to the necessities of our world, but it is admittedly not in Scripture. We should be careful not to use a huge percentage of our finances for the building, if at all possible.

Must I give a tithe? NO. Should I give a tithe? MAYBE.

The tithe, or 10%, was a law in the Old Testament. Christians are not subject to that law today. This becomes even more clear when you realize that the tithe in the Old Testament era was not a single tithe, but multiple different ones. Further, in the Old Testament there were legally required tithes, and then there were additional things called offerings. The New Testament never legislates 10%. It directs a grace-based approach in giving, more like the free-will offerings in the Old Testament and not at all like the legally obligated tithes.

To make a longer story shorter, your offerings should be offered willingly, sacrificially, generously, proportionally, and joyously (2 Corinthians 8-9). And you might decide that in your budget, 10% works well. But that is a fairly arbitrary number...maybe 9% or 15% or 17% fits and helps you to accomplish the goals for your giving that Paul sets forth in 2 Corinthians.

Should the church give a tithe of its offerings to missions? NO.

Well, it could do so if it determines that works well for it in the particular situation it finds itself. But it does not need to do that to follow any Biblical command.

Should I promise to give before I have the money? NO.

Some have called this "tithing in faith." It is more commonly called "faith-promise" giving. [2 Corinthians 8:12](#) is explicit here: "it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have." In other words, do not make a promise like this: "I promise to give \$X00 dollars every month toward missions." You simply do not know if you will have that money to give. You could be injured or lose your job or an emergency could arise. Instead, when you receive income, take a look at what you have, and give out of that amount. If you receive a regular salary, then it is acceptable to plan this giving in advance using a budget, but you should not vow to do so, since you do not know the future.

Must the church wait until it has a certain amount before it gives any money to missions? NO.

Since I was just speaking about budgets, a church needs to have a budget. The leadership should know to a certain extent how much they normally take in offerings per month and per year, and then they can make

conservative plans based on that. Then, a plan to use that money should be formulated. That plan should focus on the Great Commission responsibility of the church.

Suppose the church would like to take on the responsibility of supporting a missionary at \$300 per month. That's a nice goal, but maybe that is a bit aggressive at the present size and financial health of the church's offerings. So maybe back down to \$200 per month. Still, the church does NOT need to have \$2400 in the bank already to support the missionary. Why? Because: the church, when it takes on a missionary, is not making an irreversible vow to support the missionary forever. It is understood that the money can only be sent as the church is able. It may need to quit due to unforeseen circumstances. The church must give proper attention to the grace of giving and careful budgeting, and this will reduce the future possibility of having to drop support to a missionary.

Should the church support a missionary if the pastor is financially struggling (not because of his own errors)? NO.

The pastor *is* the first missionary supported by the church. You might object by saying, "He's a pastor, not a missionary!" That neglects the fact that *both* missionaries and pastors are agents charged by God with fulfilling the Great Commission. One does so overseas, say, and the other does so locally. There is no appreciable difference because of location.

Of course, the definition of "struggling financially" has to be answered by the church leadership and the church itself. But if the pastor is making significantly below what an average middle-class family is making in your locale, then there is a problem. It is not a virtue to "keep the pastor poor," which is just a way in which the congregation tries to lead, control, and lord it over the pastor.

What about multiple priorities? No problem! Big line items in your church budget will include your your pastor, one or more missionaries, and your ministries and building. If after a while you find that you have some more income than you budgeted for, then adjust the budget so that you split the extra between your priorities. You might not be able to fully fund the building project or the pastor or the missionary, but make a reasonable attempt to allocate the resources God gives you to accomplish His purposes. The church leadership and the church body are to be good stewards over their collected resources.

Does this type of giving include faith at all? YES.

I get the feeling that some people believe if you are not "edgy" enough in your budgeting, or if you even *have* a budget, then you are not spiritual and not exercising enough faith. My take on that kind of approach is simply this: faith does not require foolishness. If you have 10 people in your church and you think you can support 10 missionaries and your pastor, you have a serious lack of wisdom—not a superb amount of faith! Similarly, if your budget is \$4000 per month and you want to support a missionary for \$1000, you very likely need to re-evaluate the wisdom of that idea. Faith does not put God to the test. If God has given you a certain amount of income, be happy and thankful. Work hard to use the finances effectively and see more people saved who can provide further finances.

So what exactly is the difference between giving in faith versus presuming upon God? Faith consists of belief in God and, as a corollary, obedience to His Word. It is not defined by how outlandish your hopes may be for your budget. I believe faith-promise giving is presuming that God will give you a certain amount in the future when you are not promised that He will do that. I believe that a typical middle-class person giving 90% of their salary every payday is presumptuous, because they have responsibilities to feed their family and carry their own load which they will be unable to fulfill with that kind of giving. In other words, faith is always realistic even at the same time that it trusts in God.

An individual designs and executes his giving plan in faith when he trusts that God will provide his every need, and gives in January expecting that God will provide the needs in February even though he doesn't have the money in hand just yet. He would be wise to have—if he can—a three to six month emergency savings account in case the Lord has other plans. He is not in sin to save for future needs, like Joseph did in Egypt. But he cannot live in fear, holding back because of some perceived disaster that is around the corner.

Similarly, a church designs its budget in faith when the leadership and the body trusts that God will provide through the church's giving enough to meet the needs of the church ministry in upcoming months. They don't have December's money in hand yet, but they plan to keep on going for the Lord, and continue supporting missionaries and their pastor and other needs each month prior to December.

Faith and stinginess don't fit together, do they? Faith is trust in the Lord in all things. Faith is not presumption that the Lord will provide next month the same way He did this month.