

Sermon Text for November 4, 2018

By Rev. Robert K. Bronkema

Leviticus 27:30, Malachi 3:8-10, Matthew 6:19-21

“Tithing as Obedience

This is my 25th year of ministry and in each new setting where I find myself, it is always interesting to me how churches are used to going about making sure that enough funds are raised to meet the budget. I have served in a church where before I got there they went door to door to canvas pledges. That is not my style so we stopped that pretty quickly. I served in a church where posted in the church was how much people gave and when so that every week there was a running total on each member, almost like it was a competition, you would think that I would like that since it was a competition, yeah, not so much, so we changed that habit.

My style has always been one where I preach one Sunday a year on the work of the church and what is needed to financially to meet the need to complete that work, and every year somehow in all the churches where I have served, the needs have been met. I guess I am lucky, but I think it probably goes beyond that. What I probably attribute it to is that I share with the congregation what I believe is obedience to the Lord. What are we called to do, what are we commanded to do, what does the Lord require of us in our life, and also in our finances. I think you know me well enough that I am not satisfied with almost, if God asks us to do it then we should do it, and I’m going to follow Scripture to see what I believe we are called to do. That is in every area of life, including our finances.

So today I have been encouraged to break from my tradition and instead of offering a single stewardship sermon which some of you might miss, I am going to offer a month long series on financial stewardship. I am going to look into the Scriptural background for tithing. I am not going to encourage you to give a few more dollars than you already are, I am not going to encourage you to increase your giving gradually until you reach 10%, no, I’m going to say that tithing is obedience to the Word of God and that is what God has asked us to do. So, welcome all of you to stewardship month,

READ SCRIPTURE

I’m a preacher’s kid and I’ll never forget as a child the feeling that came over the church when my dad spoke about finances. He worked in an ecumenical society that

helped fund groups of low income people by providing seed money for projects, that is once we came to the United States in 1976. So he didn't have his own church, but he was pretty well known so he would inevitably get asked to preach in churches during stewardship season because the churches were hoping it would be a big draw. There was a silence that fell over the church that was palpable, because no one likes the pastor preach about money, and the pastor less than the parishioners.

I think one of the reasons why I don't feel comfortable about it is because it is an area that I feel Scripturally, prayerfully, spiritually, and every other area of my life confident that I have figured out and the plan that I have for my life in that area of my life I am very secure in. For generations, like many of you, our family has given 10% of what it makes. So why is that? Let's look at Scripture and try to understand what it is telling us.

Leviticus starts us off and this is considered the foundation of tithing. This is where we see the Israelites when they are first starting off as a nation God commands them to give 10% to the Lord. The foundation of this concept is that Scripture tells us all that we have is from God. If you go to Psalm 89:11 you read. So from the very premise of this argument you have to start with the realization that all that we have, our family, our house, our cars, our income, our jobs, our church, all that is found on the earth is the Lord's. That was the approach that we have in Leviticus, and as a result we read, so give back 10% and the Lord will allow you to keep the other 90%.

We have to start from that standpoint, because if we start from the standpoint that I am giving to God something large, and something that I cannot afford to give up, or something that I deserve and worked hard for, so I can just give a bit of a smaller piece, then we have already misunderstood the central premise of God's commandment to tithe. All that we have is the Lord's he is only asking that we give back to him 10%

This is what Malachi gets at in chapter 3. We may ask if we are accused of not giving 10% how are we robbing God? This Scripture then takes a turn that is somewhat unexpected, but makes complete sense in its context. If you do give the 10% then God is going to bless you. Let's put a pause right there. I am not saying if you buy your pastor a new car, preferably not a Prius, that God is going to bless you. I am not saying that if you fill the pockets of the rich with your tithe that God is going to bless you, no what this reads as is if you give your 10% to the church so that it can fulfill the kingdom work that

it is set out to do, then God will never leave you without enough to live your life. That will be a blessing.

I hate to repeat myself, but you know that I have stories of how this is true. You know that I have stories of how God has met our needs. I am going to tell these stories to you simply because I don't want you to miss out on what your life can look like if you obey God in all things. Story of Stacy and me in Italy. If you are faithful in small things, I will make you faithful in big things. Rachel and the \$400 for college. Keyboard at Albanella, Keurig here at First Presbyterian. I tell you these stories simply because I want you to believe that God does provide and I don't want you to miss out on experiencing that.

Our Matthew Scripture, and we are going to be spending November in Matthew, reminds us that we ought to store up treasures for ourselves in heaven, that our time and our energy ought not to be in order to provide for ourselves financially and materially, but rather that we ought to store up for ourselves treasure in heaven. When we do that, then God does take care of us, completely.

You know, kids understand this and kids will see where our treasures are stored. I have parents who ask me I don't know what's wrong. I brought up my child in the church, I taught him the things of God but today he laughs at me, he doesn't take me seriously, he just doesn't listen to me when I talk about God anymore. What can I do? Of course we all know what the problem is. This youngster is not stupid.

Jesus said, you can talk about love all you want where your treasure is, there will your heart be. And he sees a father and a mother who are willing to spend 150 a piece for a Broadway show and then go to church and put 10 in the plate for the poor. And the boy says, I know where their treasure is, and that's where their heart is. They talk about loving God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength but I don't see them sacrificing very much for those whom God has put before us to be served in his name.

Tithing is a learned behavior. The natural way to think of money is that it is ours, we own it, and we are being nice to give some of it back to the church, some of it back to God. But as we said from the beginning, if that is the way we think, then we have already lost that battle and you are not going to experience the miracles of Christ in that area of your life, you simply will not. I can't encourage those of you who have young children to start early with them to teach them what it means to tithe. If they get a weekly

or a monthly allowance, then encourage them to give 10% of it to the church, as you do. Have them take it to Sunday School and give it then, or we can start something at children's church if they don't go to Sunday School.

Malachi states put me to the test, and see if my Word is true. I want to encourage us to do the same. This is not some cheesy fundraiser, this is why we are going to do this in January because I don't want you to think that my incentive is to raise funds for the church, to make budget like we did last year, or to increase our giving. That is not my incentive. My incentive is to increase your faith and to increase your reliance upon Almighty God. In January, I want you to try to give 10%. Just for the month of January. I guarantee you that if you try it, if you truly give 10% in January, you will never go back to what you are giving today. I can tell you from experience, that if you are willing to see what you have as God's and that you are simply obeying through tithing, that your life in that area will be completely transformed. Melody and her story.

Obey the Lord through tithing. Amen.