

Malachi 3:6-12 - Giving to Know You

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Preacher: Will Spink

[0 : 00] You are listening to a message from Southwood Presbyterian Church in Huntsville, Alabama. Our passion is to experience and express grace. Join us.

Thank you all. We've been talking about repentance. One of our passions is that as the Word of God comes to us, it would not just be for moms and dads and adults, but for the next generation too.

That they would know what repentance means. That they would know what that looks like in their lives. And we've heard some of that together this morning. Kids, I hope that you're starting to get a picture of what God calls us to in relationship with Him.

But it's not just for you. It's for all of us. We need to repent too. So turn with me to Malachi chapter 3. So we're nearing the end of our study on the minor prophets.

Malachi 3. And I want to make sure you know that that's why we're studying this passage about money. About giving. Tithing.

[1 : 10] We're studying it today because it's the next passage in God's Word that we've come to. Money is near the top of the list of awkward things to preach about.

So just know this is awkward for me too. Okay? We can be equally awkward. But we're talking about it not because Southwood is having unique budget issues.

Not because we're here to make money and see how much we can bring in. But because God knows best what we need to hear. This is God's Word.

So we need to hear it because it's what He speaks to us. Right? No more apologies. Let's read His Word and ask Him to shine His light on every aspect of our hearts and lives.

Even the ones we really would prefer Him not to touch. Malachi 3 verse 6. God's holy Word. God's holy Word. For I, the Lord, do not change.

[2 : 09] Therefore, you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. From the days of your fathers, you've turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me and I will return to you, says the Lord of hosts.

But you say, how shall we return? Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, how have we robbed you?

In your tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. Bring the full tithes into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

And thereby 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 is no more need.

I will rebuke the devourer for you so that it will not destroy the fruits of your soil. And your vine in the field shall not fail to bear, says the Lord of hosts. Then all nations will call you blessed.

[3 : 10] For you will be a land of delight, says the Lord of hosts. Let's pray together. Father, thank you for your word. We need it.

We need your spirit. To speak to us that it would work into our hearts. Into our lives that we would give as you have called us to.

We pray this for the sake of Jesus who gave himself for us. And we're so grateful in his name. Amen.

How would you respond this morning if your spouse or best friend said, You know, there's something you could do to help you get to know me more?

To understand me better? Read this personality description. Do this activity with me. Listen to this song. How would you respond if your child said the same thing?

[4 : 14] Hey, mom or dad, you know what you could do to understand me better? Listen, I'm about to have three teenage girls, y'all. And if they said that to me, I would eagerly run at anything to

understand more what's going on in their hearts, right?

Of course we would. I don't want you to miss that in this passage. Yes, it's about money. I already admitted that. But more foundationally, this passage is about God telling us how we can know him more.

As we've seen over and over through the prophets, repentance is about relationship. Coming back to God because God wants us to know him and love him.

Yes, he's going to talk about giving, but he wants us, right? It's not our money. That's the context of this discussion on tithing here in Malachi.

It's God wanting to show us more of who he is so that we know him and trust him more. What is he like as we relate to him?

[5 : 24] Notice that's where he starts in verse 6. For I, the Lord, I, Yahweh, do not change. Therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed.

God is eternally unchanging. Think about how remarkable that is for someone that you're in relationship with, right?

People change, don't they? They grow. They're impacted by life. We're unpredictable. We're unreliable. God does not change.

The fancy theological word for his unchanging nature is immutability. Kids, did you get that? It's the big long one on your sheet.

Immutability. New word for the week, right? You can impress your friends. God does not change like shifting shadows. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

[6 : 25] The point being, we can count on him being faithful. Because he's unchangeable in his entire character, as we said from the catechism earlier in the service.

Particularly here in this passage. His grace and mercy that keeps an inconsistent, unfaithful people from being destroyed when they wander from him, right?

That's the second thing we learn about God here, is that he is overwhelmingly generous. We can see the beginning of it there and how he bears with his people when they don't deserve it, when they run away.

But then he really throws back the curtain in verse 10 and says, you know what I'm like? What is your God like? Like, I'm ready to throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out blessings on you that you can't comprehend or contain.

You don't even begin to understand how generous I am, God says. This will only begin to touch it, but I love the picture of God's generosity that I got from one of our elders, Vinit, this week.

[7 : 40] He likes to picture it like he's going to five guys to eat their fries. Picture God's generosity like the guy serving the fries at five guys, okay?

You know how they give you a cup that is brimming over with fries coming out all sides? And then what do they do? Right as they're about to give it to you, they put it in the bag. The fries are already spilling in.

The guy looks in. He scoops another just heaping scoop of fries and pours them in the bag too, right? Listen, I love French fries. I can eat a lot of French fries.

But when I go to five guys and they fill the bag like that, I can't finish them. I have to have somebody to share it with. That's how many fries there are. That's how God pours his grace, his blessings into our lives.

It's overwhelming, overflowing, shareable size. God's generosity. That's who he is. Eternally unchanging, overwhelmingly generous.

[8 : 42] Remember those two realities as we keep reading. Because that's what God wants to do here. He wants to show his gracious and generous character to his people and to all the nations.

Verse 12. He wants us to understand him better. For everyone to know him more. And so he tells us what to do for that to happen, right?

Aren't we going to be eager to do that? Well, maybe. It starts out okay, I guess.

God calls his people to return to him. Verse 7. Return to me and I will return to you.

It's that word we keep seeing over and over. Repent. Return. God does not change. But his idolatrous people must.

[9 : 40] They must change directions. Turn from their selfish pursuits and come home to God. God. Sometimes we bristle at anybody telling us what to do, don't we?

How we should change. We don't like that. But God says our hearts must come back to know him. And maybe like his people we say, okay, but how?

I mean, what would that look like? God, I don't understand where I'm far off from you. We're not sure how we're missing you, God. They say that a lot in Malachi, don't they? Malachi says, stop robbing God.

Bam. Right? I mean, that'll wake you up. What the prophet is telling them is that their disobedience is keeping them from deeper relationship with God.

I mean, that makes sense, right? If someone consistently robs you, wouldn't that impact your relationship with them? The closeness and trust that you felt with them?

[10:52] Sure it would. In fact, when they rob God, they get a curse. And so in response to that, the call of God is clear.

Verse 10. Let me explain what's going on here.

What is God saying to them? See, throughout the Old Testament, God and his people have this special relationship where he brings them into the promised land. A land flowing with milk and honey, right?

And he says, here's how our relationship is going to work. Because it's so important that you remember what I've done for you. Lest they forget that all this is his.

And they're to enjoy and use it for his glory. They are to give a tithe. Tithe. Literally, that word means a tenth. Ten percent.

[12:01] That they're going to give of everything that the land produces back to God. It all comes from him. And so he retains particular ownership of that tenth.

The produce of the crops. The fruit of the trees. The animals from the flocks and herds. Just read through Leviticus 27. All of that is the Lord's.

So that's where the idea of robbing comes from. If everything is yours, God, like they were singing, then it changes how we view it.

If they own, if God's people own the things, then not bringing the tithe to God would not be robbing. It would be their own stuff. But he owns everything.

And his people then are stewards who must bring his tithe into the storehouses. The storehouse is a part of the temple.

[13:06] Special room where tithes and offerings are collected to then be distributed. Particularly to the priests, the Levites, to provide for them and their families.

Since they don't receive a particular inheritance in the land that they're going to work. But the worship of God's people and his temple must be maintained. And so his people bring the tithe to the storehouse.

And then in some cases it's used to provide for the poor. The widow, the orphan, the foreigner. As needs arose, yes, they could be met individually as you allow them to glean in your fields.

But some of what you had you brought to the storehouse. For community, worship and service. Relinquishing your control over its distribution.

Scholars actually estimate that in the Old Testament if you combined the basic tithe and all the other tithes and offerings that God's law required of his people.

[14:09] Contributions here could be part of those other things mentioned in this passage. The total of all of it was likely more like 20%. Or even more than that. That the people were to bring to God.

But for sure the tithe, the tenth, applied across the board. And that's what God was concerned about. He says, bring the full tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house.

Plenty for the priest. Provision for the poor. Proper upkeep of God's house. Apparently God's people are giving occasionally. There's some stuff coming in.

But you know, who else really notices when it's not a tenth, right? Well God, apparently. The emphasis is on the full tithe.

Lest they think that they know how best to provide for themselves. I figured it out God how much I should bring in and how much I should hold back this time.

[15:14] Lest they think they know best how their relationship with God should work. He says, obey me in this. Steward my provision faithfully and generously.

And there's a glorious promise. Right there alongside it. It's God's generous provision that we've already seen. He tells them, you can't out give God. Right?

You won't have to worry as you give about the things that you fear most. I don't know what that is for you. That you would fear about your life.

In this context, locusts are referenced. A big danger to crops. Something that would disrupt your livelihood, your family. God will keep them away.

Bless your fields abundantly. Very practical blessings associated with returning to your covenant God. But there's even more.

[16:10] Actually, what's more featured here is this idea of putting God to the test. Test me, God says. Usually testing God is a bad thing, right?

We're not supposed to put God to the test. That's usually what his people are told. But here, in order to build our faith so that we truly know him and experience his overwhelming generosity for ourselves.

The point is actually not so much all these blessings he's going to give you. They're nice. But the point is, test me.

That you experience more of God himself. His people will honor and worship him as the God who provides extravagantly. The one they can trust exclusively.

And then the nations will look on and they'll see this unique blessing. The utter delight experienced by those who follow Yahweh. And they'll say, what a gracious, generous God.

[17:11] What a blessed people. I'd love to be a part of that community with that God. That's what Malachi is talking about.

A few hundred years ago. What about for us? I mean, some things have obviously changed in 450 years.

When Jesus comes, they've certainly changed. You know, 2,500 years later. We're not national Israel. Ruled by God's laws.

Do we even have to tithe? Fair points. Some things have definitely changed. Not many of you put fruit or an animal in the offering plate when it came by this morning, right?

Not usually. We don't have a storehouse room for all those gifts here on the church property. Some of you even clicked on your phone and gave electronically, which wasn't common in Malachi's day.

[18:14] So that's true. And beyond that, it's also important to say the tithe that's referenced here is not commanded directly in the New Testament.

All that is true. So please know there are important distinctions for us with this passage and its application now. But if we think things have gotten lighter in regards to our money, we're not reading God's word.

We're making that up for ourselves. The reason for giving remains the same in the New Testament. Recognizing that everything belongs to God. That's the foundational one repeated over and over.

Also caring for those who minister God's word to his people. Galatians 6, 6. Let the one who is taught the word share all good things with the one who teaches.

Providing for the poor among our community. Many examples like Acts 4. Consistently in the New Testament.

[19:33] What you'll see is regular communal giving to support the worship and life of God's people. It's commanded. It's commended over and over.

In fact, the idea of this consistent and proportional giving. Like you might think of with a tithe, a 10%. That is in the New Testament.

For example, 1 Corinthians 16. On the first day of every week. This is a regular practice, right?

Each of you is to put something aside and store it up as he may prosper.

So that there will be no collecting when I come, Paul says. So that you do this regularly. As God provides for you. You give in response to that.

I'm just giving you a sampling of some of the basics, alright? Not going into all the details of it. But if you really want to say to me, Pastor, don't ask me to tithe like the Old Testament.

[20:31] Give me some New Testament freedom in giving, right? I want freestyle giving like the New Testament. Like Jesus. Be careful what you ask for.

The best descriptions of New Testament giving as God commands would be generous. Add sacrificial. It should really hurt. It should cost you something.

And then just go ahead and say everything. Right? All that you have. In fact, it's the ones praised in the New Testament are not the Pharisees.

Who tithe carefully on every last dollar. But who? The widow. Who gives two copper pennies. Which are everything she had to live on.

After all, God's interested in more than our money. Right? It's about the heart. Cheerful givers God is looking for. Who are eager to release control over their resources.

[21 : 31] Because they so trust the one who's caring for them. Y'all, it would be really difficult to argue from the Bible. That God's people today are called to give less than a tenth.

Particularly now. In response to the riches of God's blessing. Poured out on us in Jesus. The tithe today should be viewed as a floor.

Rather than a ceiling. A principle that gets us started. And then launches us forward in generous, overflowing giving. That's the place where a lot of the particular questions.

Like gross or net. Just my salary or my real estate. And my investments. Reasonable questions like that. Get dwarfed.

By the idea that God owns it all. And he calls us to give generously. And trust him. Not asking. What can I get away with?

[22 : 34] Not asking what can I avoid giving? But what can I possibly give? How do I get the opportunity to give? Do we have to give all our tithe to our church?

Another good question. That certainly seems to be the clearest way to reflect the biblical commands and principles of giving. That supports the communal worship and work of God's people.

The provision for those who minister God's word to you. And the poor among us. The entrusting of his resources beyond my control. But of course that doesn't stop us from giving to other people and other causes as well.

That's wonderful and can be very generous. One of the ways our family has found helpful to reflect biblical principles in giving. Is to start with a tithe of 10% of everything to our church.

And then give beyond that to other needs we become aware of. Causes where we have a personal passion and special requests from our church. That come up.

[23 : 43] And as God provides and calls us to. Then we can give. Another thing that stays the same today. As it was in Malachi's day.

Is that God's people struggle. And this aspect of our relationship with him. Statistically. Over one third of professing Christians in America today give nothing.

We give less than 3% of our income to our church. Lower than even during the Great Depression. We may be a touch better than that at Southwood.

I'm told. But without knowing any names of course. Just using average income numbers in our county. We probably give as a church about 5%.

Somewhere in that range. So yes we have some budget needs right now. That's true. More importantly y'all. We have kingdom opportunities.

[24 : 45] With ministries in our own church. With materially poor here in Huntsville. With people around the world who haven't heard the gospel.

That we'd love to be able to help reach. And those are opportunities God has given us. We'll give you a few more details about these opportunities. In a letter that you'll get in your mailboxes this week.

But right now can you just imagine. Without specifics. Imagine what it would look like if we moved from 5%. Even just to 10%. Can you imagine?

Doubling our investment in the kingdom together. All those great opportunities. What God might do. I don't think we should use our distance from Malachi's day.

To avoid hearing God say to us. Bring the full tithe into the storehouse. Now I know how to figure that out. It's not always simple.

[25 : 47] And I don't want to pretend that it is. Especially if that's not the way your family has functioned. So let's help each other. Right? We're a family for that reason.

Right? God is calling us together to bring the tithe. And some of us are naturally more generous. Or more experienced with money than others are. Talk to one of our deacons about how you can develop the grace of giving.

As Paul calls it in your own life. In fact if you're a deacon. Will you stand up for just a second? They didn't even know this was coming. If you're a deacon. Just stand up for a second. But there's a bunch of them who are not here this morning.

And some of them that are still sitting probably. But seriously. God has called and gifted these guys particularly. To lead us in this. Alongside our elders.

They do a great job faithfully stewarding our budget. And they would love to help you steward God's resources. That he's entrusted to you.

[26 : 49] It's part of their heart. It's part of their gift. It's part of their passion. You can talk with them. If you don't know where to start. Email me and I'll get you to them. Thank you guys. It's a big deal.

God is calling us to repent. To return to him. Right? But it's a big deal. Not because Southwood has a budget problem.

But because we have a heart problem. That's a huge deal. We're missing out on the blessing of knowing God more. As he provides so graciously for us.

That's what's going on. The most important thing stays the same. God's unchanging character. His gracious generosity. Ask yourself. Do you give as though you have an eternally unchanging. Overwhelmingly generous father. That you can absolutely count on. Is that what your giving reflects? That you know him like that? I've always struggled with this attachment to money.

[28 : 00] In my own heart. I remember back when Christy and I got married just a couple years later. We were able at that time to pay off all of our student loans.

And to be debt free. And it felt so good. I hated the feeling of being in debt. And it felt so good to be debt free. It's a great feeling.

It's why Dave Ramsey has made millions off of people coming in to do the debt free scream. Right? Because it's just a great feeling not to have that.

And I remember feeling that. And I decided then that I would use my money to prevent ever feeling that bad feeling again.

I decided, committed to myself that I was going to find security. Not in making millions. But in having enough to provide for myself.

[28 : 59] I liked that feeling. I still like that feeling. And what God is speaking to my idolatrous heart this morning.

Is that there's something so much better than that feeling. And there's an even better place to be than that. Where you're screaming out of the excitement of being debt free.

And that's when you rejoice in a heavenly father who cares for you. Regardless of what the number in the bank account says. Who will supply all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

That's a greater inheritance. Right? That's a stronger security. A deeper joy than that other false one that I run after so often.

That's what God's offering us. Southwood. That's what he wants us to enter into. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. That though he was rich.

[30 : 05] Yet for your sakes he became poor. That you through his poverty might become rich. What does it mean? That we become rich through Jesus' poverty?

Rich there is what he starts with. Right? Jesus' riches in this passage are not primarily referring to money. But this amazing relationship with God.

That he enjoyed in heaven. Right? That's what it meant that Jesus was rich. That's what he gave up. Making him poor. So that we through his poverty.

His being rejected by God. Turned away from by his father. That we might become rich. Jesus didn't come so we could be millionaires.

No rich. No rich. Means that we might know. That kind of relationship with God. That Jesus left in heaven.

[31 : 06] To come for us. Right? Do you hear God offering that to us? Friends. God is saying. That's why you give. Not for any other reason.

Than that you're in relationship with me. And I'm inviting you deeper. Into that. Do you hear his promise. To meet us in our giving. With everything we need. Yes. Caring for us.

Of course. But with himself. In relationship. Beyond what you can imagine. I'm not talking primarily about a bigger budget number for Southwood.

But we've been praying for revival. Right? And we've been talking about revival. Praying that God would do that in our hearts. Bringing us into deeper relationship with him.

Praying he'd do it in our community. That they would be transformed. And that will only happen. If God opens the floodgates of heaven. And pours down for us.

[32 : 01] A blessing. Until there is no more need. That he would pour down things like. Conviction of sin. And joyful repentance. And confident faith in Christ.

Countless conversions. And baptism after baptism. And your neighbors and your friends coming in. And knowing Jesus. Divisions being healed in our community. And hearts full of people. Full of the Holy Spirit. That's going to require God. Pouring out the abundance of heaven. On us. You believe he'd do that. As we give.

Can you believe that he actually comes again here. And invites us home. To repentance. To return to him. To restored relationship.

Beyond what we've known. Won't we trust him. In this. Let's pray. Father we say we trust you.

[33 : 06] But we struggle. Because we trust ourselves. Our resources. And sometimes they feel safer.

And doesn't seem safe to trust you. Would you show us. How glorious you are. How good you are. How generous you are. Would you invite us deeper. Into knowing more of who you are. Father. Teach us. To listen. And to obey. And bless us beyond.

What we could ever ask for. For your glory. We. This church family. Need you. And together. Ask. For you to open our hearts.

And our hands. We would give ourselves completely. For you. In Jesus name. Amen. For more information.

[34 : 07] Visit us online. At [Southwood.org](https://southwood.org) For more information. Visit us online.

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