

ROBBING GOD, MALACHI 3:7-12

A love that Won't Let Go #5

◆**Intro:** It'll never be forgotten in our family. It was New Years 2004. We attended a big church in our area, you know, the kind with it's own Starbucks in the building. The pastor and his wife emerged from a limo draped in furs. There were camera booms swinging to and fro as they recorded the service. The preacher spoke on giving for 30 minutes. We thought it was the sermon. Turns out it was only the preface to the offering. The sermon came later and was even longer. At one point in the service our youngest stood up walked over in front of my wife and me and pleaded for us to leave this church! Meanwhile the pastor was pointing to different sections of the room telling us how much God wanted from us. "Someone in your section needs to give God \$100. Get out your checkbook and fill it out. Hundred is spelled h-u-n-d-r-e-d!" Well, you can relax. That's not what's going to happen today. That kind of preaching gives God's family a bad name in the world. It's what causes people to say "The Church just wants your money."

◆Guess what, God doesn't just want you money, and neither does the church. When Malachi preached a sermon to Israel around 400 years before the first Christmas and he talked about money but it wasn't because his church wanted it. And while it sounds in the text like God wants your money, that's really not it either.

◆**1. I can use my wealth to experience the miraculous.** Do you long to know if God is real or not? Do you wish you'd encounter God more this side of heaven? There's a simple way to

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begin, start giving away to others your money, your muscle, your moments. Your treasure, your talents, your time. Start giving away. In fact do it enough that you don't have enough unless God takes care of you! "Ah", you say, "I'm not sure I want to know God all that bad." Indeed, and so you never will.

◆**A.** At first glance we might conclude that this text is telling us to give more. But that would only be the surface issue, and even if we did it, we could still miss the real problem. So what is the real problem? Lets just think out loud about why God tells his followers to tithe. It's everywhere in the Bible. Everywhere you find people following God, you find them setting aside a portion of their wealth to give away. Adam's boys, Cain and Abel, brought offerings. Abraham tithed a tenth (that's what the word means) to the priest Melchizedek. Under Moses the tribes of Israel all gave a tenth to the tribe of Levites who worked for God's worship place, the Tabernacle. Orphans, widows, aliens all were provided for through the storehouse of the temple. In the New Testament, Jesus affirms the Pharisees for the practice of tithing as an assumed practice(Lk.11:42). The early Christians set aside percentages of their income (1Cor.16) on a weekly basis (when they went to worship) to give to others in need, even when they were dirt poor themselves. It's a characteristic of god-like people to intentionally give. But why does God tell them to do this?

◆ Is it because God is needy? Does God get hungry? Does he actually collect money? Does God have storage facilities

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somewhere full of gold, and furniture just in case? Of course not. That's just crazy talk.

◆ *"I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it. Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? Sacrifice thank-offerings to God, fulfil your vows to the Most High, and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honour me."*

Psalms 50:9-15, NIV.

◆ God does not need your money or your cow, or your help, or your ability. What he wants is your heart, the part of you that loves, that feels gratitude, that makes promises, that turns in trust when things go wrong and then sees that he is your fixer.

◆ *"Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practised the latter without leaving the former undone."* Luke 11:42, NIV.

◆ He wants your heart to know that he is God and that he will deliver you and love you. But he also knows that you and I and all humans have a tendency to trust in ourselves first. So he gives us the spiritual discipline of giving so that we train ourselves, make ourselves discover that he is really our provider.

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A love that Won't Let Go #5

◆B. Think about it. Why don't we share more? Perhaps it's because we worry about providing for ourselves. IRS statistics for 2014 reveal that the highest percentage of giving was from the income bracket making under \$25,000: 12.3%. From there it was steadily down hill. The more we made the smaller percentage we gave. Those making \$75000-100,000 gave an average of 3.8%. Those making \$200,000 - 500,000; 2.3%. Could it be that the more we make the less we give because we start to believe more that we are providing for ourselves!

◆D. James Kennedy tells a story of a man who came to Peter Marshall, former chaplain of the United States Senate, with a concern about tithing. He said: "I have a problem. I have been tithing for some time. It wasn't too bad when I was making \$20,000 a year. I could afford to give the \$2,000. But you see, now I am making \$500,000, and there is just no way I can afford to give away \$50,000 a year." Dr. Marshall reflected on this wealthy man's dilemma but gave no advice. He simply said: "Yes, sir. I see that you do have a problem. I think we ought to pray about it. Is that alright?" The man agreed, so Dr. Marshall bowed his head and prayed with boldness and authority. "Dear Lord, this man has a problem, and I pray that you will

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A love that Won't Let Go #5

help him. Lord, reduce his salary back to the place where he can afford to tithe."

◆ This is why God says to tithe; so that we stop thinking, erroneously, that our bank account is our savior. Basically he's saying, "train yourself to know that it's really me taking care of you!" Give me your heart! That's the opening verses of our text: God says "I haven't stopped loving you ever, but over and over for generations you keep walking away? Come back! Come and learn that I love you." They say "How?". He says, "Here's one way, trust me with your money." Your wealth is a tool you can use to discover God. You can use your wealth to train your heart to trust God. Of course, the converse is true too. You can use your wealth to curse yourself, or keep yourself from experiencing God. This was Israel's state(3:9). It was the state of not being blessed. It was the state where your tomatoes fall off the vine before they turn red! (3:11) and where Japanese Beetles infest your green bean plants and take little bites out of all those nice smooth beans. Oh no big deal. I'll just by Sevin insecticide and Miracle Grow. Sure, and that'll cost you. And that might not help any either. See, God is saying "You will not be all that you could have been if you will not return to me."

ROBBING GOD, MALACHI 3:7-12

A love that Won't Let Go #5

◆2. **God owns all my stuff, so...**

◆Part of Israel's despondency stems from the fact that they have lost perspective. In chapter one remember they were bringing their crippled animals for sacrifice? (That's like, so lame!) They knew the law required that God deserves your best. They also forgot to remember that God owns it all in the first place and that by not giving they were pretending that they were in fact the owners. Know what you call it when you pretend to own something that isn't yours? Stealing. Hence verse 8 *"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me."*

◆*"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it;" Psalms 24:1, NIV.*

◆A. How much of my stuff is God's? God owns the farm. God owns my kids. God owns the truck. God owns my breathing. God owns my guns. God owns my house. God owns my 401k and my stock options. God owns my boats. God owns my clothes. Everything I have at this moment He's just letting me borrow them for a while. That makes me a steward, not an owner. God alone is the owner. I work for him.

◆So you see, your generosity is directly dependent on your worldview. If you think that you are your own god, and that your wisdom is responsible for your profit, then you will have a harder time being generous. If you see reality, that you are merely a dispenser of the love of God in the world, a steward over a small portion of his riches, you do not fear helping another because

ROBBING GOD, MALACHI 3:7-12

A love that Won't Let Go #5

you're working with someone else's money! When we think we're the owner it leads to all kinds of other misconceptions:

◆B. We think if we have the money it means we have the authority to do what we want with it. But if God is the owner, then he has authority over all 100% of my wealth. I've heard parents complain that their kids play too much video gaming or buy kinds of music they don't approve of, but they can't do anything about it because their child bought it with their money. This is misconstrued on many levels. If we're going to operate merely economically, well then Jr. will have to use "his" money to pay rent, and board, and car service, and clothes. How silly. That Jr. has any cash at all is grace and provision made by mom and dad. As long as Jr is dependent on Dad and Mom, they hold authority over every move he makes. Likewise, until we are independent from God, he holds authority over every move we make too. Here's an idea: start referring to your things as God's things if you want to change your perspective.

◆Thanks for the borrow of you clothes today, God. They fit pretty well.

◆What a nice guitar you have God, can I play with it?

◆Oops God, you car got a fender bender.

◆Looks like your yard needs mowing God. Want me to do it for you? (This is closer to reality than they way we think.)

ROBBING GOD, MALACHI 3:7-12

A love that Won't Let Go #5

- ◆2) I've heard people justifying an odd expenditure as long as they also gave away the equal amount, say, to the church. I'm sorry. That's not how God fits in the universe. He is not equal to your favorite hobby. And nothing is equal to him! He is God! The Creator! Further, no amount of giving money to God will ever make him OK with you or I spending money on things that break his law or dishonor him. "I gave the United Way \$100 so it's ok I gamble away \$100." Nope. That's more foolish thinking. "I gave a hungry guy \$25, so now I can waste \$25 on cocaine." Um, no!
- ◆What if you UPS driver took every package he picked up from you to his house and holed it away? You'd be upset of course. Just because you handed him the package didn't mean it was for him. He was supposed to deliver it to someone else. We'll friends, we are God's delivery service. Just because he gave it to us doesn't mean he meant for us to keep it.
- ◆C. Here's another thing. If God is owner, and I'm robbing him by keeping everything for me, then I am giving it back to him when I'm sharing it with others. How else does one pay God? God doesn't collect money. How else does one serve God? God doesn't need your help. There is only one way to give to God, it's by giving to others. My neighbor is the divinely ordained recipient of everything I owe God. Put the two great commandments together: I love God with all my heart, strength, and soul BY loving my neighbor as myself.

ROBBING GOD, MALACHI 3:7-12

A love that Won't Let Go #5

◆ You know why God tells Israel to bring the whole tithe into the store house? (10) Not so when God gets a hunger headache he can come get some granola. No. The temple stored it to give it to the poor and hungry, and the workers of the temple. The principle, God asks us to store it, in order to pour it on those who need it! Furthermore, when we store it for others, God keeps pouring it on us. You cannot out-give God.

◆ **Conclusion:** So unlike some folk, God and his Church, true followers of God, are not after your money. You can take it home with you if you want. That's why we often give a disclaimer at offering time. Don't worry. We are not dependent on you. We depend on God. If we need it, he always gives it. But now the question is, do you want to know more about God? Are you brave enough to take a risk on God and see if he does or doesn't come through? If so, then your simple challenge is to start giving one mere tenth of your income back to him out of what he already gave you. Try it for 3 months and see what happens. Let me know too. This is the only place in the whole Bible where God says "Go ahead. Try me out and see." So I dare you. I dare you to give one tenth of your wealth away to God by helping someone else and see what happens.