

7/17/22 Christ Fellowship

What We Believe about Stewardship
Malachi 3:6-12

So...how's it going? No, seriously. I mean how is your life really going right now? Pretty good? Could be better? Awful? Don't answer out loud but just think about it. On a scale of one to ten, how is your life? One is depressed and miserable. Ten is living a full and abundant life. If it's not a ten, why not? Do you know that your full and abundant life has almost nothing to do with your circumstances. It's all about your mindset. It's about having peace in the storm and joy in the most difficult times in life. And it is possible.

In fact, Jesus said in **John 10:10** that that is why He came, so you could have life and have it to the full. Do you believe that? Then, if you don't have a full and abundant life, whose fault is it? It must be Jesus' fault, right? Yea, He's probably lying about that. That must be it. Or maybe He just doesn't understand the stress you are under and the problems you have. Ya think? 😊

We all know that's not true so it must be our fault if we are not living a full life. It must be that we are doing something wrong. It must be that we are not doing everything we ought to be doing. So, what should we be doing? What is it that God really wants? Have you ever thought about that? What is it that God really wants from us? What would make Him be so gracious to us that He would open the floodgates of Heaven and pour out His blessings on us so we could live a full and abundant life?

Well, God tells us in **Malachi chapter 3**. In fact, He uses those exact words but don't get ahead of me here. Even as you are turning in your Bibles to **Malachi 3:6-12** and you have seen in the bulletin that our topic for today is what we believe about stewardship and now you remember what Malachi 3 talks about and so you assume I am going to say that if you tithe to the church, you will live a full and abundant life. You think I am going to say that what God wants from you is money. But that is not true. That is absolutely not what I am going to say nor is that the theme of this passage that is used often to make that point. Confused yet? Hear me out.

What God wants most of all from you is all of you. He wants you. He wants everything about you; every aspect of your life; every hope and dream, every thought, every action, every word; He wants to be in it, about it, for it, with it and in amongst it all in your life. And when He has you, He blesses you. It's all through scripture from Old Testament to New.

Deuteronomy 30 says, *"The Lord will again take delight in prospering you."* **Jeremiah 9:24** says, *"I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord."* God loves to bless us! **Philippians 4** says, *"And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."* God wants

to bless you. He is setting you up to bless you. He is looking for any excuse to bless you. And He will when He has you. When you give yourself to Him completely, He will back the heavenly Brinks truck up to your heart's door and...beep, beep, beep, start piling those blessings in until you think you can't take it anymore.

Now, you may be hearing me say that if you give yourself to God completely then He will bless you with money. But that is not what I am saying nor does scripture teach that. And if you ever hear me or anybody else teach that, you need to run – not walk - away from that teaching. People have some serious misconceptions about what is taught in scripture about money. They hear that God will bless them so they assume that means with money. They hear that we are to give money so they think God wants money. None of that is true.

The Bible speaks a lot about money. Jesus spoke a lot about money. In fact, He spoke more about money than almost anything else. And yet, if you understand what is truly being taught, God doesn't really seem to be interested in money at all. And He doesn't need you to work harder or try harder to please Him. All He is interested in is you. Let's read our passage in Malachi this morning and I'll show you what I mean. At first read, it sounds like God is money-hungry but let's go through it and take it, as always, in context, and let's see what we believe about stewardship.

Malachi 3:6-12 says, *"I the LORD do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. 7Ever since the time of your ancestors 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?' 8"Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. 9You are under a curse-your whole nation- because you are robbing me. 10Bring 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 there will not be room enough to store it. 11I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. 12"Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.*

Israel has always been God's chosen people. They are special to God; always have been and always will be. But they have also always been rebellious. And in this passage, God calls them on it. Malachi the prophet is telling this story. And in **verses 6 and 7**, he speaks for God where he says, *"7Ever since the time of your ancestors you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,"*

Then Malachi speaks for the nation of Israel and says, *'How are we to return?'* It's like Israel doesn't even know what they have done wrong. Return to you? What? Why? So, the context

of this passage is not about money. It's about being right with God. It's about being obedient to what God has said to do.

Now, when some people hear this passage, they immediately start frothing at the mouth that this is in the Old Testament and we are not under the Old Testament law that says you are supposed to give 10% of your gross income to the temple. But that's not correct. Actually, we are not under the Old Testament law that says you are supposed to give over 20% of your gross income when you factor in all the other gifts and offerings they were supposed to give.

But the tithe predates the Law of Moses. The Bible tells of Abraham giving tithes to Melchizedek. Jacob, a descendent of Abraham, made a covenant with God to tithe before the Mosaic law was in existence. (Genesis 28:22) A tithe is 10% but this tithe is not about the law. I heard Pastor Adrian Rogers say, "There is no competition between tithing and the New Testament. (a) Abraham commenced it. (b) Jacob continued it. (c) Moses commanded it. (d) Jesus commended it."

Some say that tithing is just a part of the law; that the people were commanded under the Old Testament law to tithe. They were also commanded under the law not to kill. They were commanded under the law not to commit adultery. Since that is Old Testament law, do we think that we're free to kill or to commit adultery? Jesus never revised the law backward or downward. He never told us to do less than they did under the law. Any Christian who would let someone do more under the law than he would do under grace is a disgrace to grace. (Adrian Rogers, Faithful in Stewardship)

The Old Testament taught that 10% of your gross income went to the temple to supply the temple with what it needed to function. They also had other laws about giving that brought that number up to over 20% total. But we don't tithe because it is a law. We don't even tithe because the church needs the money. We sure don't tithe because God needs the money. God owns everything as it is.

We tithe and give gifts and offerings because that is our way of showing our complete submission to God. It is our way of saying, *"Lord, here I am. You can have all of me; my life, my dreams, my marriage, my kids, my job and even my money. Lord, I give it all to you. You can have it all. Take what you want."*

Do you want a New Testament mandate to tithe? I can't give you one. It's not there. You don't have to tithe to be a member of this church. You don't have to tithe or give financial gifts of any size to be a Christian. In fact, if you can't give your money to the church with a happy smile on your face then please don't. Just keep it.

But when you get tired of missing out on God's blessings; the blessings that come from being right with Him and close to Him; when you get tired of missing out on the spiritual, physical and even financial blessings that come from giving everything to God, then try tithing. Yes, I said it. There are financial blessings that come from being right with God.

I can't quote the verse that proves that because God doesn't promise that. That's not what He says. He does not say that if you give your money to me then I will give money back to you. It's not in there. But I can give example after example of real-life situations where that is the case. In fact, our church is proof of that.

Several years ago, our Leadership Team decided we, as a church, needed to tithe to other missions and ministries just as a way of showing our obedience and love to God. The problem was, back in the day, we didn't have the money to even pay all our bills. It was not a wise business decision, I'll be honest. We were running in the red almost every month. But God led us to do that and we were obedient and God has blessed our finances. It's just a fact. But we don't do it to be financially wealthy. We do it to be right with God.

And please don't hear me say that I want you to give money to the church so you can get out of your financial jam. God blesses our gifts and tithes and offerings many times in other ways than financial ways. Some of you may be struggling right now with physical issues or relational issues or mental issues that God is just waiting on you to get absolutely right with Him before He brings you healing. And our finances are just a way to prove that you have given everything to God. It is tangible to you that you trust Him and your faith is in Him and Him alone.

Hebrews 11 says it is impossible to please God without faith. And you say, *"Well, I have faith."* And God says, *"Okay. Prove it. Prove it to yourself. I know your heart but I want you to prove it to yourself."* Well, what better way is there to prove you have faith than with your finances? It's tangible. It's easy to see. You can prove it.

In his second letter to the church in Corinth, Paul wrote them and said, *"And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. 2 In the midst of a very severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. 3 For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, 4 they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the Lord's people. 5 And they exceeded our expectations: **They gave themselves first of all to the Lord**, and then by the will of God also to us."*

"They gave themselves first of all to the Lord..." Did you hear that? They gave themselves to the Lord first and then were just obedient to what God told them to do. They didn't wait until they could afford it. They didn't give the bare minimum just to be able to say they gave. They

gave generously and with joy *“for the privilege of sharing in the service of the Lord’s people.”* That’s what God wants and that’s what God blesses.

In **verse 10** of our main passage this morning, God says, *“Test me in this.”* God never says to test Him when it comes to His judgement or His wrath but when it comes to His blessings, He says, *“I dare ya! I dare ya to give a small portion of your money and just see if I won’t bless you and make it worth it to you in some way.”* Maybe He blesses you in money. I’m not saying He won’t. God can do whatever He wants to do but He never promises that. Maybe he blesses you in your marriage or some other relationship. Maybe He blesses you with peace that He otherwise wouldn’t give. And maybe He blesses you with eternal treasures in Heaven.

One of the many times Jesus talks about money, He says in **Matthew 6**, *“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. 20 But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”*

And then He says, *“You cannot serve both God and money.”* Do you understand what all He is saying there? Your true heart is proven by where your money goes. And you are either going to serve God or you are going to serve money. And if you give God whatever He asks you to give then He promises to give treasures to you when you get to Heaven, treasures that will last for all of eternity; treasures He says you deserve for being right with Him.

You always have to be careful in keeping all scripture in context and this passage in Malachi was not written to us. It was written to the nation of Israel. And here in this passage God tells the Israelites that if they will give what He told them to give, He will bless their crops. He will bless them financially and I need you to understand that God never promises us to bless us financially.

I guarantee you if you turned on the TV this morning and flipped a couple of channels there is some ol’ boy right now telling you that if you will just give such and such amount to his church that God will bless you monetarily. And there is a good chance he is using this very passage in Malachi to “prove” his point. That’s a lie and I don’t want to be in that room in Heaven when he has to face God and explain himself. I will never say that God promises to do that. But God does promise to bless you when you are right with Him. I can say that.

And I want that! I want whatever God wants for me because I know He wants far bigger and better things for me than I could ever dream of. And He has proven Himself to be trustworthy a thousand times over in just my life and in the life of this church.

Dallin H. Oaks shared a story about his mother paying tithes despite their destitution:

“During World War II, my widowed mother supported her three young children on a schoolteacher’s salary that was meager. When I became conscious that we went without some desirable things because we didn’t have enough money, I asked my mother why she paid so much of her salary as tithing. I have never forgotten her explanation: “Dallin, there might be some people who can get along without paying tithing, but we can’t. The Lord has chosen to take your father and leave me to raise you children. I cannot do that without the blessings of the Lord, and I obtain those blessings by paying an honest tithing. When I pay my tithing, I have the Lord’s promise that he will bless us, and we must have those blessings if we are to get along.”” (Lifey.org)

Tithing is like standing before God with your arms up and palms out and saying, *“Lord, all I have is yours. You can have it. Here’s my marriage, my job, my finances, my kids, my dogs, my car, my freedom, my very life. You can have it. Take what you want. I trust you.”* And like Job said, we know He is the God who gives and takes away. But we know we can trust Him because He loves us.

So, call it a tithe or a gift or an offering. It’s all God’s and we just want to be obedient and want to be right with Him so let’s bow our heads right now and I just want you to ask God what it is He wants from you. If you really do trust Him, start by asking Him to search your heart and see if there is anything displeasing in your life to Him. Ask Him to forgive you and cleanse you of all unrighteousness. He knows what you have done but He wants you to realize it and to ask Him for forgiveness and He will do that right now.

Now, ask Him if there is anything else He wants from you. Maybe it has to do with money or your job or your family. Maybe He has given you a gift that you aren’t using for His glory. I don’t know what He wants from you. Maybe it’s just to be still and know that He is God. Just listen for that still, small voice.

Now, if you are not a true believer and follower of Jesus then none of this applies to you. In fact, if you are not a Christian then just hang on to your money. You don’t need to give anything to our church. We appreciate it but our church doesn’t need money. If you are a Christian then you need to give but the church doesn’t need your money. Have you ever heard that before? Probably not and that’s a shame.

But if you aren’t a believer then today is the day of salvation for you. Let’s do that today, right now. All you have to do is believe that Jesus is God and that He died for your sins. You don’t even have to tithe or give anything. God will work with you on that later. Today, all you have to do is confess your sins to God and repent or turn away from those sins and that lifestyle. Then allow God to change you and make you more like Him. That’s what God wants from you. Do that right now as the music plays.