

The sermon

Intro

Often the reputation of churches is we're all about money. We want more and more people in attendance so we can get more money. Greedy televangelists and prosperity preachers give faithful local churches a bad name. There's a perception out there that the church wants you for your money.

I don't want the perception that I'm after your heart because I want your money. So I never comment on "tithes and offerings" unless the passage I'm preaching forces me to. I've been here for three and a half years and I've never commented publicly on tithes and offerings.

Let's consider Malachi's comments on tithing.

READ PASSAGE

Body

Caveats

The giving is really good here. Many of you are giving faithfully. Our problem isn't lack. Our problem is figuring out how to steward what you're giving.

I've been in churches where the pastor and leaders were always talking about tithing and giving. That's not what's going on here. I am not asking for more money!

Maybe you struggle in the area of guilt. I get it. When the pastor mentions giving you think to yourself, "Am I giving enough?" You don't have a clear idea of what's required so whenever we pass around the basket you question yourself. Hopefully I have answers this morning.

Maybe church is new to you and you're wondering what to do when someone puts the basket in front of you and you have to awkwardly signal, "I'm not putting anything in. Move to the next person." I get it.

One reason I'm excited to talk about this is because I get paid every two weeks and I only put in a check on weeks I get paid. Not every week. But I'm fearful of appearances. What's going on in Colin and Bernie's head when the pastor doesn't put something in the basket? It's illogical. It's ridiculous. I know God's okay with me. But yes I'm wondering what's going on in your head when you see the pastor pass on the offering basket. The basket makes us nervous.

Passage Focus

Failure to fear God results in treating God casually. This time the Israelites are treating "tithes and contributions" casually. Malachi:

- 1) Calls for repentance
- 2) Calls for faith
- 3) Promises blessing

I'll explain and apply Malachi. Then I'll consider implications for New Covenant Christians.

Point 1: Repent with precision (3:6-10)

"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. – 3:6

"For" indicates an explanation. Usually "for" explains what was just said, but here it carries the sense of "because." Because I don't change, Israel still exists.

How is it that God doesn't change? God keeps his promises. God made promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Israel wasn't destroyed because of those promises. Theologically, God doesn't change in his abilities and character. God will always be all-powerful and all-good.

Failure to consume reveals God's character. He's patient with sinners. Until the 2nd coming.

From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. – 3:7

From their first days and up through Malachi's time, Israel was worthy of judgment. Think the golden calf in Exodus 32. God would be just to end Israel. But he made promises.

Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. – 3:7

This is how God deals with sinful people. "Return" is the Hebrew word for repent. An about face. Turning 180 degrees in the opposite direction. Turning from sinful conduct to righteous conduct. God is speaking to the nation as a whole, not to individuals. So the point isn't our personal relationship with Jesus. The point isn't people who used to follow Jesus and had a period of "backsliding" coming back to him. The point isn't Jesus is with us one day and not the next depending on our conduct. The point is the nation turning from rebellion to faith-driven obedience. Because of present rebellion they are cursed. If the nation repents, the curse will be lifted and blessings will flow.

But you say, 'How shall we return?' – 3:7

The people are consistently ignorant of their sin. So, they don't know how they should repent. Like the child or adult who doesn't know how abrasive their speech is. **We need to know our sin before we can repent correctly!**

Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. – 3:8

God reveals their wrong: robbing God.

But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' – 3:8

Again, the people are ignorant.

In your tithes and contributions. – 3:8

Tithes = they are not giving what is required under the Old Covenant stipulations. The laws given by Moses at the time Israel was formed. Tithes involved seed, fruit, herds, flocks (Lev 27:30-33).

What are contributions? Do they differ from the tithes? If so, how? Numbers 18:26 suggests contribution means a part of the tithe. Nehemiah 12:44 and 13:5 suggest a contribution distinct from the tithe. Given its "*tithes and contributions*" in 3:8, I'll go with two distinct items. Per Nehemiah 13:5, unspecified contributions were given to the priests.

You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. – 3:9

The whole nation, the people and the priests, are guilty of robbing God. As a result, they are under God's curse. What's a curse?

- 1) Removal of blessing.
- 2) Experiencing misfortune and affliction (e.g., crops not growing).
- 3) Not mechanical = God is the power behind the affliction and God determines the exact nature of one's experience.
- 4) The cursed individual is powerless to resist God's power.
- 5) The curse results from violating a relationship with God (Old Covenant stipulations – see Deut 28).

Bring the full tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. – 3:10

How should they respond? How do they escape the curse? By bringing their “full tithes” which suggests they were bringing partial tithes, not nothing at all. Keeping some back for themselves = greed or fear God won’t provide.

Application

My point was **Repent with precision**. Correct the specific sin. Deal with that sins of commission (harsh speech) by controlling the tongue. Deal with sins of omission (prayerlessness) by establishing patterns of prayer. Say you’re reading your Bible or hearing a sermon and God convicts you of prayerlessness. You don’t repent of prayerlessness by reading your Bible, going to church more often, working on your tongue, etc. These are good things, but they aren’t directly addressing the problem. You repent of prayerlessness by praying. When convicted by God, **Repent with precision**. Failure to tithe is corrected by tithing!

Point 2: Trust in God by pursuing his blessing (3:11-12)

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. – 3:10

It’s sin to test the Lord by demanding signs. Jesus rebuked the scribes and Pharisees for requesting a sign, calling them “*An evil and adulterous generation*” (Matt 12:39). But when God says test me, when God encourages us to trust him, it’s sin to doubt and not act on his promise. God is challenging the Israelites to trust him. By promising a reversal of the present curse: if they trust him by bringing the tithes and offerings, blessing will overflow. Meaning the crops will grow. That’s repent and you’ll prosper. Stay unrepentant and you’ll remain under the curse. **Test me by repenting = a promise is a test!**

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. – 3:11

If they repent, the curse will be lifted when God rebukes the devourer (= some unidentified crop-destroying pest). God speaks and it’s done. Kind of like creation.

Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of hosts. – 3:12

Obedience will yield blessing. Israel’s purpose was to obey God, receive his blessings, and bring attention to their God.

Does giving guarantee material prosperity for us?

No. No. No. Why?

- 1) The nation of Israel was under a different covenant than we are.

The Old Covenant found in Deuteronomy 28 promised crop success for obedience (28:4, 11-12). The Old Covenant promised crop failure for disobedience (28:18, 38-40).

In **Hebrews 10:9**, it says, “*He [Jesus] does away with the first [Old Covenant] in order to establish the second [New Covenant].*”

- 2) The promises were national, not individual.

Under the Old Covenant, faithful believers could suffer if the majority of the nation was violating the covenant. Daniel was carried to Babylon. Faithful individuals weren’t even guaranteed prosperity under the Old Covenant.

So what does Malachi 3:10 mean for us?

There's a principle here for us. Acting in faith results in blessing. God gives promises. He challenges us to trust those promises by acting on those promises. Like praying (Jas 4:2).

If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask him! – **Matthew 7:11**

That's a call to trust and test God by praying. Do you believe prayer matters? Do you believe God gives good things when you ask?

Non-Christian

The gospel in this passage:

- 1) God's patience with sinners (Israel not consumed).
- 2) God's mercy to law-breaking sinners (opportunity to repent = a way out of the curse).

Basis is Jesus' death as a substitute for sinners.

- 3) God gives promises to sinners.

Eternal life and forgiveness of sins through faith.

- 4) God judges sinners.

How we respond to God:

- 1) Repentance
- 2) Faith = trust

Move from cursing to blessing through faith and repentance. Tithing illustrates faith and repentance beautifully.

Point 3: What about giving today?

First, giving is an act of stewardship. God gives us resources, instructs us to use them well, and evaluates our use of them at the judgment seat (Rom 14:10-12).

Second, giving is an act of worship.

I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God. – **Philippians 4:18**

Financial gifts given to Paul to meet his needs were acts of worship to God.

Third, giving percentages aren't commanded in the New Testament.

- We aren't under the Old Covenant, we don't belong to the nation of Israel, we don't have priests and Levites, **curse and blessings were national, not individual.**
- Give according to your prosperity.

*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. ² On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, **as he may prosper**, so that there will be no collecting when I come.* – **1 Corinthians 16:1-2**

Collections were taken on Sundays for needy Christians in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-28). They were told to give in line with their prosperity.

*So now finish doing it as well [giving for relief of the saints], so that your readiness in desiring it may be matched by your completing it **out of what you have**.¹² For if the readiness is there, it is acceptable **according to what a person has**, not according to what he does not have. – 2 Corinthians 8:11-12*

Give out of what you have. Don't go into debt to give.

- Think of 10% as a starting point. Jesus raises the standard of the Old Covenant law. He doesn't lower it. It's not enough to refrain from murder. Insults are sin. It's not enough to refrain from adultery. Lusting after a woman you're not married to is sin.
- One caution. Say a couple that makes \$200,000 a year gets converted. That's \$20,000 a year if tithing. What if they don't have room in their budget for \$20,000? It might take them years to get their finances in order to make room for \$20,000. Imagine the absurdity of telling new Christians you're cursed because you're not giving 10% immediately.
- It's conceivable you really can't give 10%. Be a good steward of what you do have.
 - 1) 10% as a goal.
 - 2) You may need to work on your budget to reach that goal.
 - 3) You may have unexpected calamities that prevent 10%

Not trying to excuse not giving. But I need organic food, a gym membership, a fuel-efficient vehicle.

- 4) If you have abundance, 10% isn't enough (as you prosper!)

Call to the wealthy is generosity and it's okay to enjoy wealth (1 Tim 6:17-19).

- 5) Giving is fighting greed & trusting God to continue to provide & valuing the local church.

Fourth, give to the local church.

In the New Testament we find money going to needy Christians in one's own church (Acts 4:32-35), missionaries (1 Cor 9:6-12), financial relief of Christians elsewhere (2 Cor 8:1-5), true widows (1 Tim 5:9-16), and elders who labor in teaching and preaching (1 Tim 5:17-18). That's the local church taking in money from its members and giving to missionaries on the field, giving it to impoverished Christians elsewhere, giving it to those in need among us, and paying a salary to pastor/elders. We meet in a building. Upkeep, heating, etc. cost money. Give because you value these things. Giving is a matter of what our heart treasures.

Fifth, generous giving results in more to give.

*The point is this: whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.⁷ Each one must give as he has made up his mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.⁸ And God is able to make all grace abound to you, **so that** having all sufficiency in all things at all times, **you may abound in every good work**.⁹ As it is written, "He has distributed freely, he has given to the poor; his righteousness endures forever."¹⁰ He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed **for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness**.¹¹ You will be enriched in every way **to be generous** in every way, which through us will produce thanksgiving to God.¹² For the ministry of this service is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many thanksgivings to God. – 2 Corinthians 9:6-12*

This giving is for "*relief of the saints*" (1 Cor 8:4). As we give, God gives more. Not so that we may have more for our greeds. But so we can be generous. Those blessed will then praise God. Giving generously so others will praise God. That's biblical motive.

Sixth, give willingly and joyfully.

2 Corinthians 8:3 commends sacrificial giving.

Seventh, give to the local church first, then to parachurch organizations (e.g., camps).

I appreciate when radio ministries instruct listeners to first give to their local church before giving to their radio broadcast. Why do they say this? God's design in the New Testament is the local church. The only giving we see in the New Testament is giving to the local church. They recognize the importance of the local church.

I can't address every question. Ask me. Send an email.

Conclusion

Repent with precision. Test God by giving generously.