

The Power of Belief
Series: ABC's of Giving
Malachi 3:8-12
November 27, 2016

Well folks, it's that time of year when we talk about stewardship. We talk about it every year. Do you remember why?

We talk about stewardship every year is that we plan on doing ministry next year. The youth mission trip, children's Sunday School material, organ maintenance, cool videos on Sunday would not happen unless we talked about stewardship.

We talk about stewardship every year to continually fight the societal 24/7 push towards self-centeredness.

And we talk about stewardship every year because it's important to God. We talk about Christmas and the birth of Christ every year. We talk about the passion, death and resurrection of Christ every year. Why? Because these are important to God and to us. Likewise, stewardship is important to God.

This year, our stewardship series is called, "ABCs of Giving." Turn to page 5 in your bulletin to take some notes.

Last week, we learned that "A" stands for "Attitude." We looked at the parable of the Good Samaritan and how it tells of 3 attitudes towards stewardship.

There's the attitude of the thief that says, "What's yours is mine and I'm going to take it."

There's the attitude of the Levite and priest that says, "What's mine is mine and I'm going to keep it"

Then there's the attitude of the Good Samaritan who says, "What's mine is Yours – I'll share it with you."

Today, we will look at the next letter of giving. "B" stands for "Belief."

A mother wanted to teach her daughter a moral lesson. She gave the little girl a quarter and a dollar for church. "Put whichever one you want in the collection plate and keep the other for yourself," she told the girl. When they were leaving church, the mother asked her daughter which amount she had given. "Well," said the little girl, "I was going to give the dollar, but just before the collection the man in the pulpit said that we should all be cheerful givers. I believed I'd be a lot more cheerful if I gave the quarter... so I did."

The mother may not have agreed with her daughter's reasoning, but at the heart of the matter is this fact – the daughter gave in the way she believed.

And it's true of all Christians – we give as we believe.

Today, I am going to talk about tithing, the taboo word in the church. The word tithe simply means "tenth." The Jews were told to give one tenth of what they earned to God. In the Old Testament, Abraham presented a tenth to Melchizedek.¹ His grandson Jacob, after his vision from God, devoted a tenth of all his property to God.² Later, God gave Moses this directive from Mt. Sinai: "A tenth of the land's produce... is God's. It is holy to God..."³

¹ See Genesis 14:20 and Hebrews 7:2,6

² Genesis 28:22

³ Leviticus 27:30,32 (The Message)

The tithe is a big deal for God. In fact, it is such a big deal with God that He spoke through the prophet Malachi on the subject. Malachi was the last Old Testament prophet, who served about 430 B.C. Throughout the book of Malachi, God tells the people things He is doing or things they are doing that are in fact disobedience, but they are so far from living a God-centered life that they repeatedly ask, “When?” The people had been acting religious for so long, without daily seeking God and His leading, that they didn’t know in all their religiosity how far they had strayed.

Malachi writes:

*“Should a person rob God? But you are robbing me. “You ask, ‘How have we robbed you?’ “You have robbed me in your offerings and the tenth of your crops. So a curse is on you, because the whole nation has robbed me. Bring to the storehouse a full tenth of what you earn so there will be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the Lord All-Powerful. “I will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out all the blessings you need.”*⁴

God is saying several things here. Write these down.

First, giving is part of worship. Malachi says to “Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple.”⁵ The “storehouse” was a place in the Temple for storing grain and other food given as tithes.⁶ The people were to bring their tithes when they came to the Temple, when they came to worship.

Do you know that worship is saying “I love you” to God. Giving our tithes is a way you can tell God you love Him, by giving to Him. It is a requirement of worship. It was to be a part of our worship of God.⁷ Giving of our tithe. Not a tip, but a tithe.

Giving, at its core, is the essence of love. You spell “love” G-I-V-E because that’s what love’s all about. When you love someone, you want to give to them. You parents, do you simply pass over December 25th without even a thought?

While you can give without loving, you cannot love without giving. It is impossible to do that. You say you love God, then it’s going to show up in your generous lifestyle. I can claim to be a Christian, a follower of Christ. I can claim to love God. But the Bible says there is one way to really test the sincerity of your love.

*“You are rich in everything—in faith, in speaking, in knowledge, in truly wanting to help. In the same way, be strong also in the grace of giving... I want to see if your love is true.”*⁸

God tests the sincerity of your love by looking at your giving. Why does He do that? God doesn’t need your time. He doesn’t need your money.

What does He need? He wants your heart. He wants what your giving represents. And He wants you to become like Him. “God so loved the world that He” what: “... He gave...” God wants you to be like Him, giving. If you love, you will give.

My friends, giving is an act of worship. It’s as much an act of worship as singing, praying, everything else. It’s saying, “God, I love You so much I want to give back to You. You saved my life and I want to give back to You.”

⁴ Malachi 3:8-10 (NCV)

⁵ Malachi 3:10

⁶ Life Application Bible Notes, Malachi 3:10

⁷ Deuteronomy 12:4-6

⁸ 2 Corinthians 8:7-8 (New Century Version)

The second thing we need to know is that **giving is an act of commitment and thanksgiving**. Giving is an act of commitment because when you give that tithe, you are saying that God will provide through the remaining 90%. It is an act of thanksgiving because when you give that tithe, you are telling God “thank you” for being the One who gave it to you to begin with.

You will only give first when you put God first. When you put God first, you will give first, and Jesus promises in Luke 6:38:

“Give, and you will receive. Your gift will return to you in full—pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, running over, and poured into your lap. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”⁹

A few weeks ago, we talked about how the first generation of Christians were givers, that there were no needy people among them. And that Sunday, we collected \$2,500 for a church family in need. That’s what happens when the people of God are committed and thankful – amazing things happen.

According to the 2000 census, the average median household income in Germantown was just over \$47,000. That’s the middle; half make more and half make less. So a median tithe in Germantown would be \$4,700

Now, we have about 140 families that give to the church. If our families accurately represent Germantown, then take the median tithe of \$4,700 times 140, and the church should receive \$658,000. Last year, we received just over \$355,000, or just over half what a tithe should be.

If we obeyed God and each giving family tithed, we would have over \$300,000 more income for ministry. Our apportionments were not be so dangerously behind schedule. We would have given probably \$50,000 more to missions, and \$200,000 down on the mortgage, and we’d have this building paid off in 5 years or so!

Amazing things happen when we give as an act of commitment and thanksgiving.

Third, **giving is done out of a grateful and joyous heart**. It is not a legalistic act of religion. It is not done out of obligation. Obedience yes; obligation, no.

The Bible says,

Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.¹⁰

I have discovered that there are really basically two kinds of people in life: cheerful givers and fearful givers. Cheerful givers say, “I’m going to give. It all belongs to God anyway. He gave it all to me. I wouldn’t have anything without God so I’m going to give it all to Him and He can take care of all my needs.” Cheerful givers – that’s the kind that God loves.

Then there’s the fearful givers: “I can’t afford to do this. I can’t afford to give. I’ve got to hoard. I’ve got to watch what’s for me. I’ve got to protect my selfish interests.”

Cheerful or fearful – you make the decision. You can either become like God and become a cheerful, generous giver or not like God and become a fearful, stingy hoarder. I have never known a generous person to complain about how much money it takes to run a church. Poor givers gripe about how much it takes; generous givers express concern that they don’t do more. I have come to believe that most people who

⁹ Luke 6:38 (New Living Translation, Second Edition)

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 9:7 (NRSV)

feel we talk too much about money, never really want to talk about money at all. Generous people enjoy talking about it. I have come to believe that there is a direct connection that exists between a person's faith and a person's generosity. Those who give generously tend to become more faithful; and the reverse is true in both instances. God tests the sincerity of my love by how generous I am in life.

Finally, giving is a proof of how much I believe.

Malachi 3:10 says:

"...Test me in this," says the Lord All-Powerful. "I will open the windows of heaven for you and pour out all the blessings you need."¹¹

You see, many people have an erroneous view of faith. People say to God, "I'll believe in You if you heal my friend of cancer." Or "I will do this ministry for You if You do something for me." So when the Bible tells them, "Bring in the full tithe", they think, "Ok, God, I'll do that, if you give me a big raise first." That's not belief. Belief is doing what God says before He does anything. Belief is acting first, no matter what you think God will do. God is waiting for you to act on faith. If you don't, He won't. If you don't give your life to Him, He will not save you from your sin.

We cannot expect Heaven to be opened or blessings poured out unless we give our tithe to the Lord and to His cause. So, if you do not tithe, well, He will not "open the windows of heaven for you."¹²

But there is an amazing statement here: we are to test God. God says, "Try it! Put me to the test!"¹³ Normally, we are not to test God.¹⁴ But in Malachi, God says it is ok. "Go ahead and test me. See if I don't pour out so much that 'you won't have enough room to take it in.'"

Do we believe that God will reward us if we are faithful in our giving? That's the question of the day.

In 2017, will I be a believing giver or a doubting giver?

I tell you what we're going to do. Next week is our final week of this series, and I'm going to ask you to do something. I'm going to ask you to bring the full tithe to the house of the Lord for one Sunday, just one Sunday. If you don't normally give weekly, then do so for one week, next week, and give a tithe, for one week. Then test God – He tells you to. Test God the week after you give, and see if He does not bless you. Test Him and believe.

And if you actually decide to give a tithe next Sunday, we're going to give you a money back guarantee. If you tithe and you believe that God hasn't supplied for you as this passage says, you just march up to me and you tell me how much you put in, and we'll refund your gift. I'm serious about this. If you don't see God's blessings, come to me and we'll refund your gift.

I once heard a man give his testimony of coming to Christ after many years of alcoholism, self-indulgence and waste. He shared that when he finally came to Christ, his family's finances were in a state of disrepair. One night, while attending a Revival at his church, he looked into his wallet for something to put into the offering plate. All he had was \$20. He and his wife looked at one another, remembering a significant bill that

¹¹ Malachi 3:10 (NCV)

¹² Malachi 3:10

¹³ Malachi 3:10

¹⁴ See Matthew 4:5-7

was coming due, she squeezed his hand in agreement, and, he placed the \$20 in the plate. He said that they both experienced something like a lifting of a burden from their shoulders. Upon arriving at home, there on the dining room table was an envelope containing the precise amount that they needed to pay their creditor. He marveled at the grace of God in supplying his need at the just the right time with just the right amount of money. But who put the money there? He had no idea.

So next Sunday, come and bring to God's temple, this church, a portion of what is already His. Bring it with an attitude of worship. Bring it as an act of commitment and thanksgiving. Bring it with a grateful and joyous heart. Bring it believing.