

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

◆**Intro:** This is a truly unique text in the Bible. The scriptural authors are united in declaring that you must not “test” God. That is the sin of unbelief for which Israel was severely punished multiple times in their wilderness journey for 40 years. But here and only here God actually tells human beings to go ahead and test him! “Test me in this and see...” (v10). And it’s on the topic of giving, tithing, which God repeatedly commands his followers to do. It is not without reason that the season of Christmas is associated with the giving of gifts! Though many will participate in much giving this week, many may not realize that wherever you find Christians you find giving, because it is the nature of Christ (as we’ve seen earlier in this series). There’s a connection of course: Our giving habits directly reflect the level of our faith in God. And they also have a lot to do with how much of God we experience. The Bible is full of examples of how God pours out blessing *when* his faithful offer a blessing to others of what they have. He multiplies it. In other words, our giving releases even more of God’s giving! You heard that right. But before we go any further let’s squelch something we don’t want to start thinking.

◆**1. Giving for the sake of getting is not really the giving God is talking about at all.** I say this first so we don’t get the wrong idea. If you are out to make it rich, or if you are going to throw a few bucks in the plate in order to coerce God into getting you a bigger television or making you a millionaire, you’re missing the point, just as if you give your friend Christmas gifts

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

because you want to get Christmas gifts, you're not really understanding the whole thing. That's not the faith and heart that opens God's heart. I am not preaching a health and wealth gospel as often happens on television these days. For example, the year 2004 I was off over the New Years holiday and our family attended another church nearby. It was a two and a half hour experience we have never quite forgotten. The massive hall was decorated by imperial style banners bearing the images of the pastor and his wife. They arrived in furs with an entourage. In his best southern drawl the preacher told us that 2004 was the year of the Lord's favor. This was the year we were gonna get blessed. If your husband had left you for another lady, you were gonna get him back. If your dog had run away, it was gonna come back. If you wanted a parking space nearer the store, you were gonna get it. All you had to do was write a check to the church. Then he pointed up to the balcony where we were sitting and told us that God wanted us to write him a check for a hundred dollars, (taking the time to spell "hundred" out for us). "Write it down," he said, "and blessings will come." What I mistook for a 25 minute sermon about giving, was in reality a preface for the offering. The sermon was even longer. At one point our youngest, elementary school son, got out of his seat slogged wearily over, whining as only a child can, "Dad, when is this church over? When can we leave?!" I was embarrassed a bit, both by my son's honest complaint, and I was embarrassed

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

for the name of the Christian Church. That is not how God's family is told to carry on.

◆ Now, will God bless you if you give? Indeed he will. He promises it. Still God has the authority to determine exactly how and when. If you obey God's command to tithe he will certainly bless you. And it is not wrong to desire blessing or provision. However do not confuse immediate material gain with blessing although it can often include this.

◆ Through the prophet Malachi, God promised to take care of Israel. To provide and prosper them but the requirement was a faith and trust in putting him first in their lives. Their giving was to be a demonstration of a heart that loved God above all. That brings us to ...

◆ 2. Giving that releases God's blessing is first-fruits

giving. First-fruit is the initial portion of the harvest, you know, in late summer when you've just begun to bring it in. This is the whole idea of first-fruits: God is our first priority. Israel was always to bring a tithe of the very first harvest. Not after everything was brought in, and all the bills were paid, and the taxes were covered, and the tuition was paid, and the new car was obtained. No. God wants to be first. He wants us to *depend* on him and not our so-called "own hard work." It's the same principle inherent in the practice of sabbath rest: don't work seven days a week. Stop one day for worship and restoration and God will make sure you'll thrive. It's when we are willing to

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

do that that the miraculous provision happens. Lets look as some examples:

◆The prophet Elijah goes to the widow at **Zaraphath**. She's making her last handful of flour into bread before starving with her son. Elijah tells her God will provide *if she'll feed him first*. (1Kings17)

◆A teenage **shepherd** offers merely a stone and a piece of string in the face of a armored giant. Not all the fighting ranks of the army dared face this armor-plated machine. But no miracle happened until David offered a little.

◆Gideon went with **300** men, jars and trumpets against a sea of Midianite warriors. The miracle came when they offered their little. (Judges 7)

◆The nation of Israel is stopped at the flooded Jordan river. How will they get across. God says "You'll see. Send the **priests** into the river first." But God?! Can you see them nearing the rushing water carrying the heavy ark on their shoulders? They'll be swept down stream! Nothing's happening. Not, that is, ...until their feet touch water. Then the water parts. They had to offer first. They had to trust first. (Judges 3)

◆The poor **widow** at the temple dropped in 2 pennies, all she had left. Against all logic! What was she going to use to buy food? Jesus commended her faith. We're still talking about her today. No one has ever heard of any of the rich

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

people who dropped in bags of gold they didn't really need anyway. (Mk.12)

◆B. Lets revisit these examples and ponder the kind of reasoning that might have gone through our minds had we been there.

◆The widow: wouldn't you lean toward thinking "God wouldn't want me to give my last 2 cents. It's downright irresponsible! I'll volunteer or something instead." Or, "That church member is wealthy enough to give the church \$10,000! My little pennies won't make any difference." Of course the difference is not the point. It's your love for God that he's looking for.

◆Suppose you were one of the priests at the Jordan River? "Go stand in the water? Are you kidding? Let's build a bridge maybe, or *after* the river dries up, we'll attempt a crossing. But seriously, fully clothed and carrying the ark (the worship altar of God)?"

◆David: "Look God, all I have is a sling. No training in weaponry. Did I mention I'm only a student? Haven't paid for university yet. I don't have a regular income. You don't expect *me* to give, do you? (Some well-meaning Christians actually told me not to tithe when I was in college.) Let's be rational here, Lord. Wouldn't a soldier with a sword be a better option?"

◆The Zaraphath widow: "Eli, Eli, Eli. I get it. You're a prophet of the living God, and all. But me? I am being on

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

the fixed income for some time now (some folks think that unless your are constantly becoming richer, it doesn't make sense to share.) Anyway, Eli, sit down. You can *share* some of our last porridge, then we die, yes? But you eat first? That is not the sense making, Eli!"

◆ That's more like real life isn't it? These are all ways we all say verse 14...

◆ *"You have said, 'It is futile to serve God. What did we gain by carrying out his requirements and going about like mourners before the LORD Almighty?'" Malachi 3:14, NIV.*

◆ But all those people for whom God was their first allegiance – they got the miracles, didn't they? If and when you make God first he releases blessings you wouldn't otherwise experience at all. He waits and rewards your faith in action. He always does more than you, but not as much as he would have if you'd done more too. Our giving is like turning on a faucet in heaven. Like pulling a lever that opens a spillway. You have to wonder what we've missed in our lives by *hanging* on instead of *turning* on God's faucet.

◆ *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously." 2 Corinthians 9:6 NIV.*

◆ In Malachi God tells his people to bring the whole tithe in. That's only 1 part in ten. Not even close to being a majority of what they earn. God in turn promised to open "floodgates" (10).

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

Floodgates are the gates you open when the water is so overabundant, ie. flooding, that you need to get rid of it. God promised that their tomatoes would not get that blight that shrivels them up before you can make your spaghetti sauce. And the Japanese Beetles won't infest your bean plants.

◆“I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty.” Malachi 3:11, NIV.

◆Here's the question. Do you want to play life the safe, stingy way, making mud pies in the gutter, or do you want to take a holiday to the beach? Now some of us in the room have invested hundreds, and thousands of dollars in retirement plans. It's ordinarily a wise move, but it's not for sure. You can lose it overnight if the market crashes like in 2008. And although we will risk that on a human trade system, we consider God a higher risk. Something needs adjustment.

◆**3. Giving that releases blessing costs me something.** Do you want to see God provide and do things in amazing ways? Start giving away when you *could* just keep for yourself. Chose to go without something, in order to give something.

◆A. The kind of giving that moves the heart of God is the kind that is self-denying. That is, it is not the kind when you give because you can spare it. It is the kind you give because you love. Do you understand. To love is to give of yourself. And to give of yourself is to develop love. Real love is beautiful because

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

it costs. When you love someone you will *rearrange* your schedule for them. You will go *out of your way*. You will *pay* the cost for them. That's why it is giving which costs us that shows real love. And it's giving out of love that releases even more love from God the giver of all good things.

◆ *"Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver." 2 Corinthians 9:7, NIV.*

◆ Don't tell yourself, "Oh good. I don't really want to give much so I don't have to." That's not the text's point. Rather, that God wants you to develop the happiness of heart in giving. It is the loving, or the willingly sacrificial heart that delights God because it is like God is. There is no love or honor in giving merely what you don't need.

◆ B. Have you, do you, ever give sacrificially? What does that look like? A few simple examples to spark your own thinking:

◆ 1) When you are sitting on the couch, reading Time, and sipping coffee, and **Mom calls** from the laundry room that someone needs to help junior with his math before 8:00pm, when he's supposed to call David for a ride to the game tomorrow night, and then take a shower, and he better not be on that xbox again or there's gonna be trouble... -it costs you to get up. That's love, sacrificial giving.

◆ 2) When you don't buy a **new smart phone** every year, or don't trade in your car every year, or don't buy the name

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

brands, or do cut coupons out and wait for sales to buy grapes...-all so that your lifestyle can include tithing and other forms of offering, it costs you. That's sacrifice what you could keep.

◆3) When you give up paying for 200 channels you don't watch anyway so that you have a couple hundred extra bucks each month that you can flat out give to a cause... That's sacrificial living, and giving.

◆**Conclusion:** Here's what biblical giving is friends. It's when you voluntarily limit yourself by giving away to others so that when you experience the goodness of God you can clearly see it as God's provision and not your own. Mission India is a small agency of less than 25 people. Yet in the six years between 2002 and 2008 the churches it serves reported over one million new believers each year and the average cost of less than \$5. Only God does that. There are a lot of ministries doing great things like that. Catch a vision to support something with eternal consequences. Instead of saying "It's an economic down turn. Everyone is hurting. We have to keep the budget low." I think we should be saying "What does God want us to do?" Never mind the money. Money is not an obstacle to God. Giving that releases God's blessing puts God first, and accepts a cost on ourselves. But God is always the bigger giver. The question is only whether you and I will chose to experience that of not. Does not the Christmas story show this? God gave his own son! How

HOW TO RELEASE THE BLESSING, MAL3:7-12

The Joy of Giving #3

will he not give us all other things? If God is for you no one can stand against you!

◆ *"And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written: "He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever." 2 Corinthians 9:8, 9, NIV.*