

## **WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING**

### **Malachi 3:8-12**

When I was a boy, the preachers would say that giving is a part of worship. But that is only part of the truth. Giving is not just a part of worship. Giving is worship. Worship is not what you receive from God. It is what you offer God. God's glory is tied to our giving. This is the message of Malachi 3:8-12.

The Prophecy of Malachi was written about one hundred years after the Babylonian captivity. The return to Jerusalem was marked by spiritual renewal. The holy temple was restored. The city walls were rebuilt. The people's hearts were revived. But the flames of revival cooled off. A century later, warm-hearted worship turned into hardhearted indifference. Both priests and people departed from the law of God. God's patience ran out. The Lord gave Israel one more chance to repent.

The prophecy of Malachi is followed by the INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD, during which the voice of a true prophet was not heard in Israel for over 400 years. The next true prophet was John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah-King, the Lord Jesus Christ. God will then shift his focus from Israel to the church. But first God sent the Malachi to Israel with a stern warning: "Stop playing church before it's too late!" By the time of Malachi's prophecy, Israel had outgrown image making and idol worship. And the hypocritical scribes and self-righteous Pharisees had not yet perverted spiritual wisdom with human tradition. Yet Israel still did not worship God with sincere hearts. One clear barometer of their sinful worship was their giving. In our text, Malachi confronts Israel with an essential factor of true worship: God's glory is tied to our giving. Consider four lessons Malachi 3:8-12 teach about worship through giving.

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### **I. THE PRIORITY OF WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING**

Sinful rebellion invoked divine judgment. Israel's hardheartedness refused to see they were the problem. They assumed God had changed. Verse 6 records God's response: "For I the LORD do not change; therefor you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed." The Lord is not a capricious God who changes on a whim. God is immutable. If God changed, we would have been destroyed. The problem is stated in verse 7: "From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts." If God seems far away, guess who moved? Verse 7 records Israel's proud response: "But you say, 'How shall we return?'" God answers in verse 8-9: "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, 'How have we robbed you?' In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you." God confronts and condemns spiritual robbery.

#### **A. GOD'S CONFRONTS SPIRITUAL ROBBERY.**

Verse 8 begins with one of the great questions of the Bible: “Will man rob God?” The assumed answer is no. Who would dare rob God? God answers his own question: “Yet you are robbing me.” The pronouns are emphatic: “You are robbing me!” God did not call their giving sinful. God called it robbery. A robber is different than a thief. A thief waits until you are not present and takes what is yours by stealth. A robber gets a weapon and takes what is yours by force. This is how the Lord viewed their giving. It was not embezzlement. It was a carjacking. It is a Sunday morning stick-up. It is spiritual robbery. Verse 8 says; “But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions.”

WHAT ARE TITHES? A tithe is the tenth portion. Leviticus 27:30 says: “Every tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the trees, is the Lord’s; it is holy to the LORD.” The Lord commanded Israel to tithe to honor his sovereign authority over their lives. Their failure to tithe was spiritual robbery. It was their attempt to wrestle control of their lives out of the hands of God.

Should Christians tithe today? In Matthew 23:23, Jesus says: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mind and ill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: Justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others.” Indeed, there are weightier matters than tithing. But I believe it is a biblical practice we should not neglect. The New Testament teaches proportional giving. 1 Corinthians 16:2 says: “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.” Grace giving is not a license to neglect proportional giving. For a Jew under the law to give more than a Christian under grace is a disgrace!

WHAT ARE CONTRIBUTIONS? Contributions are offerings. Israelites paid tithes and gave offerings. The tithe belonged to God. Offerings were given above and beyond the tithe. Tithing is the duty of giving. Offerings are the delight of giving. Your giving should reflect God’s authority over my life. It should also reflect your gratitude to God for his goodness to you. We do not give to bribe God. We give to give credit where credit is due. Psalm 116:12 says: “What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?”

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## **B. GOD CONDEMNS SPIRITUAL ROBBERY.**

Verse 9 says, “You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.” Malachi does not state the source of the curse. He presents it as the natural consequence of spiritual rebellion. In a real sense, spiritual rebellion does not cause God to curse you. You curse yourself. Stealing from God is like robbing the police station – not a good idea. The source of the curse is not stated. But the reason is clear: “for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you.” The word “nation” is used for people who were not in covenant with God. The New Testament is clear that sinners saved by the blood and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ cannot be cursed. Ephesians 1:3 says: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”

Christians cannot be blessed and cursed at the same time. But there are real consequences for spiritual rebellion. Galatians 6:7 says: “Be not dismayed: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

Malachi 1:14 curses the people: “Cursed be the cheat who has a male in his flock, and vows it, and yet sacrifices to the Lord what is blemished. For I am a great King, says the Lord of hosts, and my name will be feared among the nations.”

Malachi 2:1-2 curses the priests: “And now, O priests, this command is for you. If you will not listen, if you will not take it to heart to give honor to my name, says the Lord of hosts, then I will send the curse upon you and I will curse your blessings. Indeed, I have already cursed them, because you do not lay it to heart.” After confronting the quality of their offerings, God curses the priests. But after confronting the amount of their offerings, God curses the whole nation. If the spiritual leaders do not teach you how to give, God will make us answer for that. But we cannot make you give. You must decide to give for yourself. And your choice brings consequences. 2

Corinthians 9:7 wisely instructs: “Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”

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## **II. THE PRACTICE OF WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING**

### ***How should you give to God?***

#### **A. GIVE TO GOD WITH A GRATEFUL SPIRIT.**

Israel robbed God in tithes and contributions. The whole nation was under a curse. But the divine curse for robbing God was not the last word. Verse 10 says, “Bring the full tithes into the storehouse.” The Lord extended a renewed call to worship him through giving. This is the mercy and grace of God. Some teach the tithe should be disregarded as part of the Mosaic Law. But one reason why tithing is a good Christian practice is because it affords the opportunity to say “Thank you” to God for his undeserved goodness to us. The first biblical reference to tithing is in Genesis 14:21, where Abraham gave a tenth of everything he had to Melchizedek the king and priest. This predates the command to tithe in the Law of Moses. Tithing was an act of love, before it was an act of law. It was the way Abraham blessed the God Most High for giving him victory in battle.

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#### **B. GIVE TO GOD FIRST.**

God is watching what you give. God is watching how you give. And God is watching when you give. You should give to God first. Proverbs 3:9 says: “Honor the Lord with your wealth and with the firstfruits of all your produce.” It is does not honor God to take care of all of your needs and wants and then give to God whatever is left. In Matthew 6:33, Jesus says, “But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

There was a knock on the door of the missionary's hut. Answering, the missionary found one of the native boys holding a large fish. He explained, "You taught us what tithing is. And I have brought my tithe." With gratitude, the missionary asked, "Where are the other nine fish?" At this, the boy beamed and said, "They're still back in the river. I'm going back to catch them now."

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### **C. GIVE TO GOD THE FULL TITHE.**

Verse 10 says, "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse." The problem was not that Israel gave nothing. It was that they did not bring the whole tithe. But God does start them with 2 or 4 or 6 percent until they get the hang of tithing. This command to bring the full tithe teaches us that tithing is a doable practice. Tithing is not something reserved for those who are religiously fanatic, spiritual mature, or extremely committed. If you cannot give God a dime out of every dollar he gives you, you should realistically examine your lifestyle choices, spending habits, and spiritual values. Luke 16:10-13 says: "One who is faithful in a very little is also faithful in much, and one who is dishonest in a very little is also dishonest in much. If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches? And if you have not been faithful in that which is another's, who will give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money."

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### **D. GIVE TO GOD THROUGH THE LOCAL CHURCH.**

Verse 10 says: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse." The storehouse was a designated place in the temple where the tithes and offerings were stored and from which it was administered. This call to give to the storehouse of God reminds us that we should give to God through the local church. Galatians 6:10 says: "So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith." There are many charitable works that are worthy of our financial support. But we should not support these works at the expense of the local church. And we should not give to TV ministries or mission agencies at the expense of the local church. You ought to give to God through the household of faith where you are a member. What if you are in a church where you don't trust what they're doing with the money? You should kick out untrustworthy leaders or find another church. But do not use that as an excuse to withhold giving to God through the local church. We do not give to the church. We give to God through the church. You cannot watch like God can watch. You cannot punish like God can punish. And you cannot reward like God can reward.

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### **III. THE PURPOSE OF WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING**

Verse 10 says: "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house." God does not need food. In Psalm 50:12, God says, "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." God does not need our food. But the priests and the Levites who ministered in the temple needed food. The widows, orphans, and strangers who came to the temple for help needed food. What difference does our giving make?

#### **A. WE GIVE TO COMPENSATE THE LEADERS.**

The primary purpose of tithes and offerings was to care for those who worked in the temple. Nehemiah 12:44 says: "On that day men were appointed over the storerooms, the contributions, the firstfruits and the tithes, to gather into them the portions required by the Law for the priests and for the Levites according to the fields of the towns, for Judah rejoiced over the priest and the Levites who ministered." This is another principle that walks out of the Old Testament into the New Testament. 1 Corinthians 9:7 asks three questions: "Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk?" 1 Corinthians 9:14 concludes: "In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel." Galatians 6:6 says, "Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches." 1 Timothy 5:17 says, "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching."

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#### **B. WE GIVE TO CONTINUE TO WORK.**

Nehemiah was a contemporary of Malachi. He was the cupbearer for the king of Persia, who received permission to rebuild the city walls of Jerusalem. Nehemiah returned to Persia when the project was complete. After his departure, the sinful worship Malachi condemns began. Nehemiah 13:10-12 reads: I also found out that the portions of the Levites had not been given to them, so that the Levites and the singers, who did the work, had fled each to his field. So I confronted the officials and said, "Why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together and set them in their stations. Then all Judah brought the tithe of the grain, wine, and oil into the storehouses." When you give, you are not just paying bills and salaries; you are investing in God's work. There is spiritual work you cannot do. But you can support those who can do that work. When lives are changed, the preachers who faithfully declared the word will be rewarded. But the nameless saint, who faithfully gave so the doors would remain open for the preacher to preach, will also be rewarded.

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#### **C. WE GIVE TO CARE FOR THE NEEDY.**

Beyond caring for the priests and Levites, the tithes and offerings supported the widows, orphans, and strangers in the land. Deuteronomy 14:28-29 described a tithe Israel was to give once every three years, which was specifically designated for carrying for the needy. God cares for the needy. And God wants them to be able to come to his house to get help. But he intends that help to come through our gifts. That's why it's robbery when we don't give. We are robbing God of the opportunity to help those in need through the resources he entrusts to us. In Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus warns that on judgment day, he will condemn those who do not help him when he is hungry, thirsty, a stranger, naked, or in prison. But people will want to know when they ever saw Jesus in any of those conditions. And he will answer, "Inasmuch as you did it to the least of these my brothers, you did it to me."

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#### **IV. THE PROMISE OF WORSHIP THROUGH GIVING**

Verse 10 says: "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." There are two commands in this verse. The first is to bring the full tithe. The second is to put God to the test. The word "test" was typically the testing of human purity or obedience. And God took offense when humans put him to the test. But here God commands it. Worry, doubt, and fear cause us to withhold what we should give to God. God responds, "Put me to the test!" Romans 8:32 says: "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not with him graciously give us all things?" If you trust God with your soul you should trust God with your money.

**A certain man confessed to his pastor that he worried that if he tithed he would not be able to take care of his responsibilities. The pastor replied, "Brother, if I promise to make up the difference in your bills if you should fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?" The man responded, "Sure, if you promise to make up for any shortage, I can tithe for one month." What do you think of that," mused the pastor. "You'd be willing to trust in a me to take care of you with my limited resources, but you couldn't trust your heavenly Father who owns the whole world!"**

Who do you trust? In Malachi 3:10-12, God promises divine promises, protection, and pleasure to those who trust him enough to worship through giving.

##### **A. GOD PROMISES DIVINE PROVISIONS.**

Verse 10 says, "And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the window of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." This is an agricultural metaphor. In 2 Chronicles 7:13 God warns: "I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain." But God opens the windows of heavens by sending rain. God here promises to pour down a blessing of rain that will

meet all the needs of his people. This is no get-rich-quick scheme. If the people did not plant the seed and cultivate the land, the God-sent rain would bring no harvest. This is the spiritual partnership between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. VANCE HAVNER said: "God feed the birds everyday. But he does not put worms in their nests." If you live with integrity, industry, and generosity, God will provide for you. Luke 6:38 says, "Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use it will be measured back to you." 2 Corinthians 9:8 says, "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." Philippians 4:19 says, "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus." God will provide for you.

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### **B. GOD PROMISES DIVINE PROTECTION.**

Verse 11 says, "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 host." There are two promises in this verse. First, God promises protection from the foes of the harvest. "I will rebuke the devourer for you, so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil." Likewise, God promises protection from the failure of the harvest: "and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the lord of hosts." God provides and God protects. You are blessed when God gives what you do not have. And you are blessed when God sustains what you have. In Deuteronomy 8, Moses warns the children of Israel not to forget God after they enter the promised land of Canaan. They were to remember how God kept their shoes from wearing out during their wilderness wanderings. And for forty years, the hem of their garments never gave out. God sustained them. Divine blessing is not always a new car, big house, or better job. God also blessings by keeping the little bucket running or keeping your rent paid or sustaining you on that job you do not deserve or appreciate.

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### **C. GOD PROMISES DIVINE PLEASURES.**

Verse 12 says, "Then all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a land of delight, says the LORD of host." In verse 9, God declared the nation of Israel cursed. But if they worship through giving, God promises to so bless them that the nations will call them blessed. This is a promise you and I can stand on today. If you honor God with your money, God will so bless you people will know it was no one but God. And they won't have to be God-fearers, Bible readers, or churchgoers to come to this conclusion. When they look at your life, they'll know you are not where you are because of hard work, wise planning, or good luck. You are where you are because God have been good to you. Likewise, verse 12 promises Israel would be "a land of delight." This is an important promise. You see, if you are robbing God, God may still allow you to have a job, earn money, and pay your bills. But God has a way of

limiting your enjoyment of what you acquire by robbing him. Many rich people say they more money you have the more problems you have. They have money in the bank but no joy in their hearts. They have much to live with but little to live for. Why? God robs the robber. But when you worship through giving, God will not bless you and let you enjoy the blessings. Proverbs 10:22 says: "The blessings of the Lord makes rich, and he adds no sorrow with it."