

Lame Offerings

Choosing to Give God Our Best

September 11, 2022

Today we're talking about tithing.



So answer *this* question: **Money is weird ... right?!**



Over the years we've hired people from the congregation to do odd jobs. And *many* times they'll ask us to just put their pay on their giving record. But we can't. So we tell 'em they can certainly donate their check if they'd like. But when they *get* that *check*, they rarely give it *back*. Cuz once it's in our *hands*, it's hard to let it go. Money is weird ... *right?!*



If you've been a believer a while, you know that when a pastor says that we're talking on *tithing*, there's a *good* chance that *either* 1) it'll be a *veiled effort* to fund a *program* or *project*, which is *not* my intention this morning; or 2) he'll *haul* out *Malachi*, chapter three, and *beat* you over the *head* with it! Which *is* my intention this morning – let's *turn* to Malachi 3:8.



"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob Me. But you ask, 'How do we rob You?' In *tithes* [lit. "tenths" or "ten percents"; a portion set aside to honor God by helping others] and *offerings*. [Special gifts to help with specific needs, or in grateful response to unexpected blessings; but to God's point] You are under a *curse* ... because you are *robbing Me*. [So instead] Bring the *whole* tithe into the storehouse – Malachi 3:8-10 NIV



Malachi is urging *faith* and *trust* in the long awaited Christ to *come*, cuz **they're growing cynical rather than faithful**; cuz Malachi's mob assumed the *prophecies* of a *Messiah*, and *promises* of *prosperity*, would've paid off by *now*. And **they're wondering whether it's worth serving such a slow-to-act Savior**. And it's *showing* – where it *always* shows *first* – in their *giving*.



'How do we rob You?' In tithes and offerings. – Malachi 3:8 NIV

That's '*how*' we rob God – like how a *gun* is *how* a *mugger* robs a *person*; and how a *crowbar* is *how* a *burglar* robs a *house*. *Tithes* and *offerings* is '*how*' a *believer* robs *God* – but then, **'what' is it exactly, that we rob God of?** Cuz *He* doesn't need *anything* from *us*.

"I have no need of a *bull* from your stall or of *goats* from your pens ... If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is *Mine*, and *all* that is in it." – Psalm 50:9-12 NIV

Their *giving* was used in part to help the *widows* and *orphans* and the *destitute*. **They were robbing God of giving and caring**, and of one of His *greatest loves*, *blessing* those *doing* the *giving*. Therefore, **when we rob God, we cheat ourselves**.



But then, ‘how’ exactly were these cheats *stealing* with their tithes and offerings? Well, by *giving* God their very *not-best*.

“If I am a *Father*, where is the *honor due* Me? ... When you bring *blind* animals for sacrifice ... [or] *crippled* or *diseased* animals, is *that* not wrong? Try offering them to your *governor!* [Know who their governor was? *Nehemiah*, who wrote the OT book of *Nehemiah*] Would *he* be *pleased* with you? ... *I am* not pleased with you ... [When you] *offer* them as *sacrifices*, [having sacrificed *nothing* to offer ‘em] should *I* accept them from your hands? ... *Cursed* is the *cheat*” – Malachi 1:6-14 NIV

So, *whatever* you do, **don’t give God your leftovers**. Especially since **He only asks for one thin slice**. Because, as you *already* believe, **He deserves our deepest love and highest loyalty**. And you *know* we’re *not* buying His favor, right? **We’re offering a token of trust and love in His honor**. Because our *giving* is **loosening the grip of greed**, and **growing our generosity**, and **giving us ownership** in His kingdom. Faithful followers have *always* offered their *first fruits* rather than their *last leftovers*. “Would [ol’ Governor Nehemiah] be *pleased* with you?” Nope! Know why *He’s* brought into it? Cuz *he* wrote the *book* on *firstfruits!*

We *obligate* ourselves to bring the *firstfruits* of our *ground* and the *firstfruits* of *all fruit* of *every tree*, year by year, to the house of the Lord; also ... the *firstborn* of our *herds* and of our *flocks* ... the *first* of our *dough*, and our *contributions*, – Nehemiah 10:35-37 ESV

I’ve practiced this since my Lutheran Sunday school, where we had little colored envelopes to collect our money during the week. And when I was *older*, I would deposit my *paycheck* (remember *paychecks?*) and *immediately* write a *tithe* check, and *tuck* it in my *wallet*. Cuz I knew **if I gave from what was left over, it’d be pretty lame**. I *now* use *automatic withdrawal*. And I *love* it. Cuz **it’s great for offering stability**. Get it? It **expedites the process** and **secures my consistency**, which **fortifies my faithfulness** – *especially* when I’m tempted to give something *lame*. And *now* you *kids* with your *phones* can just scan the QR Code on a *giving poster*, or in the *transcript!*

So, just *curious*, do you give *more* to the *Governor?* Malachi’s *mob* showed *more* respect for God’s mid-level *manager* and minor *prophet*, Nehemiah, than the *Messiah* Nehemiah was *prophesying*. **They blocked God’s blessings and then blamed Him for their troubles**, in spite of His *warnings*.

Do not bring anything with a defect, because it will *not* be *accepted* ... Do not offer to the Lord the *blind*, the *injured* or the *maimed*, or anything with *warts* or *festering* or *running sores*. [Is it me, or is it embarrassing that this *had* to be a *law?*] Do not place any of these on the altar as an *offering* – Leviticus 22:20-22 NIV

If we *consistently* offer God our *leftover time* and *money* and *energy*, rather than *investing* ourselves *wisely* in His kingdom, **we show ourselves to be withholders rather than shareholders**. So we gotta *grow* in our *giving* as we *grow* in our *getting*. Cuz we’re called to show ever-greater *care* and *concern*. Cuz **our Father can’t bless His complacent kids**. Cuz it’d be *unwise* and *unloving*.

"If you do not set your heart to honor My name," says the Lord Almighty, "I will send a curse upon you, [mostly just the consequences He's built in, to drive us back toward our eternal best] and I will curse [what'd otherwise be] your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, because you have not set your heart to honor Me." – Malachi 2:2 NIV

Have you? Set your heart? To honor Him? By setting aside a small slice in His name? And "only" keeping 90% of everything else for yourself? He practically *pleads* with us to test Him.

"Bring the ~~the~~ [one-tenth] into the storehouse ... [and] 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

On the way home from church this dad was griping about the sermon, the mom was grumbling about the people, and the daughter was grouching about the music. And the young son suddenly piped up and said, "Yea, but ya gotta admit, it's not a bad show for a buck!" And you get what you pay for; cuz **we're blessed to the degree we're invested**. Notice that it *doesn't* say He'll "pour out so much blessing" *on you*; but that "you will not have room enough for it." Cuz where your *treasure* is, *there's* your *heart*. (Mt 6:21) Cuz the kingdom of *heaven* is *within*. (Lk 17:21) And **Jesus is just dying to throw open those floodgates** and pour out *so much* blessing!

"Whoever *believes* in Me ... *streams* of living water will flow from *within* him." By this He meant the *Spirit*, [and obviously, the work of the *Spirit*] – John 7:38-39 NIV



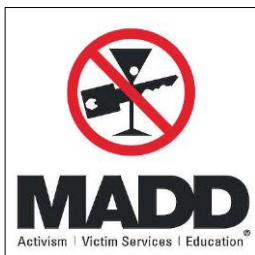
[Yes] "Out of his *heart* will flow *rivers* of living water." – John 7:38 NKJ



Now listen, you *rich* people, *weep* and *wail* because ... Your *wealth* has *rotted*, and *moths* have *eaten* your *clothes*. Your *gold* and *silver* are *corroded*. Their corrosion will *testify* against you ... [cuz] You have *hoarded* *wealth* in the last days. Look! The wages you *failed* to *pay* the *workmen* ... are crying out against you. ... You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. – James 5:1-5 NIV

Well *that's* encouraging. Here's how The *Message* paraphrases that *ending*.

You've *looted* the earth and *lived* it up. But all you'll have to *show* for it is a *fatter* than usual *corpse*. – James 5:5 TMNT



Don't sugar coat it, James. **Does that sound inspiring or condemning?** Be *honest* ... with *yourself*. James is speaking for the exploited poor who were much abused. He's like a speaker at a MADD rally, crying out: "You drunk drivers *will* pay! And your victims *will* be vindicated!" **It's inspiring stuff ... unless you're the drunk, or the hoarder.** So how'd you hear it: as *inspiring* or *condemning*? As *Americans*, we likely *all* heard it the same way.



They had three ways to hoard wealth: grain, garments, and gold. James nails all three: "Your wealth has rotted," "moths have eaten your clothes," and "Your gold and silver are corroded". But, he *then* adds: "Their corrosion will testify against you". How? Why? Well, where does our food go *rotten*?

In the *back* of the *fridge*. When do *moths* eat our *clothes*? When we *store* ‘em, cuz we don't *wear* ‘em. **These are signs of stuff being stored rather than used for the Lord.** But:

The *generous* soul will be made **[truly]** rich, and he who *waters* will also *be watered* ... [and] the righteous will *flourish* like *foliage*. **[Cuz they're watered]** – Proverbs 11:25, 28 NKJ

The Lord spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

“Who has given to Me that I should repay him?” – Job 41:11 NAS

What's the answer? And don't say, “nobody”. Job was also a bit befuddled. But Solomon knew.

Whoever is *generous* to the *poor lends* to the *Lord*, and He *will* repay – Proverbs 19:17 ESV

Well, OK. So the next time you're reading Romans, and you hear the Apostle Paul say:

Oh, the depth of the *riches* of the wisdom and knowledge of God! ... Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him? – Romans 11:33-35 NIV

Raise your hand and say, “Oh! I know! I know! The heart that's ‘generous to the poor!’” Cuz you *know* these are *riddles* we're *expected* to *answer*, just as *Job* was. In fact, *Elihu* asked *Job*:

“If you are righteous, what do you give [God]? Or *what* does *He* receive from *your hand*? **[Here's a hint]** ... Your *righteousness* [affects] a Son of Man.” – Job 35:7-8 NKJ

This is how the warning of ol' *one-talent* actually *ends*. After the master comes home and says:



““Throw that *worthless* servant outside, into the *darkness*’ ... **[Jesus says]** When the Son of Man comes ... He will separate the people **[into shareholders and withholders]** ... [and He'll] say to those on His right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father ... For I was hungry and you *gave* Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you ~~gave Me something to drink~~, **[watered Me]** ... you invited *Me* in ... you clothed *Me* ... you looked after *Me* ... and you came to visit *Me*. ... **[Cuz, speaking of one talent]** whatever you did for one of the *least* of these brothers of *Mine*, you did for *Me*.” – Matthew 25:30-40 NIV

So, “what does [the Lord] receive from your hand?” **Food, shelter, clothing, and care.** Unless He doesn't. But then, that's on *you*. Not *Him*. So, start *storing* your *stuff* in *heaven*. Not sure *how*?

“Give to the *poor*, and you *will* have treasure in *heaven*.” – Luke 18:22 NIV

Let's not give God *lame* offerings; let's *set* our *hearts* to *honor* Him; and **let's set aside a set amount (whatever it is), and practice being consistent.** Amid all the *hypocrisy* of Malachi's *mob*, there were a *faithful few* who *set* their *hearts* to *honor* our Father, and *trust* our coming Savior.

And I think we should *do* as that *faithful few*. Don't *you*?