

THE POVERTY OF GOD

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Malachi 3:8-12. If you know the Bible you know what's coming. The last book of the Old Testament, some 400 years before Christ. The next to the last chapter in the Old Testament. Malachi writing, "Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.' But you say 'How are we robbing thee?' 'In your tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse because you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and thereby put me to the test,' says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. I will rebuke the devourer for you so it will not destroy the fruits of your soil and your vine in the field shall not fail to bear,' says the Lord of hosts. 'That all nations will call you blessed for you will be a land of delight,' says the Lord of hosts."

This sermon arises out of our church counsel this past Wednesday evening. When the membership met together we shared the good things which the Lord is doing in our midst and some of the current needs of the church as well. We learned that in terms of finances for the church this last year was the best year. Finances are the best they've ever been in the church. And at the same time they are the worst they have ever been.

The reason why they are the best is simply more people gave more to the Lord in 1976 through the ministry of this church than ever before. Some \$207,000 of contributed income in the church last year. Of that amount \$54,000 went to missions. \$97,000 went to retire debt, make improvements on the property, paying utilities, taxes, insurance and the like. \$35,000 went to church ministries, the maintenance of the various programs of the church – the Sunday School and the youth department and tape ministry and van upkeep and about a dozen things all together in that. About \$75,000 went for staff – four full time people, four part time people and about a half dozen people who are less than part time but still on the church pay rolls such as the gardener, the nursery staff workers, bookkeeper on a very part time basis, and the like.

It was a tremendous year when we looked at the finances that were given in the church. And especially I'm really thrilled that in the course of the last several years the missions income has risen to total of \$54,000 in expenditures. But right now I shared with the church on Wednesday night we're really in a tight spot because of the fact that we have been subsidizing missions funds from general funds to quite a good extent. We have as well had an income for the first four weeks of this year, which is considerably below the reasonable projections, which the deacons have made. And we are in danger for the first time in the last four years of actually missing the month-end payroll and the two-week payroll this coming Monday and Friday.

So I shared this with the congregation and also the fact that about 25% of our church moves away every year. And unless we add 25% people to the church we will actually be a dying church. And of course we don't want that. We are a growing church. But there are many new people that come in and may not understand the principles of how this church functions in regards to its finances.

I have not preached a sermon on tithing specifically since I pastored the church. This Sunday morning closes my 6th year of pastoring among you. I have gone back through the sermons I have preached and I have discovered that in 1975 I preached a sermon on the general theme of finances, how to help your own personal finances. I think I may have said something in there

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about giving to the Lord. In 1974 I preached a sermon on giving to missions. And on two other occasions in sermons in Exodus and Leviticus I made references to giving to the Lord. So I haven't said a great deal about finances in the church. Thus I hope you will allow me this latitude of once every six years of preaching on the subject. The question might be raised as to Why have you said so little? I'd like to articulate three reasons before we get into the sermon why I've said so little.

One is I'm extremely conscious, having been a lay person myself, of what can often happen in a church setting or any religious organization where people are harangued for funds and made to feel guilty if they are not giving funds. I'm very conscious of the stranger in our midst. I'm especially concerned always as I preach to realize that among the men and women and young people who come to the church there are those who are inquiring as to the reality of the Christian faith. And that one thing that can really turn them off to the Christian faith is for someone to get up and deliver a harangue on finances. Or maybe even something that is said appropriately about finances can be an initial stumbling block to someone.

Yet as I have thought about this for the past week I realize that finances did get in the way of someone who wanted to follow Jesus. Jesus told him that he must sell all and follow him and the man turned away. So there may be a legitimate case in which it would be a stumbling block. But I've been very conscious of the stranger.

I've also been acutely conscious of what I would call a personal conflict of interest. In that from the funds that are received in the church the pastor's salary is paid. So at any time I talk about funds it seems like I'm saying, Support the pastor. When I came to the church six years ago the pastor's salary was approximately 35-40% of the total income of the church received. Now it is just slightly under 10%.

And by the way, my salary has not been going down. But the percentage has been going down. I'd like it to go all the way down. My real goal would be to do what Criswell did as pastor of First Baptist church in Dallas, Texas. He pastored the church between 30-40 years. On one of his anniversaries he presented the church with a check for the total amount of his salary that was paid to him in all the years he'd been pastor of the church. It amounted to about \$635,000. He said the Lord had given him wisdom in investing funds. He had lived off his salary as a pastor but had in turn been able to invest money that he had saved and had returned a profit on his investment and now he wanted to be able near the close of his ministry in the church to turn his entire salary that he'd received over the years back to the church. I would really like to do that. My wife is the investor in the family. I hope she'll make this possible.

Paul was able to preach on this theme from a real clear standpoint. While he could withhold the principle "You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain," he, as an ox, was not taking any of the grain. That's an Old Testament reference in Deuteronomy.

The third reason why I have not preached on the subject these years is that I had and still have a basic confidence that God will sustain whatever is honoring to him. But one after another people who are members of the church in our church counsel meeting Wednesday night stood to their feet and reminded me of some things and exhorted me as a pastor to say something about tithing. There were specifically two reasons as I was able to summarize them that the exhortations covered.

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First of all by not saying anything in these years, and by my continued silence on the subject, I am depriving the congregation of a doctrinal foundation for giving. And specially for those of you who may come from backgrounds where tithing or giving to the Lord was not part of your church background or part of your background at all. I'm not giving you any substantive reasons from the scripture for why to give and what is involved in giving. So I've deprived you of that.

Secondly they told me that by not saying anything about the subject and depriving people of a doctrinal foundation I was also robbing people of the blessings which come through learning what it really means to give to the Lord. Therefore something should be said because if you're really not giving to the Lord you're missing out on some of his great blessings.

So I thought as I prayed and prepared for this Sunday that I should take this momentary detour from Romans to talk about this subject. I don't believe you can produce a cheerful giver through a condemnatory sermon. So my purpose will not be to condemn but to inspire, teach, exhort, instruct. Just a phrase that I would like to lift from the passage we have read in Malachi where Malachi is speaking in the first person as though God were speaking, which God is through the prophet, the Lord is saying that "That there might be food in my house." Through this phrase I come up with the sermon title for today "The Poverty of God." Through the prophet Malachi God is saying, "My house does not have provision. I am poor."

What is the reason for God's poverty? What is the cause of God's poverty? How poor God is, his house lacks food. Of course when you look at the Old Testament system primarily you're talking about an agricultural economy and people gave their living animals and their produce to the work of the Lord and it went to sustain the priests of the time. Therefore when God's house is lacking food this is what is meant. Those who carry on the work of the Lord do not have enough. His house is poor.

This is a striking statement because we know if we look at a strain of teaching in the scripture that God is not poor at all. In fact he owns everything. Yet God would be saying here, My house lacks food.

Look with me at several scripture, which speak of the riches of God.

Psalms 24:1 "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell upon it."

Deuteronomy 10:14 "Behold, to the Lord your God belong heaven and the heaven of the heavens, the earth and all that is in it."

Psalms 50:10-11 "For every beast of the forest is mine. The cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air and all that moves in the fields is mine."

Haggai indicates in 2:8 "The silver is mine and the gold is mine says the Lord of hosts." And even according to Ecclesiastes life itself is owned by God. The body dies and goes to the dust, but the spirit returns unto the Lord who gave it.

Therefore we have in Malachi this tremendous paradox that while the overwhelming totality of the scripture teaches that God owns everything. As someone has said he owns all the cattle on the hill and all the gold in the hills. Although he owns everything he yet is poor. His house

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lacks food. This poverty of God occurs because his assets are for the benefit and disposition of others. What benefit for example does the sun do for God personally? The sun does nothing for God. He has a billion other stars in the universe and needs none of them to keep him warm or to supply him energy since he is slight and he is energy. He gets no profit at all from the sun. The sun is for man's enjoyment, the basic source of our energy. And what drives our plant life and which makes possible life itself on planet earth.

What benefit does God get from the gold in the hills? He doesn't need a bit of it. He can make it all just as easily and perhaps in his eternal realm has stuff that is far more palatial than gold. Whatever he has made is not for his benefit on this earth. It is for man's benefit and it is for our use. An apple does God no good even although it does us if you like apples, an awful lot of good.

The poverty of God is therefore occurring because while he is the owner and the creator he is not the user of the benefits. Leviticus 25:23 especially spells out God's title, his ownership of everything. It's an important foundational text in the Old Testament. The Lord in promising the land to Israel says in 25:23 "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity [forever and ever] for the land is mine, you are strangers and sojourners with me."

We live in an area where we're familiar with the Irvine Company who owns the land and puts it out on leasehold arrangement. Fifty-five year lease or 99 year leases. When I came to this area from Missouri I couldn't believe that anyone would ever want to buy a house and wouldn't own the land. Now I see it makes a lot of sense because house prices just keep going up and up. But there comes a day down the road after your life time and mine where that land reverts back to the Irvine company or whoever is going to own it at the time. The land is owned by someone but its use and the profit from its use is derived by the one who possesses it.

So the scriptures teach in a foundational sense that the Lord owns everything. But he is the user of nothing. We are the users. And the tithe, or that which is contributed to the work of the Lord is really what amounts to an interest only payment. We never can buy the principle. God owns the land. And he's going to one day make a new heaven and a new earth from it. He has title and we can never secure the title from him. But he does accord us the privilege of living on the land and of using the assets, which come to us as a result of life.

In Leviticus 27:30-32 the Lord specifically spells out to ancient Israel the terms of its using the land and the fee for using the land, if you will allow that term. "All the tithe of the land [that's 10%] whether of the seed of the land or the fruit of the trees is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord. If a man wishes to redeem any of his tithe he shall add a fifth to it. That means if anyone at a particular time does not want to give his 10% to the Lord but wants to withhold it for a period of time for use for himself then he is required to pay a 20% additional interest on the amount that he has withheld. And all the tithe of birds and flocks, every tenth animal of all that pass under the herdsman staff shall be holy to the Lord."

This giving of tithe to the Lord we recognize immediately that it is impossible to hand God something directly. When I give to the Lord my tithe, that dollar out of every ten, or that dime out of every dollar, I can't simply go up and say to the Lord directly, Here is my dime. Here is my dollar. Because the Lord is not here physically to give it to.

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So what happened in the Old Testament and what happens in the New Testament is that the income goes to God's work on earth which ultimately blesses man, I would think far more than it even blesses God. Because we receive far more from the work of the Lord and from the blessings of seeing his work progress than even he himself.

So tithe is kind of an interest only payment. We never reduce the principle.

Malachi therefore, the text that we have read today, is saying that God has been robbed. His house is poor amidst plenty. Other accounts may be overflowing but his account is scant. Other cupboards may be full but his cupboards are meager. Luxury abounds but the Lord must stand and beg.

If you have ever loaned a friend a sum of money and it has not been paid on time you know the embarrassment and the shuffling of feet that occurs as you ponder whether or not you should go contact that friend and ask him for repayment of the debt. It is a humiliating and difficult experience to ask a friend to pay the debt, which he owes. This is the position, Malachi is saying God is now in. It is humiliating for him to ask payment but that is what God is doing. Israel under this time which Malachi writes is exemplifying a story which I heard.

You may have heard it at various times how the Proverb is told how God once gave a man ten apples. He gave him three to be used for food, three to be used for shelter or barter in obtaining shelter, and three to be used for clothing or barter in obtaining clothing. The tenth apple he gave him that he might render that he might give it back to God as a gift. So man took the first three apples and spent them for food. He took the next three apples and spent them for shelter. He took the third set of three apples and spent them for clothing. Then he had one apple left. It looked redder and bigger and juicier than all the other apples. So that man took the tenth apple and ate it and gave back to God the core.

What Malachi and what the totality of scripture is saying is something like this: God owns the dollar and man owes the dime. God designed his work both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament to run at least on a minimum of a tenth of the income of the people. So the cause for God's poverty is because of the fact that he owns title. He does not derive benefit from his possessions except as man from a free and willing heart accords to the work of the Lord that interest payment which is due him.

Having looked at the cause of God's poverty we spend a few moments looking on the scriptural cure for God's poverty. Malachi is very clear on this. Bring the tithe into the storehouse. We would translate that in New Testament terms to bring the tithe into the church.

What about the subject of tithing? Let me just show how in scripture it is taught, and how even scripture goes beyond the subject of tithing.

We would look for example for a moment at the fact that tithing was a requirement under the law. In fact this may be a reason why some New Testament believers initially object to the tithe. It's an Old Testament legalistic requirement. People lived under the law then but we live under grace now. Let me not try to answer that for just a moment but simply to note that under the law tithing was mandated by the law. We've already noted Leviticus 27, which is the key text on tithing in the Old Testament. However if we are careful to note we see in the Old Testament that there are occasions under the law when giving to the Lord exceeded far more than simply the

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fulfillment or the performance of a duty. It went far beyond duty and got down right exhilarating on a few occasions which suggests that people in the law period of time were able to get detached from simply legalism in giving and got to the point where they absolutely really enjoyed it.

One of the delightful texts is in Exodus 35 when in the building of the tabernacle, the people gave so much for the materials that were involved that finally Moses had to tell them to quit giving.

Then there is another incredible passage in 1 Chronicles 29. There is a prayer of David. He has not been allowed to build the temple but the Lord has allowed him to gather all the materials so that Solomon could build the temple. David is coming to the end of his life, transition of administration. He's ready now to turn things over to Solomon but all the materials that Solomon's going to be using in the temple has been gathered. The silver and the gold, just mounds of things. David prays this prayer when all has been gathered. It's really a tremendous and incredible prayer, verses 10-19. Let me single out two verses. Verse 14 "But who am I and what is my people that we should be able thus to offer willingly. For all things come from thee and of thine own we have given thee." See this principle we've been talking about. David, in giving, recognizes that also he's giving is simply what God owns in the first place. It's like when your child goes shopping for a Christmas gift for you. You love the gift that they bring. But you know that they were only able to give you the gift because you gave them the money to go out and look for it. David recognizes that here. Verse 14 he says this.

Verse 16 another great statement, "Oh Lord our God all this abundance that we have provided for building thee a house for thy holy name comes from thy hand and is all thine own." So no matter what I personally have in the bank or in assets or whatever when I foundationally come to who owns it I recognize that it is the Lord. I have nothing into this world and it's for sure that I can't take anything out. The material remains.

This kind of hilarity in giving is characterized as occurring under the Old Testament law, we must understand that within the Old Testament itself that giving to the Lord in the tithe and offerings is not simply a procedure adopted by the law alone. In fact the principle of giving a tithe to the Lord existed before Mt. Sinai. Before the commandments were ever given. It is a principle enduring before the law. The key passage to this is Genesis 14:18-20. Where Abraham is coming out of Haran where he was alien to the land of Canaan, to the land which God had promised him, a land flowing with milk and honey. As he makes his initial journeying into the land and after defeating some kings in a battle he comes to a place where he meets Melchizedek who is king of Salem. The book of Hebrews, Hebrews 7:8-10 makes a very large thing of this. Melchizedek's name literally means "king of righteousness." And he is king of Salem and Salem means peace. It is the ancient word for the city of Jerusalem. So here is a king who as Hebrews points out has no lineage, that is we never read of his father, we never read of his beginning. He is therefore an example of Christ who is king over Jerusalem. King of the city of peace and king of righteousness. This Melchizedek in example of Christ as Hebrews points out comes and Abraham meets him. And Abraham's immediate response is he gave him a tithe of all that he had.

An incredible statement because we read no where prior to that in scripture of any mandated law of God saying you shall give a tithe. But here is Abraham in that natural response to God without the law wanting to offer something to the work of God in the person of Melchizedek.

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The writer of Hebrews goes on to point out that if in the Old Testament they paid tithes to the Levites we learn from the example of Abraham that the Levites who were the priests of the Old Testament, while they were still in Abraham's loins, not yet born they represented by Abraham paid tithes to Melchizedek who has a higher priesthood, a representative of Christ.

And if by the way in the Old Testament using the Hebrew analogy people gave to the work of the Lord, how much more in the New Testament with the age of grace and evangelism and blessing and the light of the gospel for the whole world ought we also to be motivated to give.

This principle of giving before the law also occurs with Jacob at Bethel when he is running away after he has tricked his father Isaac. His first night away from home he slept on a stone for a pillow. He wakes up in the morning after having had a dream of the ladder ascending to heaven. And he vows before the Lord that he will give as the Lord prospers him a tenth of all the Lord gives him.

We learn also as we look at the New Testament to understand what principles are being enacted there in respect to giving to the work of the Lord. We read for example Jesus saying that he fulfilled the law. To say that he fulfilled the law means that he by his own example kept the requirements of the law.

One of the key requirements of the law was the matter of tithing. We may assume on the Lord's own words since he says he kept the law, that in his carpentry years at Nazareth he gave of his income to the work of the Lord. He gave of his tithe and his offerings. He exemplified the law he fulfilled it.

The Lord also is seen in the gospels as approving tithing. It occurs in an unusual context. The context where he is excoriating the scribes and the Pharisees who he said tithed mint and dill and cumin. These were small garden vegetables. Some of them about the size of small peppers that we would have today. He is saying to these super religious Pharisees, you're so exacting to your requirements of God that you take your vegetables from the garden and every nine vegetables you separate for yourself and the tenth vegetable you give to God. He says but you have neglected justice and mercy and faith. Then comes an incredible sort of tie in to that. He says, "These ought you to have done without neglecting the other."

Without neglecting the other *what?* Without neglecting the tithe. So the Lord in Matthew 23 and in Luke 11:42 upholds the principle of tithing in this reference.

He also goes far beyond the legalistic requirements of giving. He notes for example the widow who throws in all that she has into the temple treasury in Luke 21 and approves her. The story of Zacchaeus is told how after his conversion he gave half of all that he had to the poor. Mary is approved for pouring the alabaster upon him. Jesus is come to teach now that giving is motivated not simply by the law but by love.

When I have to give a gift it's not nearly as exciting as when I love to give a gift. When love is the compelling reason and not law. Thus Paul in motivating the Corinthians to give says "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you through his poverty might become rich." This principle of giving was practiced in the early church as well. In Jerusalem they got so excited in the movement of the Holy Spirit

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that literally people gave up everything they had so that the writer of Acts notes that no one had anything which he called his own.

Other churches did not follow this example of living in community. But Paul in his writings mandates the practice of giving in the New Testament. Romans 10:15 “How can men preach unless they are sent?” And 1 Corinthians 9:14 “The Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel.” And in two other passages, 1 Corinthians 16 and 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 he has a great deal to say about giving.

So if we look at the totality of scripture – the law, the practice before the law, the example and teaching of Jesus, and the practice and teaching of the early church. We see wherever we go in the scriptures the principle of giving and tithing and offerings upheld.

We’ve looked at the cause for God’s poverty and some of the cures for God’s poverty and the Lord’s people giving to him what is rightly his, I’d like to note a third thing. That is the care for which we are to give.

I would like to note some scriptural prohibitions on the manner in which we give.

We are to not give for the sake of public recognition. Remember the Pharisee who stood and said, “I thank thee God I’m not as this publican. I tithe of all that I’ve got.” He made his giving a parade.

Jesus said when you give alms don’t let your right hand know what your left hand is doing. That is one reason why unless I really fall away from the gospel I will never do this in this church. You can know that I’ve really bent from my principles if I ever do this. We do not recognize people publicly in giving. We do not ask for people to raise hands indicating how much they’re going to give. Or people to stand up and say how much they’re going to give or pledge so that other people know it. We do not publish a list of who’s giving what. That is a matter which is protected between you and the Lord and the church treasurer and bookkeeper. That is to allow you to not receive your reward on earth but to allow you to receive your reward in heaven.

Unfortunately in many Christian organizations and even churches today I’m ashamed to say that often what is going on to the raising of finance is totally contrary to the spirit of Jesus.

I talked to a person who was very well known for the raising of missionary funds the whole principle was to get people to write down on a pledge what they will give and then read it from the podium. I said to the person, that doesn’t strike me as right from the scripture. His response to me was, It really brings in the money.

Another prohibition is wrong motives. We’re to give expecting nothing in return. I have thought of the innocent trap I fell into when I was taking TV and radio work. The whole deal in motivating people to give if you have a radio/TV program is to promise them a gift. It’s a hook. If you give you will get this. The whole purpose is the motivation, which is not in its highest and biblical sense a giving to the work of the Lord. It is a giving in order to get something in return.

In the New Testament also I think there’s a principle of forbidding a mandated collection. Or what I would call a calling of people and requiring them to put this much down on the line this year for the church. Paul in writing to the Corinthian in 2 Corinthians 9:5 tells them that the

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offering which he is collecting is not an exaction. So in this church you will never have anyone call on you and saying “What’s your income – there’s a minimum you can give in order to attend this church.” We will not have fund raising banquets and the like in order to try to get people to subscribe to things in giving.

The only time we really want to build your faith in respect to giving is still in a way that allows secrecy but in respect to missions faith promises which provide for us to operate in a way that is consistent with scripture.

What are some of the patterns in giving? If we know what some of the prohibitions are what are the patterns for giving individually?

When I receive my paycheck the top priority for me is to exhibit in that moment that beautiful biblical principle which we have a fantastic chorus written we sing about “Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.” So it gets first priority.

In 1 Corinthians 16:1 we learn that Paul states another couple of patterns. He exhorts the people to give regularly on the first day of the week, let each of you lay aside such as God has prospered you. The importance of giving regularly is that there are regular needs to meet among the people of God. By regularly then I would understand that when a person is paid he’s paid annually or monthly or weekly or whatever, that is what is involved here in regularly.

And Paul also enunciates the principle of proportionally as the Lord has prospered. The Old Testament and Jesus supports it starts with a base of 10% of giving. But as the Lord prospers his people they can move far beyond that level to really give and invest in his work.

We’re also as a pattern for giving taught throughout the New Testament to give sacrificially. Paul in writing to the Corinthians, in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 notes how they even gave beyond their means from their poverty overflowed an abundance. They gave liberally. And also he notes, they gave cheerfully. The word in the Greek for cheerful is the word in the English we derive hilarious. That’s where the phrase being a hilarious giver comes from. It’s that word “cheerfully”. 2 Corinthians 9:7.

Back to Malachi. Malachi indicates when he speaks of timing that when the work of God is going poor, when there is no food in God’s house, because the people are not tithing, a curse rests upon the people. What do we mean by a curse? Individuals may financially prosper who are not tithing. But the fact of the matter remains the work of God suffers. And because the work of God is suffering and people are not giving, their own spirit is constricting. Instead of becoming the liberal soul that is made fat, they are becoming more narrow in soul.

The curse of God rested upon the nation of Israel as a totality. For when Israel was its weakest both within and without it was its weakest when the work of God was neglected. The lack of finances symbolized and manifested a lack of spiritual ardor. Whereas the opposite is always the case as well. A presence of spiritual ardor means an overflowing of financial blessing.

But also in this passage of Malachi there is great blessing promised upon the people. It is put in very material terms. That the Lord would bless them abundantly and prosper their crops.

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I used to get into arguments with my mother on this subject who was an ardent believer and tither. In my years growing up like all teenagers I liked to argue with my parents from time to time. I used to say to her in effect, "Mom, I don't see you prospering all that much! You're as poor as I've ever seen. Look at the people who aren't tithing and they're prospering." I think if we look at the subject of blessing from the New Testament vantagepoint we understand that blessing from the New Testament vantagepoint is almost always used in reference to Spiritual blessing. But I think it can refer to financial blessing as well Jesus in Luke 6:38 says something that appears to be very much a reward in the financial area. "Give and it will be given to you, good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, it will be put into your lap." Paul in 2 Corinthians 9:6-12 notes now he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly.

I would never give from the standpoint that now that I've given to the Lord, he's got to do something for me. That's not the motivation for giving. But I recognize that in giving to the Lord and putting him first I put myself in a position for receiving his blessings.

Last fall I was in the hospital twice. Once for an appendectomy and the other time for an angiogram on the heart. We have a good insurance plan for the church staff but it does not provide certain deductibles and certain percentages that are used and I would up spending about a \$1000 that I hadn't anticipated spending or even budgeted that year or hoped to spend. I was really beginning to get tight in my spirit as to how in the world this need was going to be met. I come from the vantage point I've always argued with my mother: "You give to the Lord, whether you get blessed or not. It's right. You do it. You don't expect anything in return." That's just the way I felt and probably still feel.

One day when I was in the office, my secretary came in and said, "You're not going to believe this but someone just walked into the office who is not from our church at all and prefers to remain anonymous and she said she'd been in prayer and the Lord had laid you on her heart and she brought in this check. It's for \$250." (I needed \$750.) I thought "Thanks Lord for the \$250 but don't forget the other \$500."

A couple days later when the church was being put into the deposit it wasn't for \$250. The secretary had initially misread it. It was for \$750. That just absolutely stunned me. What stunned me so much was that of all the priorities in the kingdom of God of which I can think of many that are far more important than my hospitalization, but that the Holy Spirit should lay it upon the heart of someone in this community to give \$750 that they didn't even know what my need was. I thought, That's incredible that the Lord would single me out as a priority item.

To kind of conclude. There is need for food in the Lord's house. In fact right now there's need for about \$10,000 worth of food in the Lord's house! I want to see the work of God prosper. I want the response that I give to the Lord to be able to be imitated by every believer. I must continually raise the question that if my example were followed by all how would the work of God be prospering?

I want to be a cheerful given to the Lord. I have received more than I will ever give. And I have received more than I could possibly return to the Lord. In fact he is going to keep giving me more in the future than I can ever give to him. This is going to be the one life in which I get a chance to do something for him. When I go to be with him, he's going to be doing everything for me.

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Starting at a base of one tenth of my income to the Lord this helps me with priorities of my own personal income. It helps me organize my budget. Makes me more careful about the other 9/10 so that it actually goes further than the 10/10 would have. I also realize that there is a relationship between spiritual blessing and financial generosity. It gives me an opportunity to trust the Lord as I commit to him the top of my income.

We had a teenager in the church at our last missions convention. When we passed out the faith promise cards (I learned this from her mother) she saw that the amount on one side and whether you're going to give weekly, monthly or annually down on the bottom. She put \$10 on the right hand column then where it had weekly, monthly and the like she had meant to put down monthly but instead she checked Weekly. She turned it and then she realized all of a sudden what she had done. But she realized when she checked Weekly, she wanted to do it because she wanted to do something absolutely stunning in faith. It was stunning because she wasn't earning much more than \$10 a month in all of her babysitting jobs.

When her mother told me this I said on the basis of Old Testament scripture of being able to get out of a vow I said, You tell her that we'll accept this if she wants to change.

Her mother said, No, now that she's done it she really wants to go ahead with it. My initial reaction was this is going to destroy her faith. How can she give \$10 a week when she's only making \$10 a month?

But from that time on babysitting jobs began to open for her and she has not missed her faith promise and she made it in November. She's absolutely beside herself with joy. Her faith has been built up in the Lord.

Above all things in giving we must recognize that the Lord after all in the financial analysis does not seek our gifts. He seeks the giver. Just as when we seek the gifts of the Holy Spirit we do not seek the gifts, we seek the giver. The Lord does not pursue us for our assets. All the assets are his anyway. He wants us for ourselves. And if he has us then he has what is ours.

I pray, heavenly Father, that what I have said today has been a faithful explanation of your word and has been true in every detail. I pray that if it is not true, if it is not an accurate representation of your word that you would bring better understanding to me and to the listeners who have heard the word today. We open ourselves to you to be obedient to you in this area of stewardship and discipleship in our own lives. If Lord there are friends here today who have never really heard this teaching before. Or maybe have heard it but never become involved in giving to you on a regular proportional basis beginning with 10%, let there be today a determination to follow you and to be obedient to you in this respect. I am conscious Lord also of friends among our own church body who are in great financial straight. We've been in those times and still continue in them so you know what they are. We just simply ask that a measure of faith will be given to trust in you to provide all that is needed when you are put first. Let there be Lord a wealth of liberality and generosity flow from us to bless your kingdom, to bless your work here and literally throughout the globe, as we become involved in it. We thank you Lord for this opportunity now to share the word together today. In Jesus' name. Amen. `