

Robbing God

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[0 : 00] This is going to be my conclusion, but I just switched it to the start. So, listen to me. This is really important. This thought, that everything you have is a gift of God. Alright?

The Bible busts the myth of ownership. You own nothing. You own nothing. It doesn't matter how hard you worked for it.

God gave you the gifts and talents that you have, the opportunities that you have to earn that money in the first place. So, everything you have is His. It's a really key part where you see this in the Bible.

It's 1 Chronicles. 1 Chronicles 29, I think it is. Let me check that. 1 Chronicles 29, starting at verse 11.

And what's happened is the people of God have come together and King David has taken up an offering from his people of money in order to build. They're doing a building program.

[0 : 57] And it sounds familiar. And their building program was the temple. And so, they got this money together. The people were generous. And David prays a really good prayer of thanksgiving to God.

It goes like this. It says, Yours is yours, O Lord, Yours is yours, O Lord, yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.

Riches and honor come from you. And you rule over all. In your hand are power and might. And it is in your hand to make great and to give strength to all.

And now, our God, we give you thanks and praise your glorious name. But who am I and what is my people that we should be able to make this free will offering?

Listen to this. For all things come from you and of your own have we given you. So, you need to know before we start talking about money and giving money to God for the work of God, everything that we give to Him is His to begin with.

[2 : 11] It's not yours. You've been made a steward over everything that you have. Do you know what a steward is? It's like a money manager. So, we have money managers.

We give them our money and they invest it and make it grow. It's never their money unless they're frauds, in which case they end up in jail or in an island somewhere. But forget that.

They're stewards of your money. And in the same way, we are stewards of God's money. And so, everything that we think about when it comes to money needs to be inside that kind of framework.

That's not the framework we have by nature, is it? We think about it as everything we have is our own, that we earned it. So, we'll decide whether we give to God.

That's not the case. Everything we have comes from God. God owns your money. He has lent it to you. And then giving is an act of worship to Him.

[3 : 10] All right. So, let's look at Malachi. We're just going to look at a couple of verses. We'll start in verse 8. God says, Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me.

And the interesting thing there is that the word rob is not the normal word for rob in Hebrew.

The normal word for rob, which means to take something that isn't yours, that's not the word that's here. It's actually the word that's more like to oppress, to pillage, to rape, to take something by force that oppresses someone else.

And God says, you're doing that to me. You're oppressing me. You're pillaging me. And naturally they say, what?

How are we doing that to you? How can anyone do that to God? And he says, it's in your tithes and in your offerings. It's in your use of money.

[4 : 16] That's how you are pillaging me. So, why does God associate our use of money with our love or oppression of Him? This is what I think.

As I said at the start, God gives us money so that as stewards, we will use money in order to worship Him and in order to alleviate the sufferings of people in this world.

That includes gospel ministry as well as social justice and so on. And so, that being God's ideal for the world to bring peace and harmony and shalom, when we do not behave that way in relation to our money, we oppress Him.

We pillage Him. And we show that God, the one true God, is in fact not our God. That we're putting our hope in idols, in other things.

We'll see more about that in a minute. But listen, this is really important. Look at me. Really important. Here's why many of you guys, and me when I've been sitting in these sermons on money, here's why you've tuned out already.

[5 : 31] It's because you don't see this as being a problem for you. Most of us would not see our use of money and greed as being a problem for us.

You know why? Because we are surrounded by plenty of people who spend more money on themselves than we do. And so, everyone in this room feels middle class and frugal. Don't we?

It's not us. It's that guy who bought the Ferrari. It's not me. I only bought, you know, a Subaru or whatever. But listen, we need to really check ourselves tonight.

Because the Bible will say, and it's implicit in this verse and very explicit in other passages in the Bible, that greed is a sin of the eye and it blinds us to the power it has over us.

So, God says, you are robbing me. They say, how are we robbing you? They don't see it. Jesus will say elsewhere, or I'll read it in a minute, that the sin of greed is something we have to be on our guard against.

[6 : 35] We have to be, have our eyes open to it. So, tonight's our opportunity. Let's do it. Let's do it together. Let's think really hard about how we're using money. Because likely that you won't think it's a problem for you when it is.

All right. One of the reasons, like I said, that materialism has such a power over us is because it blinds us to the power that it has.

And you might say, what's materialism? This is what materialism is. This is a really good definition. I stole this from Tim Keller. I get a lot of help from him on this issue in general. He says this, materialism is excess concern for, worry about, love of, need for money and possessions.

I'll do it again. Materialism is excess concern for, worry about, love of, need for money and possessions.

You got that? That's materialism. And over and over the Bible says, unlike other sins, this isn't one that you will see coming. This isn't one that you will think that you need to confess.

- [7 : 51] So, Jesus, Luke 12, he says, watch out for all kinds of greed. Watch out for all kinds of greed. Why does he not say ever, watch out for all kinds of adultery?
- Because it's an obvious sin, isn't it? You don't wake up in bed next to someone who's not your wife and go, what? How did this happen? But greed is like that.
- It sneaks up on us and by its very nature, it blinds us to our danger. Watch out for all kinds of greed. Watch out for materialism.
- All right. So, this is an opportunity for us to check ourselves. Now, I think that God gives us, helpfully, a standard or a guide so that we can judge ourselves in relation to giving and money.
- And we read about it in the passage tonight and it's called the tithe. Okay. So, this is when you give a tithe, you give a 10% of what you have. And I think it's a guide for us so that we know whether we're kind of even in the ballpark of where God wants us to be in relation to money.
- [9 : 12] Okay. So, look at verse 8. We'll continue. He says, they say, but you say, how are we rubbing you? And he says, in your tithes and offerings. So, let's talk about that for a minute.
- Tithes and offerings. In the Old Testament, God required in the law that his people would give 10% of their money and of their food, their produce, that they would give it to the temple and that would be an act of worship to God.
- That was a law that required them to give 10%. And we've seen that these people, not only are they not bringing the right sacrifices to God, but they're not bringing the right amount of tithe.
- They're not giving the right amount. And so, there's a huge argument today about what does this mean for us, this tithe thing. New Testament church, we're not bound by the law like the Old Testament believers were in the same way.
- And so, where do we land with this tithe thing? A lot of people are very passionate, say, we've got nothing to do with giving tithes. You need to completely erase that from your theology.
- [10 : 15] Others say, no, no, this is part of the law that we need to observe. And so, what we need to do is go to the New Testament and see, does the New Testament talk about tithes? It does in one place.
- And it's Luke 11, 42. I'll read it for you. Jesus says this, the Pharisees. It says, They tithe out of their spice rack.
- They're that committed to tithing. Okay? You tithe all these herbs, among other things, and neglect the justice and the love of God.
- It is these you ought to have practiced without neglecting the other, that is the tithe. So, he says to these people, don't neglect the tithe.
- You should give the tithe. But you shouldn't do it in such a way that they were doing it. And this is how they were doing it. They were giving their 10% each week when they came into church.
- [11 : 15] The bowls would go around. They'd chuck in their 10%. And they would think, right, that's my giving done. Tick that box. I've obeyed that law. And then they would go and see someone in the street who was poor and oppressed, needed money.
- And they would walk right past because they'd already done their bit. And Jesus says, no, no, no. You ought to give the tithe, act tithe, and see to the needs of the poor, the oppressed.
- So, the first thing we need to see about tithing is that it cannot, according to Jesus, it has become something of a legalism for us. Something that tick off each week. Gave my 10%.

I'm right with God. Those Pharisees, they were legalists. They lacked love. They were greedy.

So, that's a significant passage for us. But the rest of the New Testament doesn't really talk much about tithing. So, what does that mean? It can't mean that God has dropped the bar for us in terms of giving from the Old Testament people.

[12 : 23] It cannot mean that he wants us to give less or requires less of us. We have more blessings as the people of God in the New Testament era than they did. And so, I cannot imagine for a second that God wants us or expects less of us than he did his Old Testament people.

Here's what I think it means. It's not mentioned a lot. Jesus validates it there. What does it mean? I think it becomes for us as Christians with liberty and freedom, it becomes for us a baseline.

A baseline amount that we should use as kind of the training wheels of giving. And from there, we should dare each other to give more and more and more. At the very least, we should be giving 10% of what we have.

And then we should strive for much greater things. At the very least, we should draw a line in the sand of what we need to exist from day to day, what we need to survive and get things done and have enjoyment.

And then everything above that, whether our wage increases or not, we should be free to give away. I think that's what it means. It's a big challenge for us.

[13 : 37] We'll see more about the tithe in the coming verses. But I think that's what it means. Tithing is the training wheels to train us in how to give generously to the work of the gospel and the work of reconciliation in the world.

So let's look a little bit closer. Narrow the focus here in Malachi. Let's have a look. Verse 10. Skip ahead there. He says, God says, bring the full tithe into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house.

And the word house there, that's referring to the temple. Okay. So he's saying to the people of Israel, give your full tithe of gold and silver and food and produce and whatever.

Bring that to the temple. That's your spiritual act of worship to God. That's a physical demonstration to people that you're obedient to God.

That fuels ministry and relieves the hurts of the world. Do that. That's the law. So what does it mean for us today? We don't have a temple, do we?

[14 : 49] There's no temple for us. And so a lot of preachers I've heard have said, all right, listen, the temple, the equivalent of the temple today is the church. And so this means, and you are commanded to give your full offering to the church.

Whether that's 10% or it's more than that, you should give it all to the church. And I disagree. I might get fired for this, but I do not believe that you should give all of your offering to Holy Trinity Doncaster.

I don't think that you can fit that into this text. Here's why. The temple was not a local church. The temple was a national institution that would care for the needs of the whole community.

It would be the center of ministry with priests and Levites, but it would also oversee the social justice ministry, the charity. And so no local church today reflects the temple in that way.

No local church is covering the breadth of stuff that the temple was covering. So here's what I think. Here's what I think. Your primary place of giving should be Holy Trinity.

[16 : 14] This is your church. This is where you're active in ministry. There is great need for the ministries that we do, for the gospel here and overseas, for money to come in for that.

And I think that should be your primary place. But I also think that you should be freely giving on top of that to charity, to social justice ministries, to worthy ones that invest in the gospel as well as alleviating the suffering of people in this world.

Your primary place of giving is here. And on top of that, you need to be active in giving outside of that.

So for us, as a family man, Renee, don't hear me putting us up as a great example to follow, okay? It's not what I'm doing. I'm just saying, in our experience, this is how it looks.

Our primary place of giving is here. And on top of that, we really experience a lot of joy in giving to organisations like Compassion, which is a child sponsorship agency, who also invests in Bible teaching for the community that they're ministering to.

[17 : 26] And then there's obviously one-off circumstances where we can alleviate the needs of others through one-off giving. And that gives us great joy to be able to do that.

Here is our primary place of giving. And there, we also include that. As we see that as being an act of worship to God and something He expects of us. Here's why I'm not worried that we're not going to be able to get our building program up or pay me next week because I've told you not to give everything to Holy Trinity.

Here's why. Because if all of us here in this church, if everyone was giving in biblical proportions, with biblical joy, the Bible says that we should be cheerful, sacrificial givers.

If we were doing that, biblical proportions with biblical joy, man, our barns would be overflowing. We would be floating all of our boats.

And you know what? All the charities of the world would have enough money. We do not receive even the baseline 10% in giving.

[18 : 37] No, I do not know of a church that does. But if we did, it would be amazing.

Now listen, this is not a money grab sermon.

I was joking before the service with a few people about places they've gone to, churches where they've done the money sermon, and then they've had an offering, and then they'd sing a song and do another offering, and then they'd send it around once more because the buckets weren't full.

We're not going to do that. We don't take special offerings for this kind of thing. Maybe we should. We're not going to do that. It's not a money grab sermon.

I'm trying to prove that to you by saying that you don't have to give everything you have to us. But if you chose today, right now, tonight, to forsake the God of materialism, who is an absolute whore, if you chose to forsake that God and to contribute baseline 10% and then dare yourself to give more, then our ministries would be overflowing with resources.

[20 : 08] Charities would have more than enough money. And we as a people would be less overcome by the God of greed and selfishness. That's the truth. That's the truth.

So that's what I think about tithes to the temple. That equals money to the church, money to charity, one-off gifts. But what about the storehouse?

You notice in verse 10, it also talks about the storehouse. Let's talk about that. This is really important for us as well. Verse 10, Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts.

See if I will not open the windows of heaven for you, and pour down for you an overflowing blessing. So the interesting thing here is that the storehouse in Hebrew actually means the treasury.

It would be helpful if they translated it that way, I think, when you see the point I'm going to make. So the treasury is the place where they put the silver and the gold, and it would be, there would be a treasury in every temple, mosque, you know, every place of worship for every deity in the world.

- [21 : 20] We have a treasury with money marked out for the ministry of whatever salvation system they had. So what God is saying here is really interesting. He's saying, when he says, bring me my offering, bring it to my treasury, what he's saying is, if your treasure is not in his treasury, then it must be in the treasury of some other God.

Do you get that? If your treasure, if your giving is not in his treasury, it must be in the treasury of some other God.

What does that mean for us? I'll give you three examples. How does your use of money reveal to God that in fact you worship another God apart from him?

Number one, if it's very, very hard for you to give away money, if every time the bowl comes around, you feel like you're getting your arm cut off just to drop those coins in, if it's hard to give to worthy charities, but it's very easy for you to go up to Doncaster and buy new clothes, I mean, it's just like falling off a log.

You can hardly help yourself. Then you are revealing to God and to us that your God is the God of fashion, not the God of the universe.

- [22 : 52] That your security is bound up in how people look at you, how people perceive you. That's what you're demonstrating to the world and to God.

If you find it really hard, really hard, to part with money for ministry, but you're always doing another renovation at your house or buying a new TV or, I don't know, you fill the blanks, you know, then you're showing God, particularly, and us as well, that you trust in the God of your house.

That you're investing in the idol of home renovation. Very popular idol today and very acceptable too. How about this though?

I can harp on about people who spend, but what about the Scrooge McDucks among us? What about people who are always talking about the fact that these clothes, I've had them for two years.

I was thinking tonight actually, I bought these shoes in 2002, right? So, a little bit of pride welled up in me. I thought, wow, I'm glad I'm preaching this because I'm above reproach. If you're always stacking away money and never spending it, you're in the exact same situation as the person who is spending it freely.

- [24 : 23] You are. My wife's an example of this, alright, let's just put this on the table. We were talking, we had a really nice lunch together today and had some marriage time and we're talking about the sermon and she said, you can use me as a bad example if you like.

So, I'll take that. If I hear you bagging her though, I'll punch you out. That's not a joke. Renee's really frugal.

She, I mean, the op shop is her little tea temple and she really is very conscientious with putting money away. And at the moment, we're saving up because we've got a mortgage, we're building a house next year.

So, every cent, man, every cent is going into this thing. And Renee, every 10 to 15 minutes will go online and check our bank balance.

Alright, and now, listen, for people who are like that, you're showing God and the rest of us in your stinginess that your God is the God of security in bank balance and not Him.

- [25 : 36] It's very easy to find security in your bank balance in a very turbulent world. You can think, well, if I lose my job, I'm going to be okay. If we have, you know, twins instead of one child will be okay.

And it's very easy to start putting your trust into that idol. And you're just as bad as the guys who are going to the shops every day. So, you're not off the hook.

This is all encompassing and it's going to lay us bare, guys. It's so true that your use of money, your checkbook, someone used to say, your checkbook and your diary.

I'll say it, your checkbook particularly will reveal to the world where your heart is. So, what have I said tonight?

I'll finish. I said in Malachi 3 that when we give in to the lures of materialism and sin with our money, we are oppressing and dishonouring and pillaging God.

[26 : 36] That we are breaking up the fabric of what He wants for the world, that peace. two, when we sin with our money, we neglect the ministry of the gospel and the plight of the poor.

We actively neglect that ministry that depends on our giving. Three, when we sin with our money, we show God that we value other gods above Him and reveal ourselves to be complete and utter idolaters.

And if you're still carrying on thinking that you're not an idolater in this way, you're wrong. You are. It's just that you live in an incredibly wealthy society and so you can hide.

But you are. So, practically, what do I want us to do? Finish here. Practically. I want you to see the tithe, which requires 10% of your giving, as a baseline amount to give to Holy Trinity.

We're not going to get legalistic about this. This is very dangerous. Jesus could come and rebuke us like He did the Pharisees, but it's worth the risk. I want you to see, at the very least, this 10% figure and amount that you can give to the work of Holy Trinity.

[27 : 47] And then beyond that, just to dare yourself to give more and more and more. I know this is hard. We had this conversation, Renee and I, recently.

I'll tell you this. In saving for this house, we're scraping every dollar and things, you know, are a bit tight and we have all of our annual giving to charity comes out at once.

It's dumb. We do it in November or something. It's just dumb. Coming up to Christmas and all of that. And so, Renee said to me, Jonah, why don't we, just this time, make that part of the amount that we give to church and just make it one thing?

So, in effect, we'll give a lot less to church, but times are tough, you know. And I tell you, the temptation in that moment to say, yeah, that's a sensible idea was so strong.

But by God's grace, we said, no, no, no, no, we're committed to this. We're committed to this. And so, we scrape a little more. The people who would encourage you to tighten your belt and not to give so much, they're the same people who would say to the woman who Jesus speaks about, who goes into the temple with her last penny, they would say, listen, love, put that away.

[29 : 10] You'll be able to eat tonight. Jesus doesn't commend that kind of thinking. He commends cheerful, sacrificial giving. So, I know it's hard. I'm not denying that.

But I want to challenge us to make that our goal. Number three, consider very carefully, this is really practical, really consider giving by direct debit to Holy Trinity.

Alright? I know, because we're sinful and because we're forgetful and because we're driven by selfishness, it's very easy for people, particularly younger people, to forget selectively to bring money.

to put in the plate. I know, it's just hard. If you direct debit give, you don't need to worry so much about remembering. Now listen, the opposite danger then is that you give by direct debit and you never even count the cost.

You never even think about the money that you're giving. So this is the challenge. I challenge you to give by direct debit. Speak to us afterwards about how to do that. Particularly speak to Eric because he knows everything about this or Jenny.

[30 : 16] Anyway, speak to someone about direct debit. It's really easy to do and then I challenge you every time you look at your bank balance and see that it's come out, think about the act of worship that it is to give to the ministry of this church.

Alright? Four, consider making a one-off donation or multiple donations to the Holy Trinity building fund. So like David with the temple, we've got a building project coming up.

We really want to get this done so that we have better facilities for ministry. We're going to have better facilities for midweek ministry particularly as well as Sunday ministry.

So this is something really important that we need to raise a significant amount of money for. Consider giving a gift to that as an act of worship. And finally, sit down.

This is the most challenging to do, I think. Sit down and think about your use of money. Think about how much you spend on yourself.

[31 : 18] Don't measure yourself against the people around you because they're dumb just like you. Alright? And we're all in the same fishbowl and so we don't realise when we're in sin.

Read the Bible and see the way Jesus talks about how your use of money should be. And then change the way that you spend money.

I want to read 1 Chronicles again. I think that's a really good passage for us to end on. If I can get it.

here's what David says. You might like to close your eyes. I'll pray this.

Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty. for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours.

[32 : 32] Yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all. Riches and honour come from you and you rule over all.

in your hand are power and might and it is your hand to make great and to give strength to all.

And now, O God, we give thanks to you and praise your glorious name. But who am I and what is my people that we should be able to make this free will offering for all things come from you and of your own have we given you.

Amen. That's before I step down. I'm not the sharpest tool in the shed and I need to confess that quite often I forget things that happen in the service and one thing that I've forgotten tonight was that one way that we've been really blessed as a congregation over the last couple of weeks in Malachi is that we've been seeing people with gifts in art and particularly in animation and so we've been using these animations to kind of give some perspective on the Bible reading and on the sermon and tonight I just want to come before you and say that I jumped up here so eager to preach this message and I forgot to just stay seated for a while while we watch the show so what we're going to do now is we're going to see Esther's wonderful work in this animation and see maybe you'll be able to see even more clearly the point behind it after the sermon alright got first going to Chair Bye ■■ on goes

Polit Skin tractor what to do need for to create things in the theme hayat s type the load now into the hand as well as well