

Giving: The Tithe and Beyond

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Bible Text: Malachi 3:1-12; 2 Corinthians 9:1-15

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When one of our ruling elders adds a little section to his report in the congregational report reminding us of what the Bible says in Malachi three about tithing, I am not so dense that I can't take a hint. And so I thought it would be good as something of a little P.S. to elder Warnocks' very fine and important words to take some time this morning to deal with the theme of giving the tithe and beyond.

And with that in mind, turn, please to the book of Malachi chapter three and you should not have a hard time finding Malachi. It is the last book of the Old Testament. While it was written about 450 years or so before Matthew was written, in your Bibles it is right before Matthew. Malachi and then chapter three.

I want to read verses one through 12. And, of course, the messenger here is the Lord Jesus himself, the preeminent messenger of the covenant.

Malachi chapter three and verse one.

“Behold, I send My messenger, And he will prepare the way before Me. And the Lord, whom you seek, Will suddenly come to His temple, Even the Messenger of the covenant, In whom you delight. Behold, He is coming,” Says the LORD of hosts.

But who can endure the day of His coming? And who can stand when He appears? For He is like a refiner's fire And like launderer's soap. He will sit as a refiner and a purifier of silver; He will purify the sons of Levi, And purge them as gold and silver, That they may offer to the LORD An offering in righteousness. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem Will be pleasant to the LORD, As in the days of old, As in former years. And I will come near you for judgment; I will be a swift witness Against sorcerers, Against adulterers, Against perjurers, Against those who exploit wage earners and widows and orphans, And against those who turn away an alien—Because they do not fear Me," Says the LORD of hosts. For I am the LORD, I do not change; Therefore you are not consumed, O sons of Jacob.

Yet from the days of your fathers You have gone away from My ordinances And have not kept them. Return to Me, and I will return to you," Says the LORD of hosts.

But you said, 'In what way shall we return?'

Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed Me!

But you say, 'In what way have we robbed You?'

In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in My house, And try Me now in this," Says the LORD of hosts, "If I will not open for you the windows of heaven And pour out for you such blessing That there will not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field," Says the LORD of hosts; And all nations will call you blessed, For you will be a delightful land," Says the LORD of hosts.

And instead of the text given in your bulletin, please turn to 2 Corinthians chapter nine. 2 Corinthians eight and nine are the two longest extended treatments of giving in the New Testament and there are many such treatments, but this is the longest and fullest. Let me just read 2 Corinthians chapter nine which I think gives the marrow of the New Testament teaching regarding giving.

Now concerning the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you; for I know your willingness, about which I boast of you to the Macedonians, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal has stirred up the majority. Yet I have sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this respect, that, as I said, you may be ready; lest if some Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to mention you!) should be ashamed of this confident boasting.

Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren to go to you ahead of time, and prepare your generous gift beforehand, which you had previously promised, that it may be ready as a matter of generosity and not as a grudging obligation.

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever."

Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness, while you are enriched in everything for all liberality, which causes thanksgiving through us to God. For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God, while, through the proof of this ministry, they glorify God for the obedience of your confession to the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal sharing with them and all men, and by their prayer for you, who long for you because of the exceeding grace of God in you. Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

The grass withers and the flowers do fade away, but the Word of our God stands forever.

Hymn number 637 which is from Psalm 116 gives you the main spring or, if you will in our day, this is the central processing unit of giving in the believer, 637.

Let's stand together and sing.

[singing]

Please be seated and turn back in your Bibles to Malachi chapter three.

Well, the Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver and I believe that the Lord loves a cheerful preacher about the subject of giving because I am, indeed, cheerful about it and I am going to tell you right at the outset why. The Bible says it is more blessed to give than to receive. If you are miserly, if you keep things to yourself, the tithe and beyond, then you are going to be a miserable person. It is, indeed, more blessed to give than to receive.

Today I want to deal with you with the subject of the tithe, yes, and beyond. I want to deal with the subject of the tithe. I want to open up this text in Malachi chapter three. I am not at all embarrassed to do it and I will look you square in the eye as I do it because it is part of the Word of God.

But I have other reasons for wanting to do that as well today.

Number one, giving is probably the main message of holy Scripture. It is about a God who gives. God loves a cheerful giver because God is a cheerful giver. He even cheerfully gave his only begotten Son that we might be delivered and made living sacrifices. It pleased the Lord to bruise his own Son to deliver his people.

There are over 2000 verses in the Scripture on money and possessions, 288 verses in the gospels alone deal with the same topic. That is approximately one tenth of the gospels. And 16 of the 38 parables deal with giving. But more than that, as I said again, probably the whole Bible deals with the theme of giving.

We do have many new people here as we have learned and not a few of you are new Christians and perhaps you have never been taught on the subject of the tithe. I want you to know from the Word of God clearly what it teaches. We are, as elders and as deacons concerned that we all be in obedience in this area because there are very definite repercussions. If you hold back the tithe you are robbing God. And I realize that is not a popular message today, but it is in the context of God saying, "I don't change," that he says, "If you don't tithe you are robbing God." You don't want the repercussions of that.

But, positively, the repercussions of a congregation that gives the tithe and beyond are what the Scriptures call a delightful land. There is a beauty of it beyond anything that we could imagine.

So there is a concern that we all be in obedience in this area because we want cheerful givers that we might enjoy the Lord's blessing. And one final reason is this, very simple. We have a congregational commitment to an annual budget and we have, beyond that annual budget, opportunities before us that are amazing, but they are going to take funds. And so for all of these reasons put together in the mix, today we are going to deal with the theme of the tithe, giving the tithe and beyond.

I have done this in different formats in the past, but I think it bears repeating today particularly because of newer people here who may be wondering about the topic. So let me deal with the matter in this way.

Number one, I want to give you five overarching principles and I want to tell you right at the outset that the fifth one is the most important. It is not going to be the one I spend most time on, but it is going to be the one that is most important and it is the fifth. And it will help you, perhaps, understand why the New Testament doesn't spend much time dealing with the subject of the tithe.

Number two, I want to deal with some very practical questions particularly about the tithe and I do that because I know that these have been addressed to the officers here, if not to me, to others. And this is a good forum for what would be called casuistry cases at that point.

And then, number three, not only do I want to give you an admonition from the Word of God, but I want to encourage you from the Word of God that you cannot out give God. That old line that you have heard in so many forms: There was a man, they called him mad. The more he gave, the more he had.

Well, the Scriptures do in so many ways teach that, that God will not be a debtor to any man and you cannot out give God.

So today giving the tithe, yes, but the tithe and beyond. Let's pray together.

Lord God, thank you that you so loved the world that you gave your only begotten Son. And, our Lord, whether it be Old Testament or New Testament, we are reading about a

giving God who knows himself it is more blessed to give than to receive for you, our Lord, can receive nothing from us. You give all things and you set a pattern for us. And so, our Lord, yes, we would understand what the Word of God teaches about the tithe, not encrusted with the ceremonies of Old Testament law, but as a basic standard of giving. But, Lord, show us way beyond that that everything we are, everything we do is to be given for the glory of your name and the good of others. And show us that it is so true, that it is more blessed to give than to receive. Hear us we pray in Christ's name. Amen.

Ok, five overarching principles. The first three are very quick. The fourth one is going to take more time. The fifth one is the most important. Five overarching principles.

Number one, everything you have is from God. Children, got it? Do you know that? Every little thing that you have is from God? Adults, do you know that? Have you gotten too big for that to realize it? Everything you have is from God.

The earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, the seas and all that they contain.

He gives you portions of those things to enjoy, but they are things from God.

1 Corinthians four and verse seven. "What do you have," Paul asks, "That you have not received?" Everything that you have is a gift that comes from God.

James one and verse 17, "Every good and every perfect gift comes from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness neither shadow of turning."

You would have nothing apart from the goodness, mercy, kindness, grace, love of God.

I saw people in the last week and a half that have next to nothing except the clothes on their back. The sovereignty of God put them there. We have such fine threads on our backs, such fine homes, such fine cars. It is all from God, folks.

So we begin with this above all else. First overarching principle: Everything you have is from God.

Number two, you are to use everything you receive to God's glory. And that is a given. Everything that you receive—that is everything you have, everything you are—you are to use to God's glory.

"Whether, therefore, you eat or drink or whatever you do, you do it all to the glory of God."

And we usually put that under the word "stewardship." We are to be stewards of everything that God gives us and that means we are to be stewards of everything. And I remind you that when you pay your bills you are using it to God's glory. You are to owe no man anything except to love one another. When you provide for your family you are

obeying God. If a man doesn't provide for his own he has denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.

And, folks, you are writing out your checks to pay your bills every week or doing it electronically for those of you more sophisticated one. That is a holy calling. You are doing that to God's glory. You are planning a budget. You are writing out your checks to give in church. Your wise use of possessions. Everything is done to God's glory and it is holy.

So that is the second overarching principle. You are to use everything you receive to God's glory.

Third overarching principle: God is particularly glorified by giving specifically to the work of his Church and his kingdom. The third overarching principle: God is particularly glorified, not just by paying your bills, but by giving specifically to the work of his Church and of his kingdom.

That's Psalm 96. That is kind of funny when we sing it this way because it ends, "And bring an offering." But it is done in the context of worship.

Give to the Lord the glory due to his name. Bring an offering and come into his courts in the worship of God. God isn't embarrassed.

Preachers are very often embarrassed they will say. Well, we don't have an offering here. We have a little box in the back. It is non-descript and we are very holy because we never mention an offering.

Well, I guess God isn't very holy because he mentions the offering. Come into his courts and bring an offering, he says. He is particularly glorified by the way God's people bring their tithes and their offerings, their widow's mites and so forth into his house. He is not embarrassed to plow an Exodus 35 in the Scriptures in which God's people give more than enough for the building of the temple. He is not wondering if old generations are going to wonder if God is a closet Communist by putting in Acts chapter two in which God's people have all things in common, giving to one another. He is not embarrassed about that, because God is particularly glorified when his people give specifically to the work of his Church and the work of his kingdom.

So those are the first three overarching principles. They are quick. Now the fourth one.

The basic standard of giving established by God is always the tithe. I want this to sink in. Some of you have been taught that the tithe is part of the Old Testament law, the old covenant that is passing away even as the glory passed away from Moses' face. And even to speak of the tithe today is to put people, once again, under a yoke of terrible bondage.

That is not true. The basic standard of giving established by God before the law and

confirmed by Christ himself is always the tithe. Now with that, turn please, to Malachi chapter three if you are not there already. Malachi chapter three.

Notice that this is in a context, verses one through three, of Christ himself coming to refine his people. He is going to be as a refiner of silver. He is going to purify the sons of Levi, that is his true Israel within and without. He is going to purge them as gold and silver that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness.

And then God, once again, rebukes the people for all of their sins. He bears down on them and he says that they do not fear him, says the Lord. I don't change he says. And that is a two edged sword. I am insistent in my demands of holiness, but I am also unchanging in my mercy. Therefore, he says, you are not consumed.

But he goes back. From the days of your father you have gone away from my ordinances. You haven't kept them. He gets to the very heart of the matter. And ye says to them, "Now, the nerve of all that I have said, return to me and I will return to you," says the Lord of hosts.

Now the people say, "In what way do we return to you? What is the basic way?"

And that is the word I want you to get here? What is the most basic, most elementary, most fundamental way that we return to you?

Now God asks a question. Would you defraud God? Would you steal from anybody? I hope you wouldn't. You are certainly not going to steal from somebody who sees you steal. You shouldn't steal anyway. God knows all things. So you don't steal from him.

This is the God who says, "I don't change."

And I think don't change means I don't change from Old to New Testaments. I don't change. And I am asking you. Are you going to rob God?

He says, "You have robbed me." And it is a very strong word. The word means defraud. "You have defrauded me."

Now, of course the people say, "How have we robbed you?"

God says, "In tithes and in offerings."

Now let's think about the tithe for a moment. Don't turn there, but the concept of it is given in Numbers 18, briefly in Deuteronomy 12 and in a more extensive way in Deuteronomy 14.

The tithe was the established standard, the basic standard of giving even before the law.

Now look with me, please, in Genesis chapter 14. I remind you that in the New Testament Abraham is called a father of the faithful. We are to walk in the footsteps of Abraham.

Genesis 14 and verse 18 through 20 and this prefiguring of Christ and his victory and this one who—as we read it here—has no beginning and no ending, this mysterious figure of Melchizedek King of Salem brings out bread and wine, a forerunner of the supper of our Lord. He was the priest of God most high even as Christ is the great high priest. He blesses Abram and says, “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your enemies into your hand.” This great victory that has come to Abram as he wages war against pagan leaders and delivers his nephew Lot is acknowledged to be a great victory of this prince of peace, this king of peace Melchisedec. And it is a glorious prefiguring of our Lord who has ascended on high and led captivity captive and led captive a host of captives and given gifts to men. All of these things are given to Abram as a prefiguring of gospel blessing.

And he, that is Abram, gave him a tithe of all. And Hebrews seven develops that in different ways, not germane to our purpose today. For our purpose simply this. No argument. I don't know why Abram knew he should do it. It is the first reference to tithe in the Bible. But he did know it. And it is not the Mosaic economy, folks. This is the one in whose footsteps we are to walk. And he just very naturally gave a tithe of everything.

Again, why he did it, where he was taught this, how it was embedded in his conscience, I don't know the answer. But he did it. And it is done in a context of a beautiful figure of this whole gospel era by a man who is a pattern for our own faith.

Now a second example, pre Moses, Genesis 28 and verse 20 through 22.

In another beautiful, pre figuring of gospel blessing Genesis 28 and verse 20 Jacob has been met by the Lord God at Bethel, a house of God. God has given promises to him and has appeared to him and Jacob gives this response in his lawful worship, Genesis 28 and verse 18. He rises early in the morning, takes the stone that he has put at his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it and anointing. He called the name of that place Bethel, that is a house of God. Bu the name of that city had been Luz previously.

There is a sanctifying of an ordinary place, even as this building, as it were, sanctifies this area by being a house of God. But the area hasn't changed in itself, so Luz became a Bethel. It was a place of God, a place of worship. And Jacob makes a vow, which is an aspect of worship saying, “If God will be with me, part of covenant promise, and keep me in this way that I am going and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on so that I come back to my father's house in peace, in the fullness of shalom, in the fulness of blessing, then the Lord shall be my God. And this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall be God's house. And of all that you give me...” Notice it is all of that you give me. “Of all that you give me I will surely, without any doubt, no question about it, give a tenth to you.”

Now, folks, this is pre law. It is in a worship context. It is in a gospel context if you will because God has come down to Jacob not based on his merit, but because of God's grace. And as a response of worship for whatever reason Jacob says, "I will give a tenth of everything to the Lord."

Now Leviticus chapter 27, now we are in the Mosaic covenant, a particular administration of law in the Old Testament, not that grace was absent, but law was dominant. Leviticus chapter 27 and verse 30.

"And all the tithe of the land..." Leviticus, right before Numbers, Leviticus 27 verse 30. "And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the LORD'S. It is holy to the LORD," which means it is separated unto the Lord. If you take it away you are stealing.

Now, Old Testament Mosaic economy. First fruits, the first that came from your wheat, your barley, your grain. That wasn't a tithe. It was to be given to the Lord anyway completely. I don't know how much first fruits was, but first fruits was to go and then after that you had a tithe, a 10 percent of all of your grain that was to go to maintain the Levites. Then, periodically, there was another 10th that you were to give that was to go to the Levites for part of their feasts that they were to enjoy. Incidentally the Levites were to take their tithe and give it to the priests, so they weren't vacated from the tithe either. And then once every three year you had another tithe that was to be given for the widows and the orphans.

So you have a tithe principle is embedded in the Old Testament and certainly some of that doesn't apply in particulars today. I mean, we don't come to you every three years and say, "Now, folks, it is a third year and you have got to give an added 10th for widows and orphans."

We are not commanded to do that in the Scriptures, but the context of the tithe itself is taken up in the law under this principle. The tithe is holy. The tithe is holy. It is not properly giving. It is payment. It is holy unto the Lord. Not to tithe is to steal. Now that is what is said in Malachi chapter three.

Now people say this. "But, it is the New Testament and Malachi was 400 years before the New Testament."

Look at Matthew 23 and verse 23. One text in the New Testament, this one, very clearly shows that our Lord never abrogated the principle of the tithe, but reinforced.

"I did not come to destroy the law, but to fulfill it, to show it in its full meaning. Yes, your ancients have said many things about the tithe and I say to you.... but I don't abrogate the law. I fulfill it."

Now Matthew 23 and verse 23.

“Woe to you scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites. Yes, you pay tithes of everything. You pay tithes of mint, the mint leaves that you grow. And anise, the little seed that grows.”

That anise, for you children, tastes like licorice. If you don't like licorice you wouldn't like anise. It was a small black seed. And cumin was a dusty kind of a thing that you would get as a spice so it goes from small to smaller to smallest and he says, “You tithe these very small things. And you have neglected the weightier things of the law: justice and mercy and faith.”

Now note what Jesus says. “These weightier things you ought to have done and skipped the tithe of these other things.”

That is not what he says. “These you ought to have done: law, speaking of justice and mercy and faith. Those should be the dominating throbbing concerns so that you don't strain at a gnat and swallow a camel. But you ought not to leave the other undone.”

And for the religious leaders that was part of their payments, spices. That was their income and they were right to be diligent about that.

But, folks, if you think you tithe and you are ok with God, you are just like the scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites. But if you think you are very pious and you don't tithe, you are not listening to Jesus.

“These things you ought to have done. The weightier matters of the law, but not left cheerfulness regarding the tithe of all.”

Now I say, again, brothers and sisters, this is our Lord Jesus Christ who reaffirms this part of law in Old Testament teaching. And that is very clear.

Now there is another, that admittedly, is a bit less clear, but I think is persuasive in the context.

In 1 Corinthians nine and verse 13.

“Do you not know that those who minister the holy things eat of the things of the temple, and those who serve at the altar partake of the offerings of the altar?”

Now Paul is not speaking about the Old Testament temple and the Old Testament altar because he says, “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

He is using an analogy of the Old Testament to be sure by saying, indeed, the Levites, those who minister the holy things eat the things of the temple, given to them as a tithe. Those who serve at the altar, that is the Levites and the priests, partake of the things of

the altar, or the tithes in particular. But that becomes an analogy for what is done in the church.

“Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.”

Even so, in the same way...

Jew or Gentile familiar with the Old Testament knew that the way the people at the altar were compensated, provided for, was the tithe. And Paul uses a very strong parallel here.

“Even so...” In the same way as tithe made provision for the holy things to eat the things of the temple and made provision for those that served at the altar to partake of the things of the altar, in the same way the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel, how, by way of analogy, the tithes and the offerings of God’s people. Otherwise, what is the standard? What is the standard of giving?

Now go back to Malachi chapter three.

Notice that there is consequences for disobedience, verse nine. “You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed Me, Even this whole nation.”

Verse 11. “I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field,” Says the LORD of hosts.”

The Lord basically says this. You don’t give the tithe. You steal from me. I am going to get restitution. And any of the old commentators who have treated this text—you can read them—have said that is exactly what happened. You didn’t give the tithe. The Lord caused their crops not to grow. The Lord caused the vine to fail to bear fruit in the field. The devourer came perhaps by way of locusts or by way of plague, but the point was God cut his tithe by restitution.

Is there contemporary ways that could be done? And I am not speaking in individual cases, but you have got to ask. Ill health, machinery breakdown, business failures, in this case the loss of influence of the church in the world because the Lord says, “All nations are going to call you blessed. You will be delightful.” And they weren’t blessed and they were not regarded as a delightful land, because they hadn’t given what was God’s due.

So another way of saying this. See, everyone tithes because God is not going to be robbed. But are you going to do consciously or unconsciously? Are you going to do it as a cheerful giver or under the devourer?

One man said, “No man can rob God without starving his own soul.”

Proverbs 11:24. “There is one who withholds more than is right, But it leads only to poverty.”

Let me put it this way. This is what we tell our children. You have heard this, Elizabeth. You can't afford not to tithe. See? You can't afford not to tithe because, listen, restitution in the Old Testament is always more than what you stole. See?

Now I am going to say this at the risk of overstatement. This is under the rubric of God saying, “I don't change. I don't change.” And if the tithe is not part only of law but it is pre law situation reaffirmed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

In Verse 10 the Lord gives the procedure for the tithe. He says, “Bring all the tithes...” Again, that language, all of it into the storehouses. And without spending any unnecessary time on this today I strongly, firmly believe that the equivalent of that is the local church. Listen, listen, listen. A local church that is under lawful biblical government.

There are so many entities that call themselves churches that are simply the fruit of some person that gets an idea and a soap box. And if we are going to act responsibly, the tithe is to be given to local churches under lawful government.

Notice that the tithe is to be given, he says, into the storehouse. It is to be that there might be food in my house, my house.

What does the New Testament say the house of God is? 1 Timothy 3:15. “I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God,” which is not the para church. Campus Crusade for Christ is not the house of God. The house of God is the church of the living God, the house of God which is the pillar and ground of the truth. And, again, for that reason, because the storehouse here is linked in verse 10 with my house commentators of various denominations, various backgrounds have said the equivalent today is the giving to the local church.

That is why if you look at 1 Corinthians 16 and verse one Paul uses the New Testament equivalent of the term used in the Greek Old Testament for storehouse, 1 Corinthians 16:1. “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, in store,” literally in store, “as he may prosper, that there be no collections when I come.”

And so at least it seems here Paul is putting his imprimatur on the concept that the local church is that place today in which the tithe is to come. And remember in Acts four, why I say lawful government. The disciples came and they brought their money and put it at the feet of the apostles. Why at their feet? Under their government, under lawful, biblical government.

And here is the other reason I say that. They laid their money at the apostles' feet. And there are today preachers and they love to have money laid at their feet. This is the apostle Paul who in penning 2 Corinthians eight and nine under the inspiration said, "We provide all things honorable in the sight of all men that we might be blamed by nobody at all."

And yet we are persnickety about our finances here. Do you want to see the budget? We are very glad to show it to you. We don't have anything to hide. You want to see where we spent in this church last year? We have nothing to hide. God forbid it should ever be anything other than that. Under lawful biblical government that is to be given.

And notice the encouragement in Malachi three verse 10, the last part. "Try me now in this." It is amazing God says, "Prove me." Otherwise God would say that is a condemned thing to do.

Deuteronomy six and verse 16, "You shall not put the Lord your God to a test."

Here he says, "Put me to the test. I the Lord who don't change. Say, put me to the test and see if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it. I will open the windows of heaven."

It is the same term used in Genesis 7:11 where the Lord opened up the heavens and inundated the earth with water. The Lord says, "Now, in the grace that comes I will inundate you with the blessings of God's grace. There won't be room enough for it and there will be blessing on the land and I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field so that the Lord of hosts and all nations will call you blessed, for you will be a delightful land," says the Lord of hosts.

There are not only benefits individually, but corporately. In other words, you will be a place known in delight.

I am ashamed that I have to use this as an example, but I have got to use it. I don't agree with the Mormon practice of the enforced tithe. I don't believe it is to be enforced in that way in the church. They do it in the Mormon church. They get their tithe. Is it any wonder that Americans are amazed at what those people do? They are seen... falsely to be sure, but they are seen on the surface... they are a people that provide for their widows. They provide for their orphans. They don't ask for money. They don't ask for welfare. They don't go to the federal government. They provide schools.

And people say, "That's amazing."

And that is what the Lord says he will do for his people if they give as they are pushed and promoted by grace. And it is corporate blessing here.

But, people say, “Ok, that is not necessarily a promise of individual blessing.”

There’s other promises of individual blessing. Proverbs three and verse nine and following, “Honor the Lord with your possessions and with the first fruits of all your increase so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine.”

Proverbs 11:25, “The generous soul will be made rich and he who waters will also be watered himself.”

2 Corinthians 9:6, “He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.”

Luke six and verse 38. “Give and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure you use it will be measured back to you.”

Do you believe that? Then how generous are you? That is what I said, folks. If you are miserly you are hurting yourself. And I am not saying this incidentally as a church that is out crying for money. Please, thank God for his provision for us. This is what the Word of God says. The Bible is a book about giving.

Look at 1 Timothy six and verses 17 through 19. “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty.” Why? “Because it is the Lord who gives it to you to make wealth, nor to trust in uncertain riches.”

He doesn’t say it is wrong to have riches, but he says don’t trust in uncertain riches. Why does he say uncertain riches? Have you seen how mutual funds have gone up and down? You see how contemporary the Bible is?

“...but in the living God who gives us richly all things to enjoy.”

That is the first overarching principle. Everything comes from God. Let them do good that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Folks, Jesus isn’t against investments. But he is against bad investments. I am going to put every single thing I can into my mutual fund, my common stock, my house, my property. I am going to secure my inheritance.

Let me ask you a question. How many U-hauls have you seen hitched to hearses? Have you ever seen one? My dear brothers and sisters, have you been deluded by they world that tells you that this world is all there is? We want to invest ourselves in things that are going to last, wood and stone... it is not.

But the kingdom is never going to be destroyed.

And the Lord says, “Lay hold on eternal life. Where your treasures are, there your heart will be.” And it is beautiful the way that works.”

You say, “Well, my heart is with the glory of the kingdom of God. I am going to give.”

And then you give and your heart is ever more with the glory of the kingdom of God because the Bible is a book about giving. And, see [?] preachers and they will abuse that principle in so many ways. Well, the abuse of a principle doesn't take away the legitimate use the principle. The Bible says that it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Now, that is the one I spent most time on, but the last overarching principle is the most important. Scripture always assume giving above and beyond the tithe.

You see, the tithe is the base. It always assumes giving above and beyond the tithe. Why? What is grace? Grace makes a living sacrifice. It doesn't just make priests. It makes altars. And as the priest offered up everything to the Lord that is what Christ does to you, folks. And so the tithe is foundation in which literally every thing is given.

And so in Acts two and verse 45, another text that we are going to see in Acts, the disciples lacked no good thing and because they gave generously just because of what they are.

And it is very interesting when you are in, for example, an African country. You can tell I was just there. There is a term called alms, ok, alms. And you give alms. There is widows on the street and they are legitimate widows. They have lost their husbands in this case in the war with Ethiopia and you give them alms. It comes from the Greek word mercy. And it is true. You are showing mercy to them, not just by say saying, “May the Lord be merciful to you,” you are helping them out.

Christians who are born of almighty mercy become people of almighty mercy and they become people who give generously to minister to others. The Scripture always assumes giving above and beyond the tithe.

Now why do I say that?

People say, “Well, in the New Testament the Bible talks about giving proportionately, giving generously and so.”

That is true, but it always assumes the tithe. The Bible basically teaches this, folks. You give everything when you are converted. Everything is the Lord's. It just begins with the tithe.

Now, very quickly some practical questions. Number one, where should my tithe go? I think we have addressed that. The local church, I think, is the biblical answer there.

But what about offerings beyond the tithe? Well, there are so many other wonderful projects, building for eternity, to which we contribute, seminaries and Christian schools and crisis pregnancy centers and other things that are not church.

But, brothers and sisters, what a privilege to have so many good entities so that beyond the tithe to the local church we can help others. Now, when you get to that point and you can give, you might want to ask for some suggestions because there are so many groups that want your money and we do try to steer you in wise directions.

Tithe to the church. Offerings go elsewhere. All are part, though, of our worship of the Lord God.

Should it be gross or net on which we tithe? Well, the Bible says all the tithe. You tithe everything and Jesus doesn't rebuke that sensitivity to tithing. Everything that comes in, every bit of money that comes in, every gift that comes. What a joy it is as a family to say, even if it is a gift and not income how can we use this to further the Lord's kingdom?

Well, we are not Pharisees to do that so long as we don't neglect the weightier matters of the law.

What if I am unemployed? Well, pray that you get work because that is part of the purpose of work.

Ephesians 4:28, "Let everyone work with his own hands that he might," listen, "Give to him who has need." Yourself, your family and others.

What about giving when I am in debt? And this one has come up with our officers frequently? Folks, you are always in debt to God. You should pay with a creditor who has the first claim. You always pay the creditor who has got first claim and Jesus has it.

I am sorry that is a rude awakening for you, but Mastercard isn't first creditor. And if it is, then you have got another problem because the Bible says, "Owe no man anything, save to love one another."

It is an injustice to steal from one creditor to pay another.

Let me tell you how our deacons have resolved dealing with this one because as the deacons help people with their finances, especially comes up. We can't tithe because we are in debt.

And here is the answer they give. Now, you need to tithe what you make and then we will work with you to help you get your debts paid off. And that is the answer you are going to get from the deacons in this church because that is a biblical answer. You don't rob God.

Should I make up my tithe that I haven't paid?

Well, I don't want to be facetious but God probably already has made them up in one way or another. Repentance means start right now.

What about children and tithing?

Yes, that is part of your household government. Teach your children to tithe on their allowance, on their income for shoveling snow or the paper routes or whatever else. Certainly that is part of raising your children in the ways of the Lord.

Or this answer. I don't believe in the tithe. It all belongs to God.

That is an evasion. Why, if that is the case, is the average among protestants in giving two percent of their income? It all belongs to God. What did you do with the other 98 percent? And even among fundamentalists those who believe the Bible, six percent. What about the other 94 percent?

Among cults, eight percent.

Now that is an evasion. You want to use that argument at the door, it is an evasion. I don't have enough faith. Then you are not in the Word of God enough to see how great your God is to provide you.

Please don't say you don't have enough faith. If you don't have enough faith go to the means of grace which is the Word of God and he will show you how big your God is to provide for you.

Then, very quickly, admonitions and encouragements. Admonition. Don't rob God. Ultimately, you are going to rob yourself. The real test of your loyalty, the tithe, is holy unto the Lord. Don't rob God who doesn't change. That is the admonition.

Encouragements, thank God for weekly reminders that Christ is Lord of your life. He puts the sabbath in the calendar and he makes it very easy to figure 10 percent of your income. And those are blessed reminders. The Lord is the Lord of my life. The calendar, checkbook confirm that.

Deuteronomy 14 and verse 23, "You tithe that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always."

Isn't that true. It is a reminder from week to week. I walk before God in fearing him.

And encouragement number two, you share in spreading the gospel and that is great.

The Republican or the Democratic national committee or the liberal party or the conservative party or the Libertarian, we have given up on count on all these people that call and ask for money for their political parties. And there may be legitimate place for

that. Those parties are going to be destroyed. You give 25, 50 bucks, 100 bucks, relative value and yet kingdom of God will never be destroyed. What a great investment that is. You share in spreading the gospel and, folks, I am just going to be real blunt. God will bless you. It is more blessed to give than to receive.

See me, test me, prove me if I won't pour out blessing upon you.

Final encouragement, delightful land. I will make you a delightful land. Let me give you an example of what I think that means. And I am sure there will be similar examples once the dust has settled from tsunami relief, but last year... actually the year was 2003 because it was December that it happened.

Remember Iran was ravaged by an earthquake and there was a little window where Iran was crying for any help it could get. A church with which I have some familiarity in the Midwest in which people give very generously, their deacons prayed about what to do and in that window of time the church rented a Lear jet. They got their doctors, it is a large church. They got their doctors and their nurses on a Lear jet. They got them into Iran and they presented the gospel to people in that window that they had because those people had given faithfully and they returned back and were thrilled that they were able to do things others couldn't, why? Because they had been faithful in their giving and they could do it.

Now, that is just a little example of, I think, what is in view by delightful land, these kinds of blessings of the Lord.

Brothers and sisters, tithing won't save you, only Christ who gave everything to save you. Thank God for the act of obedience of Christ. We trust in him. But I will say this. If you are a Christian the meaning is that you are going to give everything.

You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich yet for sakes he became poor that you, through his poverty, might become rich. And if Christ's grace is in you, you will say, "Lord, give me more that I might give more. Lord, let me increase the tithe. Let me give on every occasion. Let me cut back upon things so I can invest in what really lasts."

Why? Because it is the spirit of the whole Bible that is in you that is a gift.

I do not want to leave this up in the air. Brothers and sisters, my dear friends I want to command you in the name of the Lord that you begin this week. Repent if you don't tithe. It is in aorist tense. It means stop what you are doing wrong and do what is right. Ten percent of your income, saying, right at the outset, not mine. You write out the check this week. Ten percent... it is not mine. If you want to use it this way, say it is a tax, not from the church, but from Christ and I am Christ's subject.

I read years ago, I have a hard time believing it, but I guess it is true that in the early part of the 20th century when the United States income tax came into being, whether it was 1917 or whatever, people were thankful that they could pay their income tax.

April 15th is coming up. We may not say that now, but the point was they were thankful to be in the United States of America and they could pay their tax. Are you thankful to be part of the kingdom of God?

Jesus said, "The tithe is mine."

Place your tithe envelope with other bills. Remember, God is the first creditor and remember it is better to live on nine tenths of your income with the blessing of God than ten tenths under his curse.

And you are going to say, again, "But, preacher, that is Old Testament."

God says, "I don't change. I don't change."

Jesus, "These things you ought to have done and not left the other undone."

Make it a family discipline. Godly generation to raise your children to tithe in the name of the Lord. And one old writer said, "No man ever yet lost anything by serving God with a whole heart or gained anything by serving him with only half of one."

Teach that to your children.

My friend, you are going to learn tonight, next week, if you serve God with half a heart that makes God's stomach sick, hot or cold, but our God demands our heart for all that he has done. And then watch God bless.

"I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes. I will open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will not be room enough to receive it." And I submit to you. That promise, too, is yes and Amen in Christ our King who is the same yesterday, today and even forever.

Let's pray together.

Lord, teach us that we don't get to heaven by tithing, the same way we don't get to heaven by any other of our imperfect works. We don't go to heaven by tithing. And, Lord, don't let us be like the Pharisees who get so focused on tithing that we neglect the weightier matters of law and gospel, love and mercy and grace and kindness. Remind us, Father, that the whole Bible is about giving, that a living sacrifice is one given, burning for the glory of God. Lord, show us in practical day to day, week by week decisions that we make many terrible investments. But, Lord, if we don't take what you claim and give beyond that for a kingdom that will not end, then, Lord, we are very, very deceived people.

But then show us, too, our Lord, that we can't out give God. Show us what it is to be a delightful land, to know that we have an abundance, that we might give for the spreading of an everlasting kingdom in all of the world. And, Lord, in very practical ways, for us and for our children, even this week, show us that truth that Paul left for the Ephesian elders that it is, indeed, more blessed to give than to receive. In short, our Lord, give us the mind an the heart and the will of Christ who did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many. Amen.

Hymn number 434, *Lord, thou Loves a Cheerful Giver*. If there is any hymn that catches the spirit of giving, tithe and beyond it is this one, 434.

Let's stand together and be cheerful givers as you sing.

[singing]

I will look forward to seeing you all tonight at six o'clock. We will resume, God willing, the series on the book of Revelation. Be here right at six because I want you to hear some of the ways the Lord answered your prayers. Please take time to get to know visitors who are with us here that you may not know and if it is your first time with us, sign the guest register and don't forget to take a copy of *Banner of Truth* magazine. I always feel like a parent telling his children when they go out the door before they go to school all the things that they need. But most of all, not what you need, or what you need to do. Go forth under the blessing of Christ the king. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, yes, and amen, King of kings, be with you all and God's people said together, "Amen."