

“THE GIFT OF GIVING”

“Releasing God’s Blessings”

Scripture Reading – Malachi, 3:6-12

“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you”, says the LORD Almighty.

“But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’ Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’

“In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this”, says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

“I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit”, says the LORD Almighty. “Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land”, says the LORD Almighty.

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this”, says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”

Malachi, 3:10, NIV

Malachi was preaching to second generation believers.

Around ninety years earlier, there had been a great revival in Jerusalem. Ezra had rebuilt the Temple while, a few years later, Nehemiah had rebuilt the City Walls. Together, they went about restoring the spiritual heritage and life to the nation of Israel. God was truly evident. It was a time of revival. There was a real sense of the Lord's presence.

‘Nehemiah the governor, Ezra the priest and scribe, and the Levites who were instructing the people said to them all, “This day is sacred to the LORD your God. Do not mourn or weep”. For all the people had been weeping as they listened to the words of the Law. Nehemiah said, “Go and enjoy choice food and sweet drinks, and send some to those who have nothing prepared. This day is sacred to our Lord. Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength”. The Levites calmed all the people saying, “Be still, for this is a sacred day. Do not grieve”. Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them.’

Nehemiah, 8:9-12, NIV

But, ninety years on, all that had changed... Only vague memories of yesteryear survived. People would speak of the great glories of a bygone era. But now God seemed strangely silent, and the people wondered if God had left them again.

Perhaps they would have easily identified with the words of the song...

We have conquered in times that are past.

And have scattered the foe from the field.

William Hodgson, SASB 820:2a

The worst kind of famine is when we no longer hear the words of the Lord.

“The days are coming, when I will send a famine through the land – not a famine of food or a thirst for water, but a famine of hearing the words of the Lord.”

Amos, 8:11, NIV

As a result, the worship and service of God's people were severely affected.

It became a non-event...

“A son honours his father, and a servant his master. If I am a father, where is the honour due to me? If I am a master, where is the respect due to me?” says the LORD Almighty. “It is you, O priests, who show contempt for my name.

“But you ask, ‘How have we shown contempt for your name?’ You place defiled food on my altar.

“But you ask, ‘How have we defiled you?’ “By saying that the LORD’S table is contemptible. When you bring blind animals for sacrifice, is that not wrong? When you sacrifice crippled or diseased animals, is that not wrong? Try offering them to your governor! Would he be pleased with you? Would he accept you?” says the LORD Almighty. “Now implore God to be gracious to us. With such offerings from your hands, will he accept you?” – says the LORD Almighty.’

Malachi, 1:6-9, NIV

Worship had become unacceptable and God had already passed judgement!

“Oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you,” says the LORD Almighty, “and I will accept no offering from your hands”.

Malachi, 1:10, NIV

Empty worship is not pleasing to God. He was angry with the priests and the people.

The people failed to truly worship – they were satisfied with bringing defiled sacrifices.

The priests failed in their duty to uphold God's standards – they let the people do it.

“I HAVE LOVED YOU” – even in this situation, even during these times.

“I DO NOT CHANGE” – The Covenant is still in effect – “You know that I love you!”

In God's Covenant, there are rewards for obedience and curses for disobedience.

“RETURN TO ME, AND I WILL RETURN TO YOU” – is it not a familiar promise to you and me?

King David had to return to God. He had committed grievous sins in II Samuel, Ch. 11. Psalms, 51 gives us King David's response. A prayer for true repentance and restoration.

'Restore unto me the joy of your salvation, and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.'

Psalms, 51:12, NIV

Note that the fallen King did not pray for a restoration of his salvation – he had not lost it. But, David had lost the joy of the presence and the power of God in his life.

*Are you experiencing the joy of God's salvation? Do you feel his presence, his power?
Are you really, truly, content with your relationship with God?*

Perhaps you are asking the question, "How do I return?"

Let me ask you a question. "Do you tithe?"

You may now be asking, "What has tithing got to do with it?"

According to Malachi, tithing may have everything to do with it!

"Return to me, and I will return to you", says the LORD Almighty.

"But you ask, 'How are we to return?' Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse – the whole nation of you – because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it."

Malachi, 3:7-10, NIV

"THE PRINCIPLES OF TITHING"

'A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.'

Leviticus, 27:30, NIV

*God declares that the tithe is already his – it belongs to the Lord.
God puts you on honour to pay him your tithe – it is in your possession.
God demands that you bring the whole tithe into the storehouse.*

I recognise that 'TITHING' is a very sensitive subject to preach about.

It is never easy to approach the subject of 'GIVING' without the fear of reaction. It seems that whenever the subject is brought up, folk naturally become defensive because it is seen as an attack upon their personal finances. When the matter is 'TITHING' – the giving to God of 10% of our income – people can become quite vociferous in their objections. I realise that, in presenting his teaching in this way, I face the danger of becoming one of the most unpopular Commanding Officers in the long history of the Malton Corps. Truth be told: I could live with that, but I could not live with my ignoring God's clear word to me on this matter.

WHAT ARE MY MOTIVES?

Remember, that this word challenged me first!

I thoroughly believe that God wants us to sort this potentially problem area out now!

It is my duty to teach you this... **Why?**

Because I do not want to be classed like the priests in Malachi's day.

Because you want me to have integrity and preach the whole gospel!

To make sure that the future of the Malton Corps is the very best that it can be!

WHAT IS TITHING?

Simply, it is the giving to God of the first tenth, 10%, of my total income.

He demands from us the first tenth and the best tenth – before anything is taken out – that includes national insurance and income tax (for those of us who are employed).

If your income is £500 per month, God's tithe is £50 per month.

If your pension is £80 per week, God's tithe is £8 per week.

If your pocket-money (young people) is £10 per week, God's tithe is £1 per week.

"YOU ARE RIGHT, IT'S JUST WHAT THEY NEED!"

Of course, it does not take a University Education to come up with some excuses...

TITHING IS THE LAW, AND WE ARE NOT UNDER LAW, WE'RE UNDER GRACE

This frequent excuse is based on a misunderstanding of Scriptural truth.

There are many who argue (all of them do not tithe, of course) that as tithing is part of the Law of Moses, and Paul writes that we are no longer under Law, we are under grace, then we are no longer required to give to God a tenth of our income.

In reality, the practice of tithing has its roots at the commencement of man's encounters with God, centuries before the Law was given to Moses on Mount Sinai.

'Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine. He was priest of God Most High, and he blessed Abram, saying, "Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand". Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything.'

Genesis, 14:18-20, NIV

'Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will watch over me on this journey I am taking and will give me food to eat and clothes to wear so that I return safely to my father's house, then the LORD will be my God and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God's house, and of all that you give me I will give you a tenth".'

Genesis, 28:20-22, NIV

'THE LAW ENSHRINED THE PRINCIPLE, BUT THE PRINCIPLE PREDATED THE LAW.'

Murder has always been illegal. It is one of The Ten Commandments. It is the Law. When Cain killed his brother Abel, we saw that the act of murder was a sin in the sight of God.

Jesus endorsed the principle of tithing, and we would do well to heed his words.

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy and faithfulness. You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.”

Matthew, 23:23, NIV

EVERYTHING I HAVE BELONGS TO GOD ANYWAY

This is the idea that we are stewards of everything that God has given to us.

Of course, people can still use this as an excuse not to tithe. There is a simple test to see whether or not our giving is as it should be. What if we issued you a receipt at the end of 2006 which clearly stated how much you gave in your cartridge giving for the whole year. If you were to multiply that sum by ten, would it equal your income for the year. My experience of giving within the Salvation Army is that many soldiers who believe they give really well, give poorly!

God demands that we bring him the whole tithe.

If you are tempted to wonder if you need to be that exact about it, then consider this. What if you obeyed the law for all but one day of the year and murdered someone on a bad day. Would the courts allow you to get away with your crime because you were so good the rest of the year? What if you obeyed the commandment ‘THOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY’ for 364 days, but one day, you lapsed in your integrity and broke the commandment. Would God say it was okay? Do you think your spouse will?

I AM A SPECIAL CASE. GOD UNDERSTANDS MY CIRCUMSTANCES

Chances are that if you think you are a special case, the person sitting next to you is thinking that they are as well. This excuse is prevalent in many people's thinking.

I am in debt; I could not possibly tithe.

I am not working; I am only getting a small allowance that does not go far.

I am on a pension; I have already done my bit, let someone else do it.

I already spend it in lots of different ways. Being a member of The Salvation Army is a very costly business.

The reality is that there are no exceptions: **God does not bend the rules for anyone!**

I GIVE IT ELSEWHERE – TO MISSIONS... ETC....

God says... **“BRING THE WHOLE TITHE TO THE STOREHOUSE”.**

God does not say... **“MAIL THE WHOLE TITHE TO...”.**

If you are deciding what your tithe should be spent on then by definition, it is not a tithe and you are not tithing, no matter how well-meaning your intentions may be.

You should bring your tithe with you to the place where you worship.

In Malachi's day, the storehouse was in the temple. The temple was the place for worship and sacrifice. If you do not get this truth in mind, you will miss out upon the many blessings that God promises to you.

God does make an important distinction between ‘TITHES’ and ‘OFFERINGS’.

As the whole tithe belongs to God by right, it should be treated as ‘hot money’. Perhaps you should see it as given to you only long enough for you to return it. The offering is what you give him out of the other 90% that is left after you pay your tithe. The tithe is not an offering, and the offering is not a tithe. You cannot offer to God something which belongs to God already!

“TO TITHE, OR NOT TO TITHE...”



WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I START TO TITHE?

You will sense real peace as obedience to the Word of God brings its own reward.

The 90% will go much further than the 100% ever did because there is a strange economy within the Kingdom of God.

Your needs will always be provided because you can never out-give God.

The windows of heaven will be opened to you meaning that God will be so real to you, so close. You will experience many spiritual blessings in Christ, and he will give you more than you can possibly ask or imagine.



WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF I DON'T TITHE?

You will be constantly ‘short’. You will be no better off when you rob God. The reality here is that you will receive no benefit.

God will not allow you to get away with it. He will collect it anyway. The problem here is that the church will receive no benefit.

“YOU ARE UNDER A CURSE” *This is a dreadful thought, and not the kind of politically correct language we like to hear nowadays. Your Christian life will be powerless, and your experience of God will be like that of the ‘second generation’ believers of Malachi's day. Hearing of other situations, perhaps long ago, but never experiencing them yourself.*



WHAT IF I AM THE ONLY ONE TO TITHE?

You are not the only one. Some people here today bring their tithe into the storehouse already. Some people who have not been doing so will start doing it because of this teaching.

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this”, says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.”