

Shareholders

Offering Loans to the Lord

September 1, 2024

Today we're talking about honoring God with our giving. Because, *money's tight.* Right?

But, **as kids of the King, we can't afford to be tight-fisted with the Lord!**



So answer *this*: **What does the Lord receive from your hand?**

Money is just weird. Right? Over the years, we've hired church members to do odd jobs. And many times they ask us to put whatever we were going to pay, on their giving record instead. But legally we can't. So we tell 'em they're welcome to put their check in the offering. 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. Because, money is weird ... *right?! It's been two years since we've talked about tithing. But, if you've been a believer a while, you likely know that when a pastor says 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); or 2) he'll haul out Malachi, chapter three, and beat you over the head with it! Which is my intention – so 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*, because **they're growing cynical rather than faithful**; because Malachi's mob assumed the *prophecies* of a *Messiah*, and the *promises* of *prosperity*, would've paid off by *now*. And **they're wondering whether it's worth serving such a slow-moving 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* said *He* doesn't need *any things* 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

You see, their **giving was used in large part to help widows and orphans and the destitute.**



So, **they were robbing God of giving and caring**, as well as one of His greatest loves: **blessing those doing the giving**. Therefore, **when we rob our Father, we cheat ourselves**. But then, *how exactly* were these cheats stealing by giving? **By giving God their less-than-best**. In our Route 66 video on *Malachi*, a *sacrificial animal salesman* is trying to *pawn off* a *dead lamb*, with a *detachable ear*, until *Malachi* says it's for a party. The embarrassed seller says, "My apologies ... I thought it was just for the Lord."

"If I am a Father, [says the Lord] 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*! [Who was? *Governor Nehemiah*, of the OT book of *Nehemiah*] Would he be pleased with you? [Think about it] ... [When you] offer them as sacrifices, [having sacrificed nothing to offer 'em] should I accept them from your hands? [What would that say about Me? Thus] ... *Cursed is the cheat*" – Malachi 1:6-14 NIV

So, *whatever* you do, **don't give your Lord your leftovers**. Especially since **He only asks for one slice, for our own benefit**. Because, our giving **conquers our greed**, and **increases our Christlikeness**, and **gives us a share in His work**. But, if we *only* ever offer our *leftover* time or money or energy, **we'll be withholders rather than shareholders**. And, as you already believe: **He deserves our deepest love and highest loyalty**. Now, we're not *buying* His blessing, right? **We're offering tokens of trust by tangibly loving others in His name**. Which is why **faithful followers offer firstfruits rather than last leftovers**. Know why *Governor Nehemiah* is mentioned, saying: "Would he be pleased with you?" Cuz he wouldn't! Cuz he wrote the book on *firstfruits*! Explicitly declaring:

"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 *Sunday school*, when we had colorful envelopes in which to collect our coins during the week. And when I was older, I deposited my paycheck (remember paychecks?) and immediately wrote a *tithe* check, and tucked it in my wallet. Cuz I knew, **if I gave from what was left over, it'd be pretty lame**. Now I use *automatic giving*. Cuz **it's great for offering stability**. Get it? **It secures my consistency, which fortifies my faithfulness** – especially when I'm tempted to give my *leftover* "dough". And now we'll be able to scan a QR code during offering. You see, **they not only blocked God's blessing, they blamed Him for it** – in spite of His warnings through *Moses*, saying:

"Do not offer to the Lord the *blind*, the *injured* or the *maimed*, or anything with warts or festering or running sores." – Leviticus 22:22 NIV

Is it *me*, or is it embarrassing this had to be a rule? And, just curious: **do you give more to your Governor?** State sales tax is 6.5%; and gas tax is 49¢/gal! *Malachi's mob* showed more respect to *Nehemiah*, God's manager and minor prophet, than *God the Messiah*, *Nehemiah* was foretelling. Like them, **we're called to grow in ever-greater giving**. Because, **our Father can't bless stingy kids**. Because **we're blessed by blessing, and cursed by coveting**. Which is why ol' *Malachi* warns us:

“If you do not set your heart to honor My name,” says the Lord Almighty, “I will send a curse upon you, [by the consequences intended to drive us to our eternal best] and I will [have no choice, but] curse your blessings. Yes, I have already cursed them, [not because of money, but] because you have not set your heart to honor Me.” – Malachi 2:2 NIV

Have you? Set your heart? He practically begs His children to test Him in this. Saying to:

“Bring the whole ~~tithe~~ [one-tenth] into the storehouse ... [and] Test Me in this [See!?!] ... 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

So test Him and see, cuz **we’re blessed to the degree we invest ourselves**. Cuz He doesn’t “pour out so much blessing” ON YOU; but FROM YOU! Because “you will not have room enough for it.”

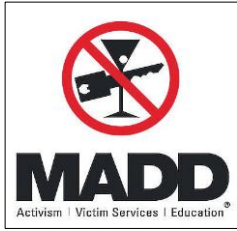
“Because the kingdom of God is within you.” – Luke 17:21 NIV

“Out of the believer’s heart shall flow rivers of living water.” – John 7:38 NRS

Get it? **You are the floodgate He’s dying to throw open to pour out His blessing!** Paul says:



You will be made rich in every way SO THAT you can be generous on every occasion ... [your giving] is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. ... [Because] Men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the Gospel of Christ, AND for your generosity in sharing – 2 Corinthians 9:11-13 NIV



[But] Now listen, you [stingy] rich people, weep and wail because ... Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. Your gold and silver are corroded. [And] Their corrosion will testify against you ... [cuz] You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ... You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. [And rather than fattening a calf to share with others] 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

Well, don’t sugarcoat it, James. Question is: **does that sound encouraging or discouraging?** Be honest with yourself. James is speaking for the poor and neglected and exploited. 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 driver, or in James’ case, the hoarder.** So, **did you hear it as inspiring or condemning?** As Americans, we likely all heard it the same way. They had three ways to hoard their wealth: **grain, garments,** and **gold**. And James nails all three: “Your wealth [of food] has rotted,” and “moths have eaten your clothes,” and “Your gold and silver are corroded”. And he then adds that: “Their corrosion will testify against you”. How? Why? Well, where does our food usually rot? In the back of the fridge. And when do moths eat our clothes? When we store ‘em, cuz we don’t wear ‘em. **These are all signs of stuff being stored rather than shared in the name of the Lord.**



Remember that *brand new 1957 Belvedere* that they sealed in a *time capsule*, and then *dug up 50 years later*, to everyone's utter *disappointment and dismay*? Well, **don't bury your Belvedere!** Whatever your Belvedere may be. Because:



The *generous soul* will be made rich, **[in every way]** and he who waters **[from his heart]** will also be watered **[from within]** ... [and] **[in this way]** the righteous will flourish like foliage. – Proverbs 11:25, 28 NKJ

Remember when 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!* Cuz God asks us the question, cuz He's given us the answer. But don't feel too bad, Job was also a bit *befuddled* by it. But wise ol' Solomon knew that:

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

Well, okay. So the next time you're reading *Romans*, and you hear 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!” “**Whoever is generous to the poor**”. And just before Job was questioned by God, the Lord's spokesman, Elihu, asked him this:

“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.**” **[How?]** – Job 35:7-8 NKJ

Well, after Jesus tells the story of the *one-talent servant* who buries his “Belvedere”, He says:

“When the **Son of Man** comes ... He will separate the people **[into shareholders who affected Him, from withholders who defected from Him]** ... as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats ... [and] will say to [the sheep] ‘Come, you who are blessed ... For **[it turns out]** I was hungry and **[didn't tell you; but]** you gave Me something to eat **[rather than letting it rot]** ... I **[actually]** needed clothes and you clothed Me, **[rather than feeding the moths; and]** I was sick and you looked after Me **[despite the cost]** ... [for] **whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of Mine, you did for Me.**” **[The Son of Man; and I was very much affected by it]** – Matthew 25:31-40 NIV

So then, “**what does [the Lord] receive from your hand?**” Food, clothing, and care. Unless He doesn't. So, **offer the Lord the loan that affects the Son.** Stop hoarding and start storing!

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

Let's not be withholders who only ever offer our *Father lame leftovers*. Instead, **let's set our hearts to honor Jesus;** and **let's set aside a set amount, and then grow in our giving.** Malachi had a *faithful few* who set their hearts to honor the Father and coming Savior. And we now know Him by name! So **I'm ready to test Him and offer Him a little loan, like that faithful few. Are you?**