

**IT PAYS TO TITHE
MALACHI 3:6-12**

NEED: TO BE A TITHER

**PROPOSITION: WHEN GOD'S PEOPLE GIVE THE TITHE TO THE LORD,
GOOD THINGS BEGIN TO HAPPEN.**

OBJECTIVE: TO LEAVE GOD'S PEOPLE TO TITHE.

INTRODUCTION:

Gene Getz shares a story from the mission field that stirred my heart. Let me share it with you.

The story concerns a small, struggling congregation in Northern Chile. Most of the believers were very poor with large families. It was not uncommon for parents to send a child to the store to buy one egg and two potatoes. Initially, the monthly offering in the church totaled no more than \$6.00.

The missionary involved in planting this church was concerned about the financial condition of this small body of Christians. How could he help them become self-supporting? He began to pray about the matter.

About six weeks later, the missionary stopped in to visit a middle aged couple who had recently become Christians. They had begun reading the Bible on their own and had

discovered the concept of tithing. They began to ask questions. It did not occur to the missionary initially that this was an answer to his prayers. In fact, he tried to dodge the question. The man was a carpenter and had been without work for months. He and his wife had somehow managed to care for themselves and their 25 Rhode Island Red Hens on the income from the eggs laid each day. He was certain it would be a waste of time to talk to them about tithing.

But this couple would not be denied. So the missionary showed them the classic passage regarding regular and systematic giving in I Corinthians 16 and in II Corinthians 8 and 9. The rest of the story is remarkable, one that our church needs to know about. Listen to the description that the missionary gave of it:

The following Sunday at the end of the meeting, Manuel handed me an envelope. When he saw the puzzled look on my face, he said with a note of pride, "That's our tithe!"

I could scarcely believe it and stood for a long moment with the envelope in my hand. When he had gone I opened the flap and saw two or three small bills equaling about 19 cents.

The next Sunday afternoon I was passing their house on my bicycle when they waved me down. They had some exciting news. The Tuesday morning after they had given their tithe there wasn't a crumb of bread in the house for breakfast, nor money to buy more.

Their first impulse was to take the few pesos that had accumulated in the tithe box but on a second thought, Manuel said, “No, we won’t. That’s God money. We will go without breakfast this morning.”

There wasn’t anything to do but to attend to the chickens. Much to their amazement several of the hens had already laid eggs - at 6:30 in the morning. Never before had they laid before noon.

They gathered up the eggs and Manuel hurried to the corner store. Eggs brought a good price so he came back with enough bread for the entire day. That same afternoon, a little old man with a push cart knocked on the door asking if they might have any fertilizer to sell. They hadn’t cleaned out the chicken house for some time, so they were able to gather twenty sacks full.

That, too, brought a good price. They bought feed for the hens, staple groceries for themselves, and had money left over.

They decided the wife would buy a pair of shoes with the extra money. The next afternoon, she got on a bus and rode 20 kilometers around the bay to a bigger town.

As soon as she got off the bus, she bumped into a nephew she had not seen for five years. They greeted each other affectionately, and he asked what she might be doing in his town.

When she explained, he said, “Well, I’ve got a shoe store right behind you. Come on in and see what you can find.”

She soon found just what she needed, at the exact price she dared spend. The nephew wrapped the package and she handed him the money. “Oh, no, Aunt, I can’t take your money. These shoes are a gift for you!”

“No, no, nephew! That wouldn’t be right. Please take the money.” When the argument ended she found herself out in the street with both the shoes and the money.

The following week Manuel got a job on a project that would last for two years. The workmen were paid every fifteen days and sure enough, after each payday this couple arrived at church with their tithe which now amounted to more than the offerings of the rest of the congregation.

Word got around the church and others began to experiment with giving. I’d been paying the rent on the old building along with the light and water bills, but soon there was money in the treasury to cover all three.

The congregation continued to grow and so did the income. Each month our books showed more surplus in the treasury. I knew that one of the mission’s national pastors working among the Indians was not receiving the support he needed and deserved, so I

suggested that we designate some money for him. The congregation agreed, and we sent in the equivalent of \$20.00 each month.

Before long, the church was ready to have its own pastor, and an invitation went to that same man. When he arrived, my wife and I were free to move to a new location and start another church.

The next two years brought continued good news. As the congregation continued to grow they bought the old building and lots I had rented for them. They began remodeling and soon they had an attractive, modern, structure with Sunday School rooms and an auditorium seating 200.

On our last visit they had just completed a house for the pastor, solidly built of cement blocks, with a living room, kitchen, bath, and four bedrooms, and they had started a branch church in a housing area a mile away.

With an offered up little prayer and 19 cents, and God did the rest.

Isn't that a remarkable story. Good things do happen when God's people tithe!

This is the promise that God gave to His people through Malachi, the prophet, many centuries ago. He promised that if God's people would bring the whole tithe to the house of the Lord that good things would happen. By the whole tithe he meant 10% of their

income. Evidently some of those Old Testament people had slipped into a pattern of giving only a part of a tithe. A part of a tithe was not acceptable to God, he wanted the whole tithe. Look at this passage with me and let's consider together three things that happen with God's people tithe.

I. A CURSE IS AVOIDED.

In one of the strangest statements in the Old Testament, God confronts His people concerning their departure from Him. They are ready to protest that they have not departed from the Lord and they want to know why God thinks they have departed. God says to them that the evidence that they have departed from Him is in the way they have been robbing Him. "Will a man rob God? Yet, you rob me."

God's people couldn't believe what they were hearing. They asked God how do we rob you? God had an answer for their question. "In tithes and offerings." They had not been bringing to God 10% of their income nor the special offerings that went above their regular tithe for the work of the Lord. Then the Lord uttered that word, "You are under a curse, the whole nation of you - because you are robbing me."

1. The cause of the curse.

The cause of the curse was the withholding of the tithe that belonged to the Lord. God had made known to His ancient people that He considered the tithe as holy. He had taught them that 10% of everything they earned belonged to the Lord. They acknowledge His ownership of that 10% by presenting it to the Lord as an offering. They were to bring

it to the temple when they came to the house of God to worship. They had not been doing this so God treats it as though they were guilty of robbery. This is a serious charge. The thing they have done reflects an attitude toward God that would be like the attitude of a robber who breaks into your home and steals your property. Obviously such a person does not respect you or that which you own. So the person who withholds the tithe is guilty of not having proper respect for God and His property.

2. The impact of the curse

Evidently God meant for the people to understand that they would feel the impact of the curse in their every day life. When he described the blessing that he would bestow upon them he talked about preventing the pests that devoured the crops, causing the vines to keep their fruit until it was ripe. So evidently the curse was felt in every day life in the rains that never came, pests that ate up their crop, vines that did not perform as they were suppose to perform. They felt the impact of the curse as everything seemed just to go wrong in their lives.

The opposite of the curse is the blessing. When God withholds His favor from His people, a curse is what follows.

When ever you and I give a tithe regularly and consistently, we avoid the curse of God. Let me assure you that life can be difficult for all of us but life is almost impossible when God places His disfavor, His curse upon your life. None of us want that. The way to

avoid that is to be a faithful tither - to maintain a proper respect for God and to render unto God the things that belong to Him.

II. A BLESSING IS RECEIVED.

God issues a challenge to His people. “Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this and see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” The blessing of the Lord is upon those who honor God with the whole tithe.

1. The source of the blessings.

Did you hear how God identified Himself to His people? “Test me in this says the Lord Almighty.” The new contemporary version of scripture caught my attention when I read this passage. It reads, “I, the Lord all powerful have spoken!” The Lord all powerful! When the Lord all powerful determines to give a blessing you are blessed indeed. I read about a Swedish boy whose mother was very ill. After his examination, the doctor suggested to the boy she needed fresh fruit to eat if she was to ever get well. Where can I find this fruit, “ he asked himself.” Even with money to pay for it there is little fruit to be brought.” Finally, he thought of the gardens in the royal nursery. As the boy stood outside the fence looking at the luscious grapes hanging in clusters, the caretaker of the gardens approached. When the son told the caretaker of his mother’s needs and offered to buy just a few he was sternly refused.

But just as the boy was about to turn away in defeat, a young man stepped forward.

Unnoticed he had listened to their conversation and saw the lad's disappointment. The caretaker immediately recognized him as the young prince.

"Wait a minute, young man" said the prince. Then going over to the vines he clipped some fine clusters and placed them in the hands of the surprised boy.

Quickly the boy offered to pay for the grapes, but his offer was refused. "No," said the young prince kindly. "My father is not a merchant who sells. He is a king who gives."

Our God is a king who gives. He loves to give good things to His children. He has all of heaven and earth at His disposal when he decides to bless one of His own. This is the kind of blessing that the tither receives.

2. The measure.

In His attempt to encourage His people to be faithful in tithing, God says, "And see if I will not throw open the flood gates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have the room enough for it." Can you imagine that! God almighty opens the windows of heaven and through those windows begins to pour out upon His people more than they have room to receive. This is the explanation of the story from Chile. The hens began to lay early. Somebody comes by to buy fertilizer out of the hen house. A nephew gives you a pair of shoes. You get a job with a steady income. God opens a window and begins to bless.

This is one of the good things that happens when God's people begin to tithe.

III YOU BECOME A BLESSING.

In His word of encouragement God said to His ancient people, "I will make you a blessing to others."

1. To the people of God.

"Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house." The storehouse refers to rooms that were built around the temple in which food could be stored. The food stored in these rooms was used by the Levites and the Priests who served in the temple. It was also used as a source from which the poor could be fed. So both those who served in the House of God and those who were served by the House of God would be blessed. But the blessing they receive was made possible by the faithfulness of the tithers in Israel. When God's people tithe they bless the House of God.

You cannot imagine how much difference it would make in the way we do church if every member of this church brought the whole tithe to the House of God week by week. We are doing what we do today on the tithes and offerings of less than 25% of the members of this church. If even 50% of the members of the church were to return a tithe regularly, there would be resources to do ministries that we can't even dream about now.

The tither becomes a blessing to the work of God. The tither is blessed but he is also a blessing.

2. To the people of the world.

God has another word to say to His people of Israel. “Then all the nations will call you blessed because yours will be a delightful and,” says the Lord Almighty. God will make the work of the Lord a blessing beyond the people of the Lord. The word “nations” is a reference to the heathen nations that surrounded the nation of Israel. God would make them a testimony, a compelling testimony to the reality of God, to these unbelieving worshippers of idols. Can you imagine what a blessing is involved in this? You not only receive something that enriches your own life but do something that makes a difference in the world in which we live.

I received a letter from Kenny Mitchell a couple of years ago in response to a story that had appeared in the Baptist Standard. The story involved some responses that the Baptist General Convention of Texas was making at the time. This dear man, whom I have never met, closed his letter with this observation, “I am a member of a Baptist Church at Smolensk, Russia. I’m told that about 85% to 90% of our members tithe. The average salary of our members is less than \$40.00 a month. They tithe despite their financial hardships. They tithe because they love the Lord and want to serve Him. Imagine what would happen if 85% to 90% tithed. We would not know how to spend that much money. We would no longer have to choose between supporting local work or missions. We would no longer have to agonize or whether to reap the fields that are white unto harvest or invest in starting work in areas where people that never heard about Christ.

We would have more than enough for all those needs. Southern Baptists have money, what we lack is LOVE. We are too disobedient, rebellious. selfish and do not have enough love to give.

When I received this stinging rebuke from this brother, I could not refute it. His accusation is right. We are missing an opportunity to be a blessing because we have been disobedient and we have robbed God.

I want to say it again – good things happen when God’s people begin to tithe. They avoid God’s curse!! They receive God’s blessings! They become a blessing!

Thank God for every faithful tither in the fellowship of First Baptist Church! I want to challenge you before God to become one of that number as we begin our 1997-1998 financial year. Good things will begin to happen in your life when you begin to tithe.

