

Place: Lurgan Baptist: 4:3:2012

Reading: Malachi 3:7-12

MALACHI'S MINISTRY MINISTRY

6. MONEY MATTERS

As a young man, Robert Laidlaw made a covenant with God. He covenanted that he would give a tenth of all his earnings. Later, at the age of 25, he decided to change that amount to 50% of all his earnings. God blessed and multiplied his resources until he was giving even more to the work of the Lord. Writing at the age of 70, he said this, “ *I want to bear testimony that, in spiritual communion and in material things, God has blessed me one hundredfold, and has graciously entrusted me a stewardship far beyond my expectations when, as a lad of 18, I gave God a definite portion of my wages.* ”

Today, on average, evangelicals in the U.S.A. today give about two fifths of a tithe, two fifths of a tithe. In 2002 a Barna poll was taken, and it was discovered, that 6% of born-again adults tithed. From the year 2000, to the year 2002, there was a 50% reduction and decline. In 2000 12% of evangelicals in America tithed, and in two years it was cut by half to 6% , and there is more money spent in the United States to feed and to care for their pets than is given to churches and charities. The wealthiest nation, the most Christian nation, so-called, spends more money on pets than the Lord's work. And I

would hasten to add the United Kingdom is no better. Yet how believer handles money is a true barometer of his spiritual life. My if we fail to handle money properly it can rob us of spiritual growth, opportunities and blessings. The Lord said, “ *If, therefore, ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous money, who will commit to your trust the true riches ?* ” (Lk 16:11) Christ did not mince His words when He spoke about giving. He said “ *For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also No man can serve two masters Ye cannot serve God and mammon.* ” (Matt 6:21-24) Now you've heard it said, I think it was Murray M'Cheyne, that said “ *What a man is on his knees before God that he is and no more.* ” But in the context of this portion of Scripture, I would like to change that to say, “ *A Christian is what he gives, and no more,* ”- for your giving is a barometer of your spiritual health. My you can impress other Christians by your extensive Bible knowledge, your fervent prayers, or many years of service in the church. But God does not look at those to test your faithfulness, rather He looks at how you manage the money He has entrusted to you.

Now what has all this got to do with Malachi ? Well, remember Malachi was the last of the prophets. The times in which he lived about 400 years before Christ are remarkably typical of our day and generation. In this book he brings a 4 fold charge against the people of God. **Religiously:** they were guilty of profanity and sacrilege (1:6) **Morally:** they were guilty of sorcery and adultery (3:5) **Socially:** they were untrue to their family responsibilities (2:14) **Materially:** they were robbing God of the tithes that were due to Him. (3:8) “

Will a man rob God ?” What a question. My are you robbing God ? Are you failing to give to God that which He requires ? Have you never learned the blessing of giving to God ? Are you among the many believers who are takers but not givers ? Now the Bible has much to say about money matters because money matters. Money matters to you because you need it. Money matters to God because He gives it. Money matters to Satan because he wants it. God has a plan for you and your money. God has a plan for how you accumulate it, how you assimilate it, and how you allocate it. And if you will follow His plan you will know His blessing. Now look at his passage and notice,

(1) WHAT THEIR GREED REVEALED

You see, a lack of tithing or proportionate giving is a symptom of one’s spiritual condition before God. Do you recall Paul’s words about giving ? He says to the Corinthian believers, “ *Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia even so do ye.* ” Now notice the word “ *collection.* ” It’s a word that indicates something is said or revealed. Our giving says something about us. It says something about our attitude to God’s Word. It says something about how serious we take God’s commands. It says something about how grateful we are to God for His goodness to us. On the other hand our lack of giving says something. In terms of the Jews in Malachi’s day their lack of giving indicated two things. There was,

(a) A DEPARTURE FROM GOD:

That’s why the Lord says in (3:7) “ *even from the days of your fathers ye are gone away from My ordinances and have not kept them. Return unto Me, and I will return to you, saith the Lord of hosts.* ” You see, Judah had failed to learn from their past. Their history was chequered with disobedience from the time of Moses. Their lack of giving was symptomatic of a deeper trouble they had departed from the Lord. The Lord charges them and their ancestors of turning aside from His statues and not keeping them but they are dumbfounded by the charges. Now it’s wonderful to come from a long line of Christians. A Christian upbringing spares you from much of the devastation that comes from a pagan upbringing. But a Christian upbringing has its dangers. For it’s, so easy for the reality of a daily walk with God to leak out over the generations to the extent that it becomes ritualistic and mechanical.

A. W. Tozer, has said, “ *We are satisfied to rest in our judicial possessions, and for the most part we bother ourselves very little about the absence of personal experience.* ” In other words, we are blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ, we know what our standing is, but what are we experientially before God ? Do we experience the blessings that we ought to have in Christ ? Or have we lost the zeal, the desire to please and obey God ? My like these folk in Malachi’s day are you backslidden ? Are you cold in heart and zeal towards the Lord ? Are you indifferent to spiritual realities, to the prospect of eternity ? Have you forgotten that God has shut up His

blessing to a life of obedience ? For “ *to obey is better than sacrifice and to hearken than the fat of rams.* ” (1 Sam 15:22) You see, when the heart of a believer is right with the Lord giving is never a problem. But when his heart has turned away from God one of the first symptoms is he quits giving. The truth is, that many problems of the Christian life are but symptoms of a heart that is not right with God. It begs the question is your heart right with God ? Are you regular in your giving ? Are you faithful in your attendance ? Are you motivated in your witnessing ? Are you fervent in your praying ? Are you genuine in your devotion ? (a) There was,

(b) A DEFRAUDING OF GOD:

Do you see that word “ *rob,* ” ? (3:8) Well, the Hebrew word occurs only one other time in Scripture (Prov 22:22) it means “ *to defraud,* ” or “ *to take forcibly.* ” Now a robbery can only take place if we take from someone something that belongs to him or her. Israel was a backslidden nation who had turned away from God. God said to them, “ *Return unto me, and I will return to you.* ” But they played dumb. They feigned their innocence. They asked the question, “ *In what way shall we return?* ” God gives them the shock of their lives. He does not mention their morals. He does not mention their manners. He talks about their money. He accuses them of robbery, not highway robbery, but heavenly robbery. He says “ *Ye have robbed me,* ” My can God be robbed ? Yes. Can we rob Him ? Yes. William MacDonald has made this very piercing statement regarding the lack of stewardship in

the church of Jesus Christ today, “ *We rob God in this sense, often times the Lord’s own money is not available to Him.* ” Can you imagine and contemplate the possibility that God’s own money is not available to Him, because the Christians of Malachi’s day and the believers of today are so tight-fisted that they won’t let go of it and allow Him to use it. How were they robbing God ? By not tithing. Why were they not tithing ? *Because they had forgotten that everything belongs to God.* You see, you will never put God ahead of money until you understand that your money is really His money. Now you may think you earn your money by your hard work, by your industriousness, by the good job you have. But in reality God gave you that job. God gave you the skills and the ability to learn that job. God gave you the health to perform that job. My the truth is, your money comes from God. Moses says, “ *But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is He that giveth thee power to get wealth.* ” (Deut 8:18)

Do you remember that David had it in his heart to build a temple for the Lord, and so he took up an offering from the people to build the temple. They took up a magnificent offering. They were rejoicing and blessing God for the financial victory that was theirs, and David prayed a beautiful royal prayer before all the people, and in that prayer he said this, “ *But who am I, and what is my people, that we should be able to offer so willingly after this sort ? For all things come of Thee (from Thee) and of thine own we have given Thee.* ” (1 Chron 29:14) Now the words “ *of thine own,* ” literally mean “ *of your hand.* ” What David literally said was, “ *What we put into one of Thy hands we*

simply took from the other.” Did you know that all of us live “*hand to mouth?*” We live “*from His hand to our mouth.*” Listen to what James says, “*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.*” (Jam 1:17 Rom 11:26) My Do you realise that your money is really His money ? And could it be that His money is not available to Him because you are robbing God ? Christians, who would never contemplate robbing a bank, never think twice of robbing God. My are you robbing God ? Are you failing to give to God that which He requires? Have you never learned the blessing of giving to God ? Are you among the many believers who are takers but not givers. I heard about the Jewish Rabbi that went to get his hair cut at the local barber. When he started to pay for his haircut, the barber said, “*Rabbi, there is no charge for I don’t charge the clergy for haircuts.*” The next morning when the barber came in, to work he found a loaf of rye bread at his door. Later a minister came in and got his haircut. The barber said, “*Sir, there’s no charge I don’t charge the clergy for haircuts.*” The next morning he found a box of chocolates sitting at his door.

A Baptist preacher then came in and got his hair cut. The barber said, “*Preacher there is no charge. I don’t charge the clergy.*” The next morning he found 15 Baptist preachers lined up at his door. You see, we often are willing takers of all God has to offer, but are unwilling to give to God that which He requires. (1)

(2) WHAT THEIR GOD REQUIRED

Do you see what the Lord says here ? “*Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts. But ye said, wherein shall we return?*” Now whenever you get away from the Lord learn this lesson. The point of return is always at the point of departure. They asked the question, “*Wherein shall we return?*” And God gives them the shock of their lives. “*Ye have robbed me,*” and then He gives them the basis of blessing. “*Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, receive it.*” (3:10)

Now the Lord here is speaking here about stewardship and do you see how His work is to be maintained ? Not by unbelievers, not by daffodil teas, not by cake sales, not by car washes, not by sponsored walks. You see, when God’s work is done in God’s way it will not lack God’s supply and what is God’s way ? Well, look at this blueprint for blessing and notice,

(a) The PERCENTAGE that is DETERMINED:

Giving begins with the tithe. The word tithe literally means “*tenth.*” God makes it plain that the first pound of every ten pound is to be given back to the Lord. Now someone immediately objects that the tithe was given unto the law and we are no longer under the law, but we are under grace. Well that is the truth, but it is not the whole truth. You see, we are not under law, but because we are under grace we are above the law. *Any Christian who would do less under grace than a Jew would do under the law, is a disgrace to grace.* But furthermore, the tithe was given before the law. In Genesis (14:20) we are told that Abraham paid tithe unto Melchizedek, and according to (Heb 7:3)

Melchizedek is a beautiful type of Christ. Years later Jacob, his grandson, paid tithes unto the Lord voluntarily. (Gen 28:22) This was over 400 years before the law was even given. Later Moses instituted the law making tithing a universal command. (Lev 27:30) Someone says, “ *but this is Old Testament.* ” Well, go to the New Testament. The Lord Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees and listen to what he said: “ *Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law: judgement, mercy and faith. These ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.* ” (Matt 23:23) The Lord Jesus had a golden opportunity to abolish the tithe, but instead He approved the tithe. Now if Abraham commenced it, and Jacob continued it, and Moses commanded it, and Christ commended it, who am I to cancel it ? My are you robbing God ? But there is not only the tithe that God demands, there is the offering that God deserves. The Lord says we ought to bring tithes and offerings.

You see, the tithe is not a ceiling you stop at, it is a floor you stand on. The tithe is not the maximum, it's the minimum. It's not a stopping place, it is a starting point. When a Christian grows in grace, he will grow in giving. My what are you doing with the money the Lord has entrusted to you ? Are you not happy with the tithe ? Are you saying, “ *there is no express command to tithe given to the church in the New Testament ?* ” My are you suggesting for one moment that the “ *grace giving,* ” that Paul talks about in the Corinthian letter is less than ten percent ? Actually, the law of

Moses prescribed several tithes that would have amounted to somewhere between 20 to 25 percent. (Lev 27:30-33, Num 18:20-21 Deut 12:17-18 14:22, 28, 29) Are you happier with that ?

Is the Lord talking to you about your stewardship this ? Have you ever taken this aspect of your Christian life seriously ? Is God saying to you “ *Ye Me ?* ”

(b) THE PLACE THAT IS DESIGNATED:

“ *The storehouse,* ” (3:10) From the time of Hezekiah, there was in the Temple a storehouse built for depositing the tithes and offerings of the people (2 Chron 31:11) This was also true of the second Temple in the days of Nehemiah. (10:38-39) **A Definite Place** ! Now the New Testament church is the counterpart to the Old Testament temple. In (1 Cor 16:2) Paul says, “ *Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings (collections) when I come.* ” Do you see the words there “ *in store,?* ” That is a play on words based on the concept of the storehouse in the Old Testament. It was on the first day of the week that the people would come to church. They were to bring their tithe to the place where their membership was established, their spiritual life nourished and their Christian privileges enjoyed. The phrase “ *all the tithes* ” would be more literally translated “ *the whole tithe.* ” You are to bring the whole tithe to God's storehouse.

There are some people who think that they can give their tithe where they want to give it. *I want to tell you that God has not only commanded what to give, He's commanded where to give it.* There is nothing wrong

with supporting other organizations. I support other organizations, and you may too, but you ought to support these out of your offerings. Because your tithe, belongs to the church. There are some people who have the attitude that it is their tithe and their business and they can give their tithe where they want to give the tithe. Well, the people of Israel had that same attitude. Moses said to them in (Deut. 12:8) “ *Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes.*” He goes on to say in verse 11, “ *then there shall be a place which the Lord your God shall choose to cause His name to dwell there, thither shall ye bring your tithes*” Do you know what happens today ? Someone takes a grudge against the church or the pastor or the elders and they send their tithe somewhere else. My that is not tithing or proportionate giving. You are, to take your tithe to the place that God has chosen, and God has chosen as his storehouse the local church. (a) (b) But notice,

(c) *THE PURPOSE THAT IS DEFINED:*

We are to bring our tithes that there may be food in God’s house. The priests and the Levites were supported by the tithe (Lev 27:30 Num 18:21) It was used to feed the Hebrew orphans and widows within the city. (Deut 14:28-29) You the tithe or regular giving is God’s way of financing the work of His church. My if God’s people would just tithe there would be more food in God’s house than anybody would know what to do with. Did you know that if every church member in America were suddenly placed on welfare, and they

each gave a tithe of their average welfare payment to the church, the income of all churches in America would go up by 35%. There is not a need this church has, or could conceive, that cannot be met by the tithe. (1) (2)

(3) *WHAT THEIR GIFTS REVERSED*

For the Lord said if they took their stewardship seriously instead of cursing there would be blessing, instead of barrenness there would be fruitfulness, instead of deadness there would be effectiveness. My *do you not realise that when you rob God, you are robbing yourself ?* Robbing yourself of the blessings that always accompany faithful giving (2 Cor 9:6-15) But more than that. Do you see that money that you keep for yourself that rightly belongs to God ? It never stays with you. (Haggai 1:6) If you don’t trust the Lord to care for you, whatever you do trust will prove futile. My God wants us to give because He has something to prove. This is the only time in the Bible when God says, “ *prove Me, put Me to the test.*” God makes some special specific promises to anyone who will trust Him enough, and love Him enough, and obey Him enough to give. The Lord says,

(a) *OUR FAITH WILL BE REWARDED:*

God says when we open up our wallet and give our tithe, He opens up his window and gives his blessing. “ *Prove Me now herewith,*” saith the Lord of hosts, *if I will not open you the windows of heaven and pour out it.*”

(Deut 28:1-14 Lk 6:38 2 Cor 9:6-8) My.... God just cut a deal that you cannot refuse that is if you believe God. Listen, if this verse is true there can only be one reason why a Christian doesn't give, only one. Because he just doesn't believe it. Now we are getting to where the rubber hits the road. *Tithing is not a matter of finances. It's a matter of faith.* Tithing is not only God's way of raising money. It is God's way of growing Christians. Some of you are saying, " *Well I just can't afford to tithe.*" My , if this verse is true, you can't afford not to. By the way, if you wait until you can afford to tithe you never will.

*The bride bent with age leaned over her cane,
Her steps uncertain need guiding,
While down the church aisle,
With a wane-toothless smile,
Came the groom in a wheelchair gliding
And who is this elderly couple thus wed ?
You'll find when you've closely explored it,
That this is that rare most conservative pair
Who waited till they could afford it.*

The question is, are you willing to trust God ? My tithing is not God's way of getting something from you. It is God's way of giving something to you. *But let me hasten to add that God's blessing is to be the result of tithing, not the reason for tithing.* It pays to give, but if you give because it pays, it won't pay. You don't give because it pays, you give because it's right. (a)

(b) OUR FOES WILL BE REBUKED:

" And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, ground." (3:11) In other words, God will stand in the gap. He will protect you. *" When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord shall lift up a standard against him." (Is 59:19)* (a) (b)

(c) OUR FRUIT WILL BE REPLENISHED:

" Neither shall your vine Hosts, (3:11-12) This will ultimately take place during the millennial reign of Christ. (Is 61:9) But have you ever thought about it in relation to our gospel outreach ? You see, had the Jews trusted God, He would have done great things for them and they would have been a testimony to others. Do you ever wonder why the gospel that is being faithfully preached in our land is not being wonderfully blessed by our God ? Is it because you won't put your hand into your pocket to bless it ? My the Lord does not merely want your money He wants you. Do you recall what Paul said concerning the Corinthian believers who had taken up an offering for the poor saints at Jerusalem ?

He said, *" And this they did not as we hoped but first give their own selves to the Lord." (2 Cor 8:5)*

President Woodrow Wilson who was out campaigning on a train had stopped in Billings Montana. From the back of the train he spoke to the townsfolk. Some people that day gave the President an American flag, and other things. But a little boy handed him something wrapped in a piece of paper. Five years later when Woodrow Wilson died in office, they discovered in his wallet, what that little boy had given him wrapped in

that piece of paper. *Do you know what it was ?* A cent, that's all just a dime. You see, it was not the amount but the love that prompted that gift that touched the heart of the President. My the Lord does not really need that first pound of every ten that He calls for. It's the love that prompts that gift that He so greatly desires. It's not merely your money that God wants. My **the Lord wants you.** Have you given yourself totally to Him ? You see, if you give to God all that you are, you will have no problem giving to Him all that you have.