

“THE GIFT OF GIVING”

“Restoring the Relationship”

Scripture Text – Luke, 15:11-24

Jesus said, “There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, ‘Father, give me my share of the estate’. So he divided his property between them.

“Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no-one gave him anything.

“When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men’. So he got up and went to his father.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son’.

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found’. So they began to celebrate.

“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 enough room for it”, declares the Lord Almighty.’

Malachi, 3:10, NIV

God is very interested in your finances.

Do not worry! He does not want your money. He does not need your money. There is not a recession occurring in heaven as we speak. If you read the Bible, you will see how interested God is interested in your giving. Of the thirty-eight recorded parables told by Jesus Christ, sixteen deal with man’s use of finances – how he secures his money, how he saves his money, how he spends his money, or how he shares his money.

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In fact, one out of every ten verses (10%) in the Gospels deals in one way or another with personal finances...

Frequently, God speaks to us about money and possessions because he knows:

‘Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”.’

Matthew, 6:21, NIV

There are about five hundred verses in the Bible about prayer. There are about the same number of verses about faith. Guess how many verses there are in the Bible about our personal possessions? There are four times as many, two thousand! God speaks to us about possessions so frequently because he is abundantly interested in what we do with our money.

“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 enough room for it”, declares the Lord Almighty.’

Malachi, 3:10, NIV

A DEFINITE PROPORTION

He commands you to bring a tenth.

One tenth of all of your increase is to be set aside for God’s use. God has made you a steward of the remainder, but one-tenth is to be set aside and consecrated for God’s use.

A DESIGNATED PLACE

In the Old Testament the storehouse was part of the temple.

Your tithe is not to be used for other things, not to be used to help your relatives, not be used for the work of outside ministries, or for anything else. God’s tithe is to be brought into God’s house on God’s day so that God’s work will be done in God’s way.

A DETERMINED PURPOSE

We give in order to sustain God’s work.

I read once that if everyone was on a pension or a government allowance and everyone tithed, the income of the average church would more than double what it is now. God’s blessing is passing by God’s people because God’s house does not have the resources to do God’s work!

You can rob God not only in your tithe, but you can rob him with your offerings, too.

You have not finished when you have tithed. In fact, when you tithe you are really just returning what belongs to the Lord. It is what you give in addition to your tithe that is really what you are offering to God.

Martin Luther said that every Christian must be converted three times.

The first conversion for his mind; the second conversion for his heart; and the third conversion for his wallet – and of the three, the most difficult conversion is of the wallet.

"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.

'Leighton Farrell was the minister of Highland Park Church in Dallas for many years. He tells of a man in the church who once made a covenant with a former pastor to tithe ten percent of their income every year. They were both young and neither of them had much money. But things changed. The layman tithed one thousand dollars the year he earned ten thousand, ten thousand dollars the year he earned one-hundred thousand, and one-hundred thousand dollars the year he earned one million. But the year he earned six million dollars he just could not bring himself to write out that check for six-hundred thousand dollars to the Church.

'He telephoned the minister, long since having moved to another church, and asked to see him. Walking into the pastor's office the man begged to be let out of the covenant, saying, "This tithing business has to stop. It was fine when my tithe was one thousand dollars, but I just cannot afford six-hundred thousand dollars. You've got to do something, Reverend!" The pastor knelt on the floor and prayed silently for a long time. Eventually the man said, "What are you doing? Are you praying that God will let me out of the covenant to tithe?" "No", said the minister. "I am praying for God to reduce your income back to the level where one thousand dollars will be your tithe!"

Malachi spoke about restoration of the relationship between God and his people.

It has a parallel in 'THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON', as found in **Luke, 15:11-24.**

'TIE A YELLOW RIBBON ROUND THE OLE OAK TREE' by Tony Orlando and Dawn.

Folklore has it that the inspiration for this 1973 song came from a true incident that occurred on a bus bound for Miami, Florida. It seems that one of the passengers had just been released from prison and he was bound for home. He had already written to his wife to let her know he still loved her and wanted to be with her. He asked her to tie a yellow ribbon around the lone oak tree in the Town Square of White Oak, Georgia, if she still had feelings for him and wanted him to be with her. Everyone in the bus asked the driver to slow down as they approached the town square, and there it was! The bus driver pulled over and telephoned the news services to share the story and it quickly spread throughout the country. Songwriters Irwin Levine and L Russell Brown wrote the ballad after hearing the news.

In your search for a spiritual restoration with God, you are sure of a plentiful display of yellow ribbons – in a very prominent place, so that you cannot miss or misunderstand the welcome that awaits you...

Relationships are more than just being on "nodding terms" with someone.

How quickly relationships become spoiled or even broken when selfishness appears.

How offended we become if anniversaries or birthdays are overlooked – "They forgot".

In any caring relationship, there must be some balance between 'give and take'.

It is said that: 'You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving'.

Giving is important in developing any worthwhile relationship.

Malachi focuses clearly on the relationship of God's people in the aspect of their giving.

This is seen as an accurate indicator of the true relationship between man and God.

THE LOVING FATHER

"The younger son said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate'."

Luke, 15:12a, NIV

In **Luke, 15:11-32**, the Parable starts with the Father – undoubtedly, a sad father – who transfers one-third of his wealth to his younger son. Then he had to watch (from a distance) how waywardness ruined the life of his precious child. Filled with grief, sadness and disappointed, he waits for the day when his young son might return. That day, might his son be a sad and sorry sight, dispirited, weak and weary? Perhaps he was even asking himself and wondering: "What might Father say"?

"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.'

Malachi, 1:6a, NIV

THE RETURNING SON

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men'."

Luke, 15:17-19, NIV

It takes real courage to accept the situation for what it is and to admit that I need to return home to my father. It requires courage to be restored unto my father.

For 'THE PRODIGAL SON' – the wasteful son – it meant:

The reassessment of the true relationship with the Father.

The retracing of his steps – it must have been hard to admit his failure.

The recognising of the need to give (not just take) in the family household.

The return, possibly, into slavery – being a servant.

God expects us to constantly reassess our giving, reviewing it in the light of his Word.

“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.”

Malachi, 3:6-8, NIV

The people asked, **“HOW ARE WE TO RETURN?”**
God’s reply was simple, **“STOP ROBBING ME!”**

God’s love is constant.

He waits to accept the returning sons into a truly loving relationship.
He waits for a time when his people really contribute to that relationship.
To be a friend of God is to be on more than ‘nodding terms’ with God and involves contributing something to that relationship. Something acceptable and pleasing to him...
THE WHOLE TITHE!



THE FORGIVING GOD

Abraham is known in Scripture as a ‘FRIEND OF GOD’.

When God tested him, he asked for the servant’s pride and joy, Isaac, to be sacrificed.

Remember the story of the widow’s mite.

Jesus deliberately went to the Temple and sat in a position where he could see who gave what on the offering plate. He noticed who put in an offering, and how much it was. He also knew the percentage of what the gift was. He noted that the widow alone gave all that she had – she held nothing back!

Malachi called for the people to return to a strong relationship with God.

The people were offered a true relationship IF they would play their part.

“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

The Prodigal Son returned (wondering if slavery awaited him)...

“But the father said to his servants, ‘Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let’s have a feast and celebrate’.”

Luke, 15:22-23, NIV

The Prodigal Son was to be the object of celebration and great joy.

He gained... a robe... a ring... a feast of recognition and acceptance... a restoration.

God is just the same today – in returning to him, we allow him to do his best for us.



A PARTNERSHIP WITH GOD

We sing: *‘I love Jesus, Hallelujah, I love Jesus, yes I do!’*
But, is your giving a true measure of your love for Jesus?

God is challenging you about your relationship with him.

This relationship must be a two-way commitment between you and God. It seems to me that God often finds the relationship with his children can be very disappointing! The Lord himself detects that the relationship has deteriorated to a state where he is shown little or none of the honour that is rightly due to him. In short, love is lacking!

The people refused to accept the message.

They brought defiled and unacceptable gifts to be offered on the altar of sacrifice. They made a presentation to the King of Kings they would never dream of bringing to a foreign king. They brought to God sacrifices and worship that cost them nothing and were unacceptable to the Father.

Have we ever tried to do the same to our God?

Lord, thou art questioning: Lovest thou me?
Yea, Lord, thou knowest, my answer must be;
But since love’s value is proved by love’s test,
Jesus, I’ll give thee the dearest and best.

*All in my heart, Lord, thou canst read;
Master, thou knowest I love thee indeed.
Ask what thou wilt my devotion to test,
I will surrender the dearest and best.*

How couldst thou smile on me if, in my heart,
I were unwilling from treasures to part?
Since my redemption cost thee such a price,
Utmost surrender alone will suffice.

Down at thy feet all my fears I let go,
Back on thy strength all my weakness I throw;
Lord, in my life thou shalt have thine own way,
Speak but the word, and thy child will obey.

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