

# Proving God

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, glory, that was some great singing this morning, and we're looking forward to being in God's Word this morning. And let's turn in our Bibles to the book of Malachi, the Old Testament, the last book in the Old Testament.

We will read from the prophet Malachi this morning, and the title of today's message is Proving God. This last Sunday of 2018, as we prepare to go into this brand new year, as we normally do, just take a look at some of the things maybe we just need to be reminded of.

And one of those things is how we give back to God, those things that God has provided us. He has provided us health. He has provided us a measure of wealth.

And you say, well, what do you mean wealth? Well, if we have food to eat, if you have a roof over your head, if you have a way to get around, then I really believe we have wealth that is measured far beyond many, many people, many millions of people around the world.

And everything we have, especially those of us who are following Christ, especially those of us who know Jesus as our Savior, we have been redeemed, we have been bought back, and everything we have is because of the grace of God.

[ 1 : 24 ] And whether it's our health, whether it's our time, whether it's our talents, whatever it is, those are on loan from God. We know that God has provided those. He expects us to invest those things, and He expects us to use them for Him.

So in the book of Malachi this morning, we will be looking at Malachi chapter 3 and verses 7 through 11. As we begin with verse number 7, Yet from the days of your fathers you have gone away from my ordinances and have not kept them.

Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. And here is the response from Malachi of God's people.

They say, Return to me, and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts. But you said, In what way shall we return? In verse number 8, God answers, Will a man rob God?

You have robbed me. But you say, In what way have we robbed you? And the response back from God is, In tithes and offerings.

[ 2 : 34 ] Then God says, You are cursed with a curse, For you have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, That there may be food in my house.

And try me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, If I will not open for you the windows of heaven, And pour out for you such blessing, That there will not be room enough to receive it.

In verse number 11, And, this is the promise that God gives to his people, And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, So that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground, Nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field.

And in verse 7, What God is doing is God is calling his people, He is calling Israel to return to him. And this is the fifth oracle of God, That he is, as he is talking to his people, And it's reminiscent of the second one, And he says to return back to him.

And he is saying that his people Have over and over and over again, Went back to their own ways, Turned their back against God, Or from God, And were doing their own thing.

[ 3 : 51 ] And God is calling them back. These people became wayward, Just like their parents before them. And we see that cycle, That took place over and over again.

And what God is doing here is he is inviting his people to return, And to be welcomed by him. But what do they do? They play dumb before God.

Well, how did we do that, God? And when did we do that? And what do you mean? What are you talking about? Have our children done that to us before? Have we done that to our parents when we were little?

They confront us with something and go, Who, me? What do you mean? What are you talking about? I don't know what you're talking about. And we try to deflect. And we try to not deal with the issue.

But typically, as parents, When we ask the question, We already have what? We already have the answer. And so we just want our children to admit That what they've done is wrong.

[ 4 : 56 ] And so the same thing with God. God asks this rhetorical question. Really doesn't require an answer, But they're playing dumb before God. Well, how have we robbed you?

In what way have we done this? In what way shall we return? We didn't know that we left. And how can we come back? We didn't know where we went.

So what we see is this dynamic dialogue with God reveals their sin. And so this morning we're going to be looking for the next few moments At how we can give back to God And how God, I believe, Even in this New Testament time, Age of grace, How God will bless those who trust Him And will bless us as we give generously back to Him And to His ministry.

And so we were asking ourselves these same questions That God is asking His people. And so this morning as we're preparing for this, I want your input as well.

Because I want us to be able to look at this And to be able to realize that we're not alone in this.

And maybe the questions or the fears that we might have When we think of giving to God And when we think of giving of our resources When we think, I don't have enough to survive.

[ 6 : 23 ] I don't even have enough to pay my bills. How can God expect me to tithe and provide offerings And to give? I don't know how God can expect that. And many of us have already been through this before.

And we've faced those fears. And we've gotten beyond those fears. When we decided to trust God. And I believe what you may have to say this morning Might be what it takes to encourage someone else here today.

And so we're going to have that opportunity this morning as well. So the first thing that we see is God questions and answers. God asks the questions.

Then He provides the answer. Verse number 8. He asks the question, Will a man rob God? Yet you have robbed me.

He says, But you say, In what way have we robbed you? And He answers in tithes and offerings.

[ 7 : 22 ] So the first question is, That God asks, Will a man rob God? And the expected answer would be, Well, God, of course not. How could anyone rob you?

Or why would anyone rob you? And God expects their answer of innocence. I mean, He's been in this rodeo before. He's expecting His people to play dumb and say, Well, what are you talking about?

In what way have we robbed you? Only one who's aware of the path from which He's come can retrace His steps. So God is saying that we need to come back to Him.

But Israel pretended ignorance in their waywardness. We don't know what you're talking about, God. What do you mean? Bluntly stated, God is accusing Israel of being a thief.

It's exactly what He is claiming. He says, Will a man rob God? And they claim ignorance. In what ways have we robbed you?

[ 8 : 33 ] And God comes back and says, You've robbed me by not giving your tithes and offerings. Tithes and offerings had been taught to them for generations.

Generation after generation after generation, God had taught His people to be providing this to Him. The tithe was literally a tenth of all produce, a tenth of all livestock that the people possessed.

We see that in Leviticus 27, verses 30, verse 32. The firstborn. Matter of fact, literally, when the crops came in, that first harvest, before they set anything aside for them to eat, before they paid the property taxes, before they paid maybe the landowner for the lease of the property, before anybody else got anything, they provided a tenth of everything that came in.

And so they were accustomed to this. They knew what was expected of them. And over and over again, we see Israel failing God in this.

Even today, some people will use the excuse, Well, this is the age of grace. We're no longer under the law.

[ 9 : 57 ] And so we don't have to give tithes. I can just drop my 20 in the offering plate, and it's good. Well, if all you made this week was \$200, that's great.

But for most of us, that's probably not the case. So we can't use the age of grace as an excuse. And we're going to look at that a little bit this morning and to see how much God has blessed us, how much God has already provided for us, even with our time.

We're saying, Well, you know what? I work hard, and I'm tired, and I've got to give my family time. And all those things are true. But how much time does God get in our week?

How much time and how many resources do we provide back to the kingdom of God during our day, during our week, during our month? And do we realize that God provides the air that we breathe?

We're only borrowing this life because it is God that gives life. God can take it away anytime He wants. And so even someone who says, Well, I'm a self-made person, and I've worked hard for everything I have.

[11:07] Nobody gave me anything. Oh, stop right there. God gave you life. God gives you air, and God gives everything to you. We don't realize that because very often people don't want to admit that we're vulnerable, and without God, we're utterly incapable of doing anything.

And that goes for the believer as well as the unbeliever. Even though someone who's not following Christ doesn't belong to God, so to speak, and that they're not part of God's family, they still breathe the same air we have.

God says it rains on the just and the unjust alike. So those who follow Him and those who are His enemies, still the rain falls on the ground, and it waters their crops, and we're able to work, and we're able to make a living.

And so we can't really, really use that excuse. One reason is we go back to the Old Testament. We go back to Abraham. And the fact is, Abraham gave tithes way before the law was even given.

We look at Hebrews 7 and verse number 4. Now consider how great this man was. We go back to Melchizedek. Melchizedek, we go back to Abraham.

[12:28] And way before the law, Abraham came way before Moses, and says, to whom even the patriarch Abraham gave a tenth of the spoils.

So even Abraham, way before the law. So one thing that we can see is giving to God, giving of our resources back to God is pre-law. And so what we consider this is it is ultra-dispensational.

It's outside of any law, non-law, age of grace. And so Abraham gave way before that time. Jacob also gave tithes.

Genesis chapter 28 and verses 18 through 22. Then Jacob arose early in the morning, took the stone that he had put at his head, set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on top of it.

And he called the name of that place Bethel, but the name of that city had been Loz previously. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, if God will be with me and keep me in this way that I am going, and give me bread to eat and clothing to put on, so that I may come back, so that I come back to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God.

[13:46] And this stone, which I have set as a pillar, shall be God's house, and all of that, all that you give me, I will surely give a tenth to you. There you shall take your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the heave offerings of your hand, your vowed offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks.

So these people had been knowingly robbing God, and God was accusing them of being thieves. And in verse number 8, we see that again.

God asks, will a man rob God? Yet you, speaking to his people, have robbed me. But you say, again, claiming ignorance, in what way have we robbed you?

And God responds, in tithes and offerings. And if we use the excuse that we're no longer under the law in order to rob God today, we've missed the whole point of God's grace.

Because what have we received as God's people? We are so blessed today. We are blessed beyond measure. We are blessed, especially in America, not even considering the monetary blessings.

[15:08] We've been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places in Christ. We have been blessed with salvation. We have been blessed with a brand new life. We have been blessed with complete, unhindered access to God at any time, day or night.

And we have our sins forgiven. We have an advocate in heaven before God, sitting at the right hand of God. We have so many things with which we have been blessed that it's staggering.

In this age of grace, we are so, so blessed. God's people are not under the law, but we are under the age of grace.

So not only should we be giving at least what God expected in the Old Testament of His people before anybody else gets theirs, including the IRS, we should be, as God's people, excited to give even more as a big thank you to God.

To say, God, You have blessed me so greatly, so mightily. And how are we to give according to the New Testament? Be a hilarious giver.

[16:25] Actually, literally, what that word means to be like, Oh, I get to give to God. Now, not many of us give hilariously, but if we truly understand the process, giving is worship.

When we have the opportunity to give back to God, and we do that in the Old Testament, the New Testament, says bring the tithes to the storehouse.

That was where God's people came together, and then it was divided to the Levites, the Levites gave to the priests, on and on and on. So God's way could still be taken care of.

And the way we do it is when we come together on Sunday, we give. And part of it goes to missions, part of it goes to other non-profits non-profits that we give to with our Happy Birthday Jesus offering, and some mundane things.

Pay the bills, pay the utilities, pay the insurance on this place. And so, we give back to God, and we ought to be excited to give back to Him, because it all belongs to Him in the first place.

[17:38] We're simply stewards of what God has given us. It's just like when you go to the bank, and you want to deposit money in your very own account.

You give it to a person. Unless you use the, take a picture of your check, or whether you, if you go to the ATM and shove cash in that little thing that sucks your cash out, what do you expect?

You expect somebody somewhere, a person somewhere, to take your money and put it in your account. All they are is a conduit.

They are a steward of your money. They take your money, and you trust them to take that money and to place it where it belongs. And if you invest money, whoever you're investing with, you expect them to take that money, invest it in stock, invest it in bonds, invested in money market funds, whatever.

They're only a steward of that money. So today, as we're thinking about on planet Earth, everything belongs to Him. So we are simply stewards of what is God's.

[18:55] And so we can't say, well, that's mine, any more than the bank teller could say, ooh, that's mine. And how about I keep 90% of this and put 10% in your account?

Or how about I keep all of it and I put it in my account? Which, what many times we do, and we don't consider any of it being God's. God has given to us, God has given all things to us richly to enjoy, the Bible says.

To enjoy life, to enjoy even recreation, enjoy our family, enjoy just being, but it's all His to begin with.

And in view of the way that God has blessed us, let's not be guilty of stealing from God. And so, one of the questions is, have we been withholding from God?

Have you been withholding what is God's? Then the next thing that we see is God challenges. First thing that God did was God questions and God answers.

[20:10] Will a man rob God? You've been robbing me. How in the world have we been robbing you? In tithes and offerings, God says. And then what God does is God challenges and then He returns with a promise.

He comes back with a promise in verse number 10. He says in verse 10, bring all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and try me now in this, says the Lord of hosts.

If I will not, and here's the promise that He gives to His people in the Old Testament, if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such blessing that there will be, that there will not be room enough to receive it.

What we saw in verse number 9, if you have your Bibles open, God said, you've robbed me. They say, how have we robbed you? He says, in tithes and offering in verse number 8.

And in verse number 9, God says, there has been a curse on you. And there are probably some of us here today, and myself included, that would agree that there have been times, maybe, in our Christian walk when we have not been obedient in giving back to God.

[ 21 : 31 ] And the more we try to save, or the more we try to keep, it seemed like the more unexpected things took place to suck all the money out of our account.

Anybody ever have that experience? God says, verse 9, you are cursed with a curse, for you have robbed me, even this whole nation.

As a matter of fact, in another place, it says that you put things in, you put things in a bag, but the bag has holes in it. Anybody ever had that? Had pants, or had something that, have a jacket that's got a hole in it.

And I was wondering why change was on the floor around my chair. Well, it's because I stuck it in my pocket and it came right out. And God says, that may be the case in our lives if we're trying to hoard what we think is ours and we wonder why we don't have enough, we have too much month at the end of our money.

And maybe because God says, you're being cursed because you are not giving to me. I tell you what, this is time to give back.

[ 22 : 44 ] Who has the mic? All right. I would like for us to be honest this morning. If any of us this morning, and for the sake of those who are listening by way of this recording, for us to hear the answer, if anyone would say, with me, there's been a time in our life where maybe it's early, maybe it was when we were first married, or maybe it was a certain period of our life where maybe we weren't giving to God and we really didn't have any more because we didn't, who wants to be the first to give testimony this morning?

Because remember, there may be someone else who's facing that same fear that you faced way back when. Who wants to be the first? Talk back to me this morning. Okay.

Good. Anybody else was under that assumption that, well, I give based on my take home? And, I mean, there's, it's still giving, but what did God say?

God said, of the first fruits. Okay. Who else? Who else wants to be willing to say, I remember back a time when, when maybe I was not completely obedient and this is what God taught me, or this is how God taught me.

All right. Let's table this for a minute and we'll have an opportunity in just a moment to, to share the ways that God has blessed you when you chose to obey Him. So as we continue in verse number 10, what God is saying is, He says, bring all the tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house and try me now in this.

[ 24 : 38 ] And this is where God says, I want you to prove me. And this word try is like, is a word that was used for, for, for testing something. Like, if you test metals, you want to, to see if it is truly pure or it is truly that, that, that metal.

And so what God is saying is, I want you to test, but I want you to put me to the test. I want you to, I want you to prove me. I want you to allow me to prove to you that I am not just talking, that I mean what I'm saying.

And He says, try me now in this, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open up for you the windows of heaven. We sang about that a little bit earlier this morning.

And He says, I will pour out for you such blessing that there will be, not be, room enough to receive it. So to obey this command required faith from His people for them to say, okay, we've gotten accustomed to this lifestyle.

We've gotten accustomed to this, this, this way of living. And in order for us to begin obeying you, there's going to have to be some trust involved.

[ 26 : 00 ] And so it did demand trust. But this divine challenge came with an unfailing promise. So God challenges His people to prove Him, fulfilling His promise would be proof of His blessing, proof of His faithfulness.

So if we are faithful in giving back to God, God says He will prove Himself to be faithful as well.

Now, what would accepting God's challenge bring?

Well, He would open up the windows of heaven. He would provide for them. And in their economy, it was agricultural. So their livestock, their grain, it would be such a large harvest that their silos, their grain bins couldn't hold all that they would be taking in.

His blessings would be more than they could contain. Now, we need to be careful today in applying these promises too strictly to believers today.

Main reason is because this was God speaking to His people in the Old, or under the Old Covenant. So you have to remember, promises God made to Israel specifically were promises to

Israel specifically.

[ 27 : 27 ] There are other promises that were more general that not only applies to the nation of Israel, but applies to everyone who is a follower of God. The Mosaic Covenant with His promise of material blessings to Israel for her obedience is really no longer in force because that was God's promise to Israel.

However, we're not totally off the hook here because what the New Testament does is the New Testament speaks of generosity. And the New Testament speaks of giving. The Apostle Paul talks about this. Others talk about this. while not requiring a tithe, so to speak, of believers today, the New Testament does speak of God's blessing on those who give generously to the needs of the local church and especially to those who labor in the Word. So those who administer in the Word, those who study in order to teach God's people. So what the New Testament does say is give generously, and he does say that we will receive blessing. So while we're not under that Old Testament law in the age of grace, I believe God expects greater belief. God expects greater obedience because now we have the Holy Spirit to empower that obedience.

[ 28 : 53 ] So I really believe that God will bless our generosity. God will bless us as we give back. And the tenth really is only a figure.

It's only a, it's a suggestion, I believe, for us today in this age of grace. But I think it's a good starting point. And for us at faith, the way we give, and this is, again, schooling us on just our way. There's no one perfect way, one right way necessarily, right or wrong way. But the way we do is everything that comes in that's not specified, if it's a check written to the church, if it's cash, whatever it is, it goes into the general fund and out of the general fund is paid our insurance. And by the way, our insurance is, it's expensive. We're talking about a lot of money. We're talking into the thousands and thousands, tens of thousands of dollars every year just for insurance. And then everybody, you know, we all pay utilities. So it's, so all these things come out of the general fund. then we have missionaries. How do we provide for our missionaries?

[ 30 : 02 ] That is separate. So if you give in an envelope or if you give on your check and you write missions, then that goes into the missions fund and out of that missions fund we give to missions.

And we fortunately have been able to add more. We're giving more to our missionaries in this past two or three years because that has grown. more people are giving to missions.

And so when more people give earmark for missions we're able to, well first of all what we did rather than take on more missionaries we gave more to the missionaries that we have. And if that increases we may be able to take on more missionaries plus give more to the missionaries we're already supporting. And we also have another fund where if someone maybe needs a little bit extra maybe they've lost their job or maybe they've lost their income or just can't make ends meet maybe an emergency took place we call it the help fund H-E-L-P and if you give toward the help fund we're able to help those with medications sometimes we've helped with a utility bill here or there so that is the way we're able to be benevolent.

We're able to take care of widows, orphans, we're able to take care of the poor and sometimes we wouldn't consider ourselves poor but maybe a medical emergency comes up and all of a sudden your budget was pretty well rocking along pretty great and then now you've got this \$20,000, \$30,000 medical bill how will you take care of it?

[ 31 : 43 ] I wish we had that much money to help you with but what we could do is maybe help with the medication help with paying a smaller bill off and it's not a one and done sometimes we help somebody more often than that but that's how we do it that's how we're able to do it we don't just keep all of it and use it for ourselves we don't just use it to make prettier and bigger buildings we're using it in the lives of people as well and so that's how we give and that's the way that it's used so the New Testament speaks of giving generously the New Testament speaks of giving to God sacrificially as well so our question this morning is have you accepted God's challenge?

and I say well pastor I thought you just said this promise doesn't apply to us well who this morning let's get let's get our microphone again and who would want to testify this morning that God has truly blessed you in your obedience and you have not really been poorer for obeying God we have someone in the back because we all have this fear we've all had this fear maybe at one time or other in our life well what if I obey God how will I make ends meet?

while you're thinking and while you're getting prepared I don't want to leave anyone out the opportunity for a blessing this morning there have been so many times in our lives when we were willing to step out in faith and we were afraid one was years ago when I felt the call of God to go back to school and literally left quit a very good paying job here to go back to Birmingham and without the promise of any income to go back to school full time and it was a difficult decision but yet it was an easy decision and the time had come to begin and

I was going to obey God by going back to going back to Bible college and the night before the money was due for for tuition probably one o'clock in the morning I woke up couldn't go back to sleep went to the living room spent hours in prayer on the floor in the living room and the very next day when we went to get the mail God had through some individual had laid upon their heart week or so before to give and it was enough to pay everything that was required for that semester it was a total and complete blessing and a miracle from what we were even remotely considering we had a similar time when we were in

Birmingham and when I was at that time was bivocational and really was wanting to go back full time and quit a again very well paying job as a sales manager for a company in Birmingham for I think it was a guarantee of I think it was \$9,000 a year it was either \$9,000 or \$10,000 a year that's all they could afford well we never missed a payment we somehow figured out sometimes it was God providing a little extra odd job sometimes it was an offering sometimes it was someone at the end of a service would come and say pastor thank you for that today and shook my hand and in his hand he swapped a \$100 bill to me over and over and over again things like that happened

[ 36 : 28 ] I remember one time there was a time in our life when we were in school that we weren't tithing we weren't giving back to God because we thought we're doing God's work we're doing his business and so he can't expect us to tithe even when we're not making enough money to survive and we're paying tuition for school and we decided we can't Catherine and I we really were really convicted about it and we said you know what we just need to trust God and do what he wants us to do and we did we decided we didn't have the money there's no way that our budget just I mean it was almost pointless to have a budget because we knew that we were so far short each month but God still provided one time I remember it was one of the kids needed to go to the doctor and at that point in time our insurance didn't cover it was not copay it was pretty expensive well we got a dividend from an insurance policy

I think it was a car insurance policy we got a dividend from stuff like that never happens well for whatever reason we ended up with a dividend check in the mail and it was just enough almost exactly to the penny enough for the doctor visit that one of the children needed to have when we went when the receptionist said this is the amount Catherine and I just looked at each other and I can't believe that that was it was a God thing over and over and over again God supplied but I will also remember back when in the few times when we slipped back and weren't tithing and we were making more money and not tithing and we were spending it on ourselves and it was like the bag with holes in it stuff would happen things would break down things needed to be replaced we thought we were getting ahead but we ended up getting further and further and further behind and it was unintended consequences and so over and over again we decided to trust

God again now I'm not saying we do it in order to receive but what I'm saying is don't be fearful of trusting God because when we're faithful to God he will be faithful to us and he will provide you don't have to trust me on that I think we can trust him on that when he says prove me test me try me and see if you're obedient to me that I will not take care of you in this age of grace I don't think we I know we don't do anything in the way that the Old Testament did God promised his people in the Old Testament he promised them wealth if they obeyed him we don't have that promise so to speak monetarily today materially but we do have the promise that he will take care of us so have we proved the faithfulness of God and as we as we bring this to a close verse 11 God comforts and God guarantees in verse number 11 he says and I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes so that he will not destroy the fruit of your ground nor shall the vine fail to bear fruit for you in the field says the

Lord of hosts he said I will rebuke the devourer for your sake they could put away their fears of committing fully God would reward them with more than they could even remotely imagine God would protect them from disaster God would protect them from the bull weevil God would protect them if that was such a thing then God would protect them from the pest that would devour their crops their fears of not having enough would never materialize bountiful blessing would result in

obeying God so anybody else before we close this morning wants to give a testimony up here in the front of how God has blessed us and how our obedience is something that provides more than material or monetary blessings amen and thank you all for that and as we as we wind this down this morning just remember we are so blessed by God not just monetarily we're blessed with family we're blessed with the forgiveness of sin we're so blessed today in so many ways and when we obey God in every way not just with the tithe but when we obey God with giving our life to him when we obey God with giving a kind word to someone when they need it rather than being selfish we receive so much let's not rob from

God and are we willing to risk all and prove God faithful let's pray Lord this morning as we've come together today I thank you for each one here I thank you for for these who are willing to to encourage the rest of us with their testimony this morning of how you've you've come through for them how you have proved yourself faithful and we're so thankful today that that you have blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ but father that you also will provide for us to survive and I believe as well Lord that you will provide for us to thrive as we honor you as we glorify you with our lives that we're able to be content with such as we have Lord we praise you we glorify your holy name this morning for it's in Jesus name we pray amen amen