

Giving Series, 2.4.07

Tithing: A Door way into God's blessings

Intro

- Student Life Video – Annanias & Sapphira
- **This is a life & death issue...under financial strain...God is going to show you the way out today.**
- The people have returned to Jerusalem after decades in Babylonian captivity. The city is being rebuilt...Ezra & Nehemiah have led the way for both the physical & spiritual reconstruction of Israel
- The Temple is rebuilt, some semblance of new religious order, priest have reinstated temple worship, etc.
- They are still under heavy taxation from the Persians and the country is still under economic hardship.
- They have begun the long road to recovery with a lot of initial enthusiasm, but now that is waning. They are finding there way back, but it's hard. They are returning to their old patterns of half-hearted and mechanical obedience to God.
- God sends his prophet Malachi into this environment. He challenges them about their blemished sacrifices; he challenges the priest about their dishonorable service; he calls into account their flippant attitude toward divorce
- Then he says – 3.6–7a.
- It's important we see 3.6. God doesn't change...the principle of tithing doesn't change nor God's desire to truly bless his people.

**When we return to the Lord in any area of our life he will return to us**

(3.6–7)

- God doesn't change!
- God wants us to walk under his full umbrella of blessing. But, if we choose to walk away, the Lord lets us do so & then experience the hard consequences of our sin.
- Like the Prodigal son, he was under his father's blessings & protection. He wants to walk away from the father. The father blesses him & lets him go. , at first we think all is well (money in

- our pocket, freedom to do whatever we desire, friends by our side and the world at our fingers) but then we begin the experience the hard realities of our choices...it's best when you taste the bitter fruit to put it down then and return to the Lord. The fruit never gets any better. When he took steps back to the father, he was welcomed & made an honored guest.
- The wonderful promise is if you take one step towards God He'll take a step towards you & His steps are much bigger than yours...this is a great promise for now...turn around to him and begin to come back home.
    - Where have you stepped away from God?
  - The specific area is tithing...it doesn't take weeks to get it right...it begins now...it doesn't take months to repair. Step towards God & He'll move towards you!

### **We rob God when we don't tithe (3.8)**

- Think about this statement! By withholding my tithe I am robbing God. I am keeping something that rightfully belongs to him.
- Tithes & offerings – refers to all the money that was used to support the Temple staff, the temple itself and to assist the poor (maintenance, personnel & ministry fund)
- Ever been robbed or stolen from...example as a little kid someone stole our Christmas presents for a family. I felt terrible violated and mad. I couldn't believe someone would have taken that which didn't belong to them
- All the emotions I experience are the same type of feelings he has. He's not up there chuckling like Santa does when someone takes a candy cane without asking...you little stinker.
- All of it belongs to him, but the tithe is to be returned. When we don't we're robbing God.
- Robert Morris: You can either tithe & have 90 % of your income blessed or keep it & have 100 % cursed.
- Tithing is a principle started before the giving of the Law to Moses...the idea of first fruits seen in the story of Cain & Abel. Gen.4.3-16 is the story of two people...one who does & one who

doesn't tithe. He didn't give God his first portion. This story is the living example of this Malachi passage...it's a story about tithing.

- Abel gave God his best and God's hand of favor was on him. The very first portions...
- Cain gave to God but it wasn't the first portion, "in the course of time." He gave to God out of the second portions. I don't believe God was upset that he gave grain & Abel gave meat, but that Cain didn't give his best to God.
  - God wants our best, b/c one, he deserves it & two, it is statement of trust. "God you deserve my best and I know you will make up the difference."
  - When we tithe it needs to be the first portion, not the leftovers or after you get all the bills paid.
- Cain did not experience God's favor and blessings...he knew it...we don't know exactly how this manifested, but it was probably something visible
- **Cain gets upset with Abel when he could be walking under the same umbrella of favor & protection. God wasn't showing favorites...he was rewarding obedience.**
- God tells Cain there is two doors in front of him...the door of acceptance & blessing...the door to downfall.
  - Learning how to give God the firstfruits will give you victory over greed & materialism.
- All he had to do was give God the firstfruits, but Cain's greed & pride led to his downfall and distancing from God. He didn't want to admit he was in sin. It was easier blaming Abel rather than taking ownership for himself & God was correcting him (an aside - we think if God would just speak to a person they would change...he spoke to Cain & he didn't change.)
- He could've lived under God's blessing & favor if he had just given God his firstfruits. All he had to do was "what was right." (4.7)

**Disobedience opens the door for our demise (3.9)**

- He says the “whole nation” eventhough some had to be tithing. The collective sin impacts the spiritual environment of an area, as does the collective righteousness impacts positively the environment of an area.
- The curse was noted by the crops failing due to lack of rain and the locusts destroying what little remained. They looked at it as a series of unfortunate events, but it wasn’t coincidental. God uses the weather as a tool of both blessings & discipline. They hadn’t made the connection between not tithing and these natural disasters. Instead, they found another reason to keep their firstfruits rather than give them to God.
- Three reasons why I need to tithe. First, so the spiritual climate of my family is fertile ground for the activity of God. Second, so this body will be strong & vital. It will be a place that can host the HS. The HS isn’t going to show up any place in extreme power when the people are willfully disobeying God. Third, so the spiritual climate of this community will be filled with life of God.
  - Example of going to certain places/communities and feeling spiritual oppression, increase of sinful desires...b/c people currently or in the past have capitulated to sin.
- The activity of God was crippled. The spiritual life of the community suffered b/c of their disobedience. Likewise, the advancement of the gospel is hamstrung when we don’t tithe, but conversely it advances as God’s people faithfully give.

### **Obedience opens the door for divine blessing & protection (3.10–12).**

- V.10 - God promises”to open the flood gates of heaven”. This is very similar to Gen.7.11 & the opening of the flood waters upon the planet.
  - Luke 6.38
  - 2 Cor.9.6–11
- V.11- God promises divine protection
  - Prevent pests - rebuke, restrain, to make non
  - Devourer - type of locust & the Devil. You close the door to giving the devil a legal standing. Explain.

- The vines in the field will not fail to bear...everything will be fruitful
- You have a legal right to stand before God and ask for both his blessing & protection when we tithe.
- V.12 – God promises to make you a living example to the lost.
  - “a delightful land” – it will be a place of both divine & human delight.
    - Reading stories about revival in a city and there was much unity, joy & love all throughout the city.
    - Whenever there is a revival it will be accompanied by liberality of giving both individually & collectively.
  - This is what Cain saw & he wanted it. It will be a tool of jealousy to provoke others towards God.
- “Test me” is in the imperative. It’s emphatic & God himself is declaring this is what we should do. “Please put me to the test.” One translation reads.
- The cause of some spiritual atrophy is due to disobeying God in the matter of finances. If you want to experience God’s favor & pleasure in a more demonstrable way then it requires giving the Lord his tithe. For the rich, you need to go beyond the tithe. Do you want a breakthrough in an area (luke 6.38)...God acts on behalf of those who are faithful to give...
- John Wesley: There can be no real revival of true spirituality without it touching our giving.
- We want to see God transform our families, the church & community...in part, this will happen in greater degrees when we individually & collectively honor God with the tithe. Part of God’s promise is, if we return to him the tithe he will return to us!

#### Conclusion:

- Before you today are two doors, one door leads to God’s favor & protection & the other to oppression & spiritual darkness.
- If you travel down one, you can claim the promises of God and beseech God to both close & open

- If you travel down the other, you are virtually on your own with nothing but a veneer of God's favor covering you.
- Challenge you to start today. Push delete and begin anew. Begin giving as often as you're paid; give on a %; work towards the tithe and then move beyond.