

## Sermon – Stewardship – MONEY

Deuteronomy 14:22-15:11; Malachi 3:6-12; Mark 12:41-44

### \* Intro – Video – “money”

\* <sup>Pr 23:4</sup> Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. <sup>Pr 3:9</sup> Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops; <sup>Pr 11:4</sup> Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. <sup>Ecc 5:10</sup> Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. <sup>Mt 6:24</sup> “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money. <sup>1Ti 6:10</sup> For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. <sup>1Ti 6:17</sup> Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. <sup>Heb 13:5</sup> Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

The Bible talks about money in a very different way to the world. But even among Christians, there are so many different views about it. Part of the difficulty in understanding God’s teaching on money is that we often adopt either an Old Testament approach or a New Testament approach, or we adopt a verse by verse approach.

So today we’re going to talk about money by looking at the **whole** Bible. And we’re going to look at **one overall principle**. It’s in the Old Testament AND the New Testament.

\* The way we deal with our money (Giving) is a matter of **faith**.

\* So why do we give? Here are some reasons people have suggested:

- I give because I’m a committed member of this church.
- I give \$5 every week because I’ve always given \$5 every week, and so have my parents before me.
- I give because it makes me feel good.
- I give to help the poor and needy.
- I give because it was a good service this week.
- I give because I want to support our church workers and missionaries.
- I give because if I give, God will give me more.

NONE of these answers hits the nail on the head in terms of the primary reason we should give anything at all. Because none of these answers actually mentions **God himself** as our motivation.

\* Turn with me to Deuteronomy 14:22-23:

*22 Be sure to set aside a tenth of all that your fields produce each year. 23 Eat the tithe of your grain, new wine and oil, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks in the presence of the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name, **so that you may learn to revere the LORD your God always.***

We give because of WHO God is. The **first principle** of giving is that we are to learn to **revere God**. To learn that he is the one who supplies all things, and that without Him, we have NOTHING! Their giving is not to depend on how big their crops are or how many people are in their family. Their prosperity had nothing to do with their irrigation or their farming techniques. Their prosperity depended upon **God alone**.

Our wealth does not depend upon how smart we are, or how well we invest. Our wealth doesn’t depend upon house prices or inflation or superannuation. Our wealth, the provision of ALL THAT WE HAVE, depends upon God and God alone. God gives. And God can take away.

The tithe, or the giving of a tenth, was the way the Israelites **learned** to **revere God**. Tithing was a learning process. They could give a tenth, they could give their best, their first-fruits, and God would still provide them with all they needed. Tithing is an act of faith.

But also, tithing had two very practical results:

**\* 1. The tithe met their responsibility to the family of God**

The tithe was shared with the Levites who looked after God's temple. Just like today, but instead of food, we give money, which supports our ministry staff, our missionaries, and our buildings – repairs, maintenance, electricity, building work, toilet paper, – all that we need in nurturing the fellowship that we have here as the family of God.

**\* (1 and) 2. The tithe met the needs of the wider community.**

Every third year, the tithe was extended to be given for the poor, the needy, widows, orphans, and others in need, along with a 7 year policy of cancelling debts. The idea of chapter 15 is of being **open handed** with our wealth and not **close fisted**. In other words, not limiting ourselves to the tithe.

Through our giving as a church today, we also provide finances and services for those in our community with needs – support for those with mental illness, support for widows and nursing home residents, children, mothers, and those struggling financially.

So the tithe was an act of faith that taught dependence on God, **and** provided for the needs of all the people. This principle hasn't changed. But the Israelites didn't JUST give a tithe.

**\* 1.** When they gave the **tithe**, it had to be the **BEST** of their produce and the **BEST** of their flocks and herds – **without defect**.

**\* 2.** THEN there was the **sacrificial system** which involved guilt offerings, burnt offerings, sin offerings, wave offerings, grain offerings, and drink offerings and other things like that.

**\* 3.** PLUS there were the **voluntary offerings** – the giving which was on top of the **tithe** and the **sacrifices**. Often this was given to do special projects like the building of the sanctuary in Exodus 25:2-7.

Of course, today, since Jesus, there is now no sacrificial system. Jesus became the perfect sacrifice. SO instead of sacrificing, we celebrate the Lord's Supper which is a meal of **remembering**, not sacrifice. That's why we no longer call this table up here an altar – because altars are where sacrifices are made. It's called, simply, a table. So the sacrificial system part of our giving is superseded by Jesus.

But the tithe and the voluntary giving are still good principled ways to give. Our giving is "faith driven". Tithing is a helpful way of giving that teaches us to have dependence on God and **also** ensures that God's church and the people in our community, are looked after.

When our giving is weak, not only does our community suffer, but it's a sign that our dependence on God is failing. Let's turn to Malachi. The book of Malachi is about "holding back" from God, or as verse 8 says: "robbing God". Look at 1:13:

**\* *"When you bring injured, crippled or diseased animals and offer them as sacrifices, should I accept them from your hands?" says the LORD.***

They were giving the rubbish – giving God the leftovers rather than the first fruits. They were holding back because they did not trust in God as their provider. They were robbing God because their faith was lost.

There **are** some people in our society who can not afford to give 10% of their income. And God makes provision for them to be supported by the rest of us who **CAN** afford it – the widows, orphans, the poor and others in need are to be supported by the giving of the rest of us. I really would like us to

be challenged with the idea of the tithe today. Because if we say that we can not afford to give just 10% of our income to God, that says to God; **“I cannot trust you to provide all I need if I only keep 90% of my income.”**

And the principle of the tithe, remember, is only supposed to be the ***beginning*** of giving. The church in Acts simply put ***all*** their possessions together and gave to anyone as they had need.

The tithe teaches us to trust God for all our needs, **and** ALSO provides for the needs of your church family AND the needs of the people in our community. Sometimes we may not give, or we give less, because we’re got a big credit card bill or spent too much on Christmas gifts, or perhaps we don’t give to our own church because we’re away on holidays. But the needs of you church here and your community don’t stop because of these things. I can’t imagine, for example, that we would stop paying our electricity bill if we went on holidays or if we had to use the money to buy a birthday present. Giving is a matter of faith – and putting your trust in God ***first***.

Turn with me to Mark 12:41-44, because we’re going to have a look at the faith of one amazing poor widow.

***\* 41Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny.***

***43Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, “I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything—all she had to live on.”***

Two things here:

1. She gave ALL she had to live on. She had 2 coins, but she didn’t just put in one. She put in both! She completely trusted in God’s provision
2. And this is not a parable. This is an actual woman who Jesus watched with his disciples.

Giving is a heart matter. A faith matter. **Giving teaches us dependence on God and reflects our trust in God as our provider.**

For many years I ignored this part of my faith. I gave as much as I had always given. Maybe just 4 or 5% of my income. But as I increased my giving, I was able to learn. I learned dependence on God. I learned that giving strengthened my faith. I trusted God with my wealth. And as my faith has been able to grow, God has been able to help me give more. How much I give is between me and God. But I give from my first-fruits – including ALL my income, before tax, before any fringe benefits are taken out. I give my best and I give it first – before I pay for food, before I pay my bills, before I pay my tax. In my budget, it comes out first. There is no “robbing God”. And the tithe, the 10%, has been a springboard. Not only for more giving, but for strengthening my faith.

Money IS a spiritual matter that DOES affect your faith. Talk about it with your family, with your Bible study group, with your prayer partner. And be prepared to learn about depending on God. Giving is not a reflection of how we feel about our life, or our church, and it’s not a reflection on how generous we are. Giving is a reflection on how we trust **God** and who we think he is. Let’s pray.