

Deuteronomy 14:22-29 and Hebrews 7:1-10

“Tithing as a way of life”

I know we have a number of you who have been attending recently, like within the last year or so. What you may not know is that once a year I preach a sermon on tithing, once a year. Congratulations you have come to church on the Sunday of 2026 that we are going to be hearing about tithing from Scripture. One of the primary reasons why I only preach on it once a year is because of the cultural reputation that churches carry in regards to finances, where it is not unusual to hear someone say about a church is that all they care about is my money.

I hope and I pray that no one would ever say that about First Presbyterian Church of Strasburg, in fact, I pray that people would ask the question, do they even care about money? I never hear them talk about it. But there is a way of life in Scripture that like a red thread runs through both the Old and the New Testament which finds at its core tithing, the giving of 10% of all that we bring home from our work going to the church. The cynical view of finances and the church creates a narrative that runs so counter to the Gospel message that I try very hard to ensure that our church is not defined that way. We don't have a culture of fundraisers for either our youth or our children for their programs, you as a congregation in the budget support that.

You see, I grew up as a missionary kid and as a family we tithed, it was a way of life. Stacy and I tithe, so if you look at the budget you know exactly how much we give to the church each year, maybe a little more, but who is counting? Growing up we never owned a house. We ways only had one car, like always, even when my brother and I were in high school my parents had to figure it out. But we had lived and we had seen the world and we knew that we were blessed materially beyond belief, especially compared to some places where we had lived in the world. Tithing was a way of life for us, and our way of life was simple, and filled with joy.

Our first reading is described as the regulations concerning tithing. Our Hebrews Scripture gives us the first mention of tithing in Scripture between Abraham and Melchizedek and uses that as an example of our tithing as obedience to Jesus. This is what I want us to remember. Tithing is not a way of life for the sake of the church. Oh, beyond a shadow of the doubt it helps the church. But tithing must be seen first and foremost as a way of life that establishes a relationship with you and Jesus around something in your life that you value and that you consider important. When you are able to do that, then, well, then, you and Jesus are on different terms. Let's read

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When we pick up the concept of tithing in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy we see that it is already a way of life. One tenth of all that we make we give to the Lord. The assumption is that we understand that all that we make, even all that we have, is a result of who God is in our life. All that we have is in reality God's in the first place, and we are merely stewards, the one who are responsible for what we have to use it as God would want us to use it. There is no sense of possession in Scripture. We don't possess anything, God gives us things, material good, crops, animals, in our day and age, money a job health family, all of that is actually originated, created, and given to us by God in the first place. So what we have isn't really ours at all, it is God's. All that we have, some could even say, is a blessing for our obedience. There is that concept also in Scripture, but I don't want to push that one too far.

There are some who have taken this and launched into a full blown theology of the prosperity Gospel which states that the more we give to God the more God will give to us and it moves from provision to prosperity. That is a lie and a heresy, and I can say that from not only a theological perspective from Scripture but also from a personal perspective that God does not bless anyone with prosperity, God blesses with provision and then we choose what we want to do with what God has provided us.

Within our Deuteronomy Scripture, I hope you noticed that, there is a command to care for those who do not have, who are on the margins of society and so we are called to be those who provide for those who are not able to provide for themselves. Look at Deuteronomy vs.29 where we are commanded with our tithes to care for the stranger, the foreigner, and the widow and the orphan. Your tithe covers what we are able to do with CIC which you heard about this morning from Alicia. Without your tithe we could not do what God has placed upon our hearts to do, to care for those who are on the margins of society that Matthew 25 describes so clearly. Look at what we are able to do with the food bank, similarly, your tithe, your finances, your time, your commitment to ensure that God's promise of provision comes true is realized through your tithes.

Your tithes covers our youth and children's programs, it covers the resources that we need for worship on Sunday morning. It allows us to remodel bathrooms so that all people are able to use them comfortably and not have to worry whether they are suited for them or not. Absolutely tithing benefits the church. This is true, our budget reflects that, our endowment allows us to give to mission far beyond what we have ever been able to do. But the reason why

we tithe is not to help cover the costs for the church. There is a much more personal reason for tithing that we often miss. When you tithe you are obeying the way of life that God has laid before us in Scripture. When you tithe you are able to experience the presence of God in your life as you rely upon him day in and day out, that you would not experience if you did not tithe and thought that all that I have is a result of my hard work. That can change in a blink of an eye. You know that.

Hebrews lays out for us what it means to tithe to Jesus as a way of life. Yes, I am equating giving to the church, and not just giving but tithing to the church as giving to Jesus as a way of life. I have no hesitation in equating the two. The church is the bride of Christ and it is through the church, Jesus says, that his kingdom will be realized. So 5 times the word tithe is used in Hebrews 7. I can only preach from the text that I have. Do you see why I had to do my once a year sermon on tithing now?

But in this Scripture of Hebrews we read about this person Melchizedek who in the time when Hebrews was written had become this great than life figure. Keep in mind that outside of Hebrews Melchizedek is only mentioned twice, once in Psalm 110:4, and then more extensively in Genesis 14 where we have three verses that describe him as a priest and a king to whom Abraham gave his tithes. This story of Abraham and Melchizedek is fascinating because Melchizedek is described as a priest who appear right after Abraham had conquered a bunch of kings and had taken their possessions and he was about to give all of these possessions to the king of Sodom. Melchizedek shows up and Abraham gives him 10% and then gives all the rest that he had taken to the king of Sodom because he did not want the king of Sodom to think that he had somehow enriched Abraham.

This simple story of this king and priest who shows up and then disappears then in later Jewish writings Melchizedek becomes a figure in literature that in the dead sea scrolls was central to the first century expectations to the end times. He was seen as God's agent, an angel above the other angels. Philo mentions him in 5 separate writings. The targum, a Jewish writing, describes Melchizedek as Shem, Noah's son who passed down his priesthood to Abraham who was the great grandfather of Levi through whom the priestly line passes. All of these stories of Melchizedek outside of Scripture makes him a bigger figure than we have in Scripture. It is similar to the three kings where we actually don't know how many there were, we certainly don't know their names, and their occupations are a bit hazy as well, but we have

created a whole narrative that has no Scriptural support. I think over the years pastors like to fill in the blanks and then it can become problematic.

Abraham giving to Melchizedek, the point is, is then equated as us giving to Jesus through the church. That is how the author of Hebrews is wanting us to see it. This was a way of life, it wasn't even questioned, as our tithing to the church should be a way of life for each of us. I know that this may feel uncomfortable to talk about, but let's talk what it looks like. We give each week, but you can choose to give every two weeks if you get paid bi-weekly, or monthly as well. The point is, tithe as soon as you receive it so that you can see and experience the blessings of God that come as a result of the faith and the trust that you have in the Lord that he will provide.

Tithing will create an expectation of experiencing God that is not present when you don't tithe. I have told you so many times now of how God has revealed himself to our family to the dollar for needs that we had and that were met to the dollar. I am not going to repeat them this week. If you are new in the church find an older member, or someone who has been here for a few more years, and they'll tell you the stories, they are life changing, they describe a provision that cannot be coincidental. God promises to provide, and as we saw last week, God's promises always come true.

If you have never tithed before, I want to challenge you for the month of May to try it out. Just for one month. That would be next week, give 10% of whatever you brought home in pay this past week. I can tell you that God will not leave you without. These stories of tithing are less about funding the church and more about establishing and solidifying a relationship between you and God over something that means something to you. Try tithing in May, and when you do, if you have never tithed before, I want to hear your stories of tithing in May and how you saw God during that month like you have never seen him before. Amen.