

# How have we robbed God? (Evening Service)

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ] If you've been with us these last few weeks, you know we're in Malachi. It's the last book of the Old Testament. So you've got the Bible, Old Testament, New Testament, and God has been speaking to His people, like all the way through, up until Malachi.
- And He's given them a way to live. He's saved them on many occasions from certain destruction. He has provided for them a sacrificial system, a way to meet Him.
- He's given them the sustaining hope of a coming Messiah. So after all that time, after all of those words, what kind of shape were His people in?
- Well, the history of Israel is succinctly summarized in one sentence in verse 7 there. From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and not kept them. So not in great shape.
- Not in great shape at all. As we zoom in now on this book, Malachi, God is confronting His people with six issues.
- [ 1 : 1 2 ] The book is based around these kind of six disputes, because God sort of, it feels like a bit of an argument people are having with God. Six places where they have really dropped the ball. And at the heart of it is they simply didn't trust God.
- But they didn't have the nerve to abandon Him completely. So they would sort of go through the motions of doing churchy stuff, sort of temple-y stuff.
- But they were not really into it. Their hearts were very cold. The scary part of the passage is verse 7.
- It starts off really lovely and then there's sort of scary a bit here. It says, God says to them, return to me, which is wonderful, right? God says, return to me, which is wonderful. But you see what he says afterwards. He goes, return to me, and I'll return to you.
- The interesting thing is that they were so cold, they didn't even realize that God had left the building. God wasn't with them. I remember visiting a church years ago.
- [ 2 : 1 8 ] It was Christmas. I was on vacation in a small town in the middle of nowhere. And I'd been at St. John's for a couple of years. And I was with extended family.
- And they were like, oh, let's go to Christmas Eve service. And we'll go to a liturgical church. Like a liturgical church. Because they'll try to be nice to me.
- Like, it's got something that Aaron will like, you know. And so he went. And the preacher got up. And he said to the congregation, his first words out of his mouth were, are you saved?
- And then everybody laughed. And he went on to make fun of the whole idea of salvation. This was the minister of the church.
- 25 minutes later, the sermon had finished. And remarkably, he had not mentioned Jesus. And had not mentioned the birth of Christ.
- [ 3 : 1 7 ] Which is a pretty amazing feat considering this is Christmas Eve. I remember during the greeting time, people seemed quite happy to see each other.

And they're sort of hugging each other. And there's lots of that going on. But the whole thing felt spiritually very yucky. The whole family, a couple of people walked out.

We all felt it. And it was clear that this was not a place that honored God. But they seemed to have a pretty nice time at church that day. They were getting on with stuff.

Doing churchy stuff. Having fun. Oblivious to the fact that God had left the building. Now back to Malachi. So these people were cold.

Cold towards God. And this coldness presented itself in a number of different ways. We're just doing a general overview of Malachi again here. I said six. Six ways. Six disputes. And we've talked about them over this last month.

[ 4 : 15 ] And they were like, these guys really felt that marriage was pretty disposable. The sacrificial system was corrupt. You remember that they believed that God's, they doubted God's commitment to justice.

So they're in rough shape. And in today's passage, this is the fifth dispute. The second to last dispute. God addresses their lack of tithing. Their lack of giving.

Right. Now before we actually get into the passage and find out more about that, let me make a few, just a couple of general comments for about 30 seconds. First thing, if you are visiting with us for the very first time, you may be thinking, come on.

Really? I get myself to church, to a brand new church, and I happen to turn up on like money Sunday when the minister gets really harsh on money and stuff.

Look, I understand how you could feel that way. We don't have a money Sunday here at St. John's. We're just preaching whatever the passage is before us. That's what we talk about.

[ 5 : 23 ] But if you are visiting here, it's probably really good. I mean, given the fact that there are a lot of Christian charlatans out there, they're not Christians. They're people that are defrauding the church with their sort of TV shows and who use passages like this passage in Malachi, actually.

Considering the amount of charlatans out there, I think that it's probably a good idea early on when you're thinking about joining a church to work out what that church thinks about money and to work out and understand what that church believes about tithing.

Now, the other thing I'll say before we jump into the passages, the issue of money is not a minor theological one. The Bible has a lot to say about money. It has far more to say about money than it does sex.

And we should actually preach on it far more than we do at St. John's. And I think the Bible talks about it a lot because the love of money is a sin that we are particularly blind to.

In verse 8 of our passage, God says, you rob me. And they say, what are you talking about? What are you talking about robbing you? And God says, in your tithes, in your giving.

[ 6 : 34 ] And they're like, what do you mean? What are you talking about? And it's bizarre that they would even say that. It was bizarre that they would be so ignorant of this because the Old Testament laid out very specific guidelines about giving.

Let me give you a quick primer. So back in the days, the tithes were 10% of your incoming. And then on top of that, there were extra offerings. And these tithes, God's people would give to the temple, to the Levites, who were the priestly sort of class, the priestly tribe.

And they ran the temple. They didn't earn any money, but they ran the temple. And so people would offer animals and money and materials, produce like fruit, et cetera.

And these would be used to maintain the temple. They'd be used for all the feasts and festivals, like the Day of Atonement, et cetera, those big ones. And also used to support the poor, the orphans, the widows, and the community.

So in terms of giving, it was really, really specific. The Bible was very, very specific what the people of God were supposed to do. In Luke, Jesus confronts these Pharisees because they were tithing but not loving people.

[ 7 : 56 ] And what these guys were doing was they were like, they would like be very specific about their tithes. They were like counting like every leaf on their herb plants and taking off 10% of the leaves on their like, whatever it was, their rosemary or something like that.

I mean, Jews knew what to give. So God confronts them because they're not doing it. And not only that, they can't offer up much defense apart from this in verse 7.

God says to them, return to me and I'll return to you. And they say, how will we return? That's their defense. But it's not like, and that doesn't mean, oh, we're so sorry.

You're absolutely right. We should be giving. It's not like, give us a roadmap to repentance. What's behind that is, we don't need to return.

We're not doing anything wrong. So like us today, this is a big area of our lives. And like us today, I think we can have huge brokenness around it and have no idea that we have brokenness around this.

[ 9 : 01 ] Okay. That's a long introduction. Let's get into the passage. The way I want to tackle the passage tonight is basically four very short questions that I'm going to ask of the text.

Four very short questions. The first question is this. Why were they not giving? So they're clearly not giving. Why were they not giving? Like I said before, under this lack of tithing was a lack of trust and love.

They doubted that God would care for them if they gave. They doubted that God would keep his promises. So they didn't give to God's work. Again, they were happy to do churchy stuff, but finances, no.

That was something they trusted more. They trusted themselves more than they trusted God in this area. During the Crusades of 1100 AD...

By the way, if you are not a Christian here today and you're visiting with us, great to have you here. Your Crusades are genuinely thought of as a bad idea today as we look back.

[ 10 : 04 ] It's not one of our great moments in the church. But anyway, here's another bad moment within the Crusades. So during the Crusades, some theologically weak leader had the idea that, okay, as we ship out the soldiers, let's baptize them all.

Because that way, if they die, they'll go straight to heaven. As I said, for them, this idea was more superstition than it was good theology. It was poor theology. Apparently, what would happen is as they were baptized, they would hold out their sword hand out of the water as they'd go down under the water.

And this hand wouldn't be immersed in the water. Now, why would they do that? Because what they were going to do with this hand in the Crusades was going to be awful.

They were going to kill. They were going to maim. And so the picture is this, God, in baptism, I give you my whole life. Except this part. Because this part is going to do terrible things.

This part, I can't commit to the kingdom. This part, this thing here, this is not submitted to you. It can do what it wants. That's a great picture of spiritual dysfunction, isn't it?

[ 11 : 22 ] God, you have my whole life. But not my wallet. But not my bank account. Not my securities. Not my income. So why were they not giving to God?

They didn't trust him. So they withheld this area of their life from him. Second question. Why does God call that robbing him? In verse 8.

He says, you robbed me. See, I just describe it as withholding. God says, no, this is robbing me. Our family got robbed this week of our beautiful double stroller with a thing at the back, which we use.

It is a serious piece of kit. It's a very expensive piece of kit. Somebody said he just took it off our patio. Off our patio. And we're so angry. We're very angry about this.

We're bitter. It's awful. You feel violated when you get robbed. And God is saying here, you robbed me. This is what's happening to me. You've robbed me.

[ 12 : 30 ] What happens when we rob? He's saying something's been taken from me. And not even very stealthily like the dudes that stole our stroller. Like verse 8, it says the word rob there behind that word, the Hebrew root of that word is violence.

It's plunder. It's taken violently. So why would God use that kind of word to describe not giving to God's work?

Well, when you rob someone, what are you doing? You're taking something that isn't yours for yourself. So God is saying you're holding on to something that is not yours.

This is why I think this rob word is really helpful to us. Because I think we can easily fall into the trap of thinking about giving as this. I'm going to give some money to the church or Christian work or Christian missionaries.

So I will part with some of my money that I've worked really hard to earn. It's not the right way to think about it. And one chronicles, David, King David prays.

[ 13 : 34 ] He says, blessed are you, O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and majesty for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours.

That's a principle we work on when we think about money. Our money is not ours. It is God's. So when we don't give it back to him, it is theft. Now we still might say, yes, yes, yes, I kind of know that sort of.

But I earned that money. I went to university and I got the student loan and I got a job and I negotiated the salary. It's my money. Yes.

You did all of those things. But you did it with abilities and circumstances and opportunities that God gifted you.

So not giving is called theft, the theft from God, because all we have belongs to God. And if we don't give, we're keeping it all for ourselves.

[ 14 : 40 ] We're pretending it's ours. But it's not. We are stewards. We are stewards of our resources. We are, think of it as this, we are money managers. And like a good money manager, we invest in line with the values of whom the money belongs to.

And we invest in line with the values of God. And if you're not investing, if you're not plowing your resources into the kingdom work, if you're holding it back, you might think, I know that's not ideal because the church needs to run and pay bills.

It's good stuff, you know. But God is way more pointed in his criticism. He says, no, you're robbing me. So we're looking at four questions, remember.

Four questions here. The first one, why aren't the people of Malachi's day giving? It's a heart issue. They don't trust God. Secondly, why is it called theft? Why is it called robbing God?

It's because all we have is God's. And third, what happens when we withhold the tithe? What happens when we withhold giving? Well, verse 9 tells us, you are cursed.

[ 15 : 47 ] It's very serious, right? You are cursed with a curse for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Goodness, that's sobering, isn't it? So for God's people, the curse looks like the opposite of verse 11, which says, I will rebuke the devourer so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil and your vine and the field shall not fail to bear.

So the curse is the opposite of that. This has been an agrarian culture. So the curse looks like a lack of flourishing in that culture. So what does it mean for us?

Now, when you think curse, you might think kind of voodoo or something. Don't think voodoo. So a curse in the Bible is what happens when we separate ourselves from God and pretend to be our own gods.

So if we're holding back money and saying this is all ours, this is mine alone, your wallet can get fat, your bank account could get fat, but like the crops and the famine that it's talking about here, your heart will wither.

And your heart will wither and you'll know all the anxieties that come from the love of money. And you'll experience all the loneliness that comes from thinking financially.

[ 16 : 59 ] It is all up to me. And you'll experience the shame of comparing yourselves to others who have more. That will be a shameful thing for you. It'll only bring shame.

And you'll hear the voice of the enemy telling you that you don't have enough. Why do you know why you don't have enough? Because you're not good enough. That's the devourer speaking.

And all on top of this, you're sort of, you know, you're stealing from God. Crazy thing is, we are such, we're such terrible thieves too. It's not like we're characters from Ocean Eleven here.

We're stealthily kind of sneaking some stuff from God, you know. We're stealing from God right in front of him. And the moment of that theft, we're sort of condemned.

God sees it all, you know. There's no clever lawyers going to get us off this. Wouldn't it be better to admit our guilt and brokenness in the area of finances?

[ 17 : 57 ] Wouldn't it be awesome to receive forgiveness? To ask God to change our hearts? Wouldn't it be better for us to be under, to not under that curse? Not experience that shame? Not experience the anxiety of thinking this is all up to me?

Which takes us to the last point here. So we don't want to be under the curse. We want to know God's blessing. So the fourth and final question. What happens when we give? Verse 10. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

And thereby put me to the test. Isn't that remarkable, right? God says, 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 a blessing until there's no more need.

It's a great passage. When you give, there is blessing. God rewards. God takes the extraordinary step of saying, test me. Test me to see if this is not actually the case.

Now in those days, again, agrarian sort of culture there. So it talks about the floodgates of heavenly opening. It's talking about, I think, talking about rain.

[ 18 : 59 ] It's talking about an awesome harvest. It's talking about supply. But it's not so the Israelites can sort of sit back and live large. Look at verse 12.

Then all the nations will call you blessed. It's so. God will bless them so that the nations will look at them and go, look at those guys. What's different about them?

If you give to God's work regularly, sacrificially, here's what's going to happen. I cannot promise you that you'll become very wealthy. The prosperity ministry will do that, and that's a heresy.

Here's what will happen. God will change your heart. And he'll bless you in ways that he thinks will move his glory forward through you.

He will dethrone the idol of money in your heart. Money will no longer be this functional God in your life. It will no longer be the source of your security. The voice of shame will be silenced, and people will look at you because you handle money differently.

[ 20 : 07 ] And they'll say, what's different about this person? And it will be a testimony to God's grace. That's what the blessing will be. Doesn't that sound great? Wouldn't it be good if in your life, wouldn't this be good?

Wouldn't it be good if in your life money was just money? It was just money. And everyone knew Christ was your real treasure.

Wouldn't that be fantastic? Let's close this up. So I asked four questions of the text. You may have a lot more questions. For example, is it a percentage? Do I take a percentage of my net or gross?

Do I give it all to the church? Can I spread it around? Is it 10%? Look, I don't know. You've got to work this out with God. I'm happy to chat to you about it. But this is you and God.

You have to work this out. I wouldn't stick to 10%. Because for some of you, 10% is way too much. For some of you, it's nowhere near enough.

[ 21 : 09 ] So I would say this. I would say, order to your finances prayerfully and bring that to God and say, God, help me to work this out. What shall I do here? So my question is for you.

What are you going to do about what the Bible has talked about this evening? That's what I want to finish with. What are you going to do about what I've talked about today? If you're not giving even a tiny amount, God says, test me.

But how can we trust him? That's the question, isn't it? How do we know we can actually trust God, though? Let's go right back to the start.

Verse 6 for 30 seconds here. For I, the Lord, do not change. Therefore, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. God begins this whole bit about money by reminding him he doesn't change.

And what is it about him that doesn't change? Probably lots of things. But I think the main thing here it's talking about, the thing that doesn't change, is his commitment to his people. God's commitment to us, to me, to you.

[ 22 : 16 ] And do you notice what he calls us here? Children of Jacob. Why children of Jacob? He could describe us in lots of different ways. Why the children of Jacob? He calls his children of Jacob because Jacob was a scumbag.

He was terrible. He manipulated his brother. He tricked his dying, blind father. This is not like a really stand-up guy that God chose.

And Jacob did it for the love of power and money. And yet, God chose Jacob. God chose Jacob. Jacob did okay in the end. But God chose him.

Why? I don't know. I don't know. He just did. Like you, like Jacob, God loves you because he loves you because he loves you because he loves you.

And it was a very costly love. It cost him his son. Folks, this God who chooses you, the children of Jacob, this is a God we can trust.

[ 23 : 25 ] Folks, test him. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.