

Good morning, church. Today we consider God's Guarantee. The prophet Malachi ended the Old Testament – the last words of the Bible before the New Testament.

7) *“Return to me, and I will return to you,”* says the Lord of Armies. Yet you ask, *“How can we return?”* 8) *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!”* *“How do we rob you?”* you ask. *“By not making the payments of the tenth and the contributions.* 9) *You are suffering under a curse, yet you — the whole nation — are still robbing me.* 10) *Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in my house. Test me in this way,”* says the Lord of Armies. *“See if I will not open the floodgates of heaven and pour out a blessing for you without measure.”*

The Bible and Money. In 40 plus years of pastoral ministry, I have received more criticism when I preached on money or financial issues than any other subject. I always found that interesting. I could preach on any sin, even the most serious sins, and not receive as much criticism as when I preached on what the Bible says about money and finances. I could address some of the most sensitive life issues and not be castigated as when I addressed financial issues. I could speak about total commitment, personal witnessing, or theological doctrines and cause minimal disagreements compared to preaching on stewardship issues.

This morning, I make no apology for preaching on the issue of money. You may be surprised to know how much the Bible says about money and material possessions. **500 Bible verses relate to prayer – 500 relate to faith – 2000 relate to money and possessions.** Clearly, God is interested in how we steward his resources. Jesus addressed stewardship issues regularly. **The Gospels record 38 of Jesus' parables – 16 involve handling money or possessions.** In fact, one out of every ten verses in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) address stewardship issues. At the conclusion of the Old Testament, the prophet Malachi boldly declared God's Guarantee. A guarantee is something you can count on, depend on, or be sure of. Malachi 3 defines God's Guarantee in two dimensions.

1. GOD'S GUARANTEE FOR THE CHURCH — ENOUGH.

God commanded *“Bring the full tenth into the storehouse so that there may be food in My house.”* (Malachi 3:10) **God's Financial Plan can be narrowed to one issue: tithing.** Two questions beg for an answer:

Question #1: What is a tithe? The biblical word tithe literally means *“the tenth part.”* Tithing is giving 10% of the income God blesses you with. The Bible is clear that God owns the tithe. The Levitical law affirmed, *“A tithe of everything....belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.”* (Lev. 27:30) Thus,

Malachi spoke the truth when he accused the people of robbing God. Because a tithe of everything belonged to the LORD, when they failed to bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, they were robbing God. The question: *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.”* But you ask, *“How do we rob you? By not making the payments of 10 percent and the contributions. You are suffering under a curse, yet you – the whole nation – are still robbing Me.”* The word “rob” literally means “to take by force.” The people responded, *“In what way have we robbed God?”* They could not comprehend taking anything from God by force. Yet, by failing or refusing to give what already belonged to God, they were in fact committing theft by force. Faithful giving involves many areas and avenues, but obedience to God’s Financial Plan begins with tithing.

Question #2: “What is storehouse tithing? **The Old Testament storehouse = the Temple.** From the time of Hezekiah, storerooms existed in the Temple complex to receive the tithes and offerings of God’s people. 2 Chronicles 31:11 records that Hezekiah *gave orders to prepare storerooms in the temple of the LORD, and this was done. Then they faithfully brought in the contributions, tithes and dedicated gifts.*” This practice continued during the time of Nehemiah when the people brought the tithes to the *“storerooms of the treasury in the house of God.”* [Nehemiah 10:38-39] In Old Testament times, money was not the payment for work wages or the exchange of goods. When Jews brought their tithes to the Temple, they brought a tenth of their flocks, herds, grain, or produce, thus the need for storerooms. However, New Testament Christianity shifted from one Temple, where the people gathered for worship and where they brought their tithes, to individual churches, planted in towns, cities, and communities across the New Testament world.

While the Temple was the Old Testament Storehouse, **The New Testament Storehouse = the Church.** Under Roman rule, money and personal property became the means of paying wages and exchanging goods and services. Churches received offerings. All of the New Testament principles of giving relate to the local church. We could start a huge debate on this issue, but I believe that the local church is still the storehouse. So, for the church, God promises enough provision -- *“that there may be food in my house.”* God knows what is needed, and He will supply whatever is needed. I’m going to make a statement that I believe to be true. Based on God’s guarantee, if there ever is a time in life of the church when there is not enough money or resources to do what God has led us to do, then it can only mean that some of God’s people are not being faithful and obedient in tithing. God promised that tithing would provide enough. Each year as a church you adopt an annual budget – a congregational contract on how the tithes and offerings are disbursed. I just

foolish enough to believe that when God leads a congregation to consensus on a budget, if a budget deficit occurs, it is really a tithing deficit.

God's guarantee does not just impact the Church (the storehouse), but God's guarantee also involves each individual Christian.

2. GOD'S GUARANTEE FOR THE CHRISTIAN — EXCESS.

Tithing *“opens the floodgates of heaven and pours out blessing without measure.”* Heaven's floodgates are reserved for tithing! Heaven's floodgates are mentioned in the Bible only two other times: at the great flood during the days of Noah [Genesis 7] and at the end of the world [Isaiah 24:18] The only other time that God promised to open the floodgates of heaven is to bless with excess those who tithe. God even goes one step further -- granting permission to test Him in this to see if He will do what He promised. *“Test Me in this way.”* **The Trust Test – Do you trust God and Can God trust You?** Do you trust God to open heaven's floodgates when you tithe? Do you trust God to bless the 90% He lets you keep if you give Him His 10%? Can God trust you to give what already belongs to Him? The issue for us is does this really work? We are often like the people of the Old Testament – we observe people who don't serve God and who aren't faithful in their giving, and they seem to be prospering. Here's my take on this: *“It's better to be a treasure than to have treasure.”* I'd rather be one of God's treasured possessions than to have all the treasure of this world.

When I was a pastor, it was my practice to preach an annual stewardship sermon, often on the subject of tithing. I usually preached this sermon during the time of our annual budget emphasis. One year I shared from this text in Malachi about the Trust Test. At the close of the sermon, I challenged the congregation to “test God.” I boldly declared: *“If you're not tithing, then God gives you permission to test Him. Try it for three months. And if after three months, you can produce valid proof that God has not kept His promise, that God cannot be trusted, that you are worse off since you started tithing, that no blessings have come your way, then I will do everything in my power to arrange a refund of your tithe, because I don't want you to live the rest of your life serving a God who lies and following a biblical principle that does not work.”* As you might guess, it caused quite a stir within the church. It got back to me that several left that worship service determined to take the pastor up on his offer and prove me wrong. After three months, no one asked for a refund. But some who did begin to tithe testified of God's blessing. This is not my guarantee — this is God's guarantee.

Tithing will never be AFFORDABLE. I can honestly say that I have never had a problem with tithing, simply because my father taught me the basic principle of biblical tithing. I must have been about 10 years old when he gave me my first allowance. It was 50 cents a week. He gave it to me in the form of one quarter

and five nickels. And he explained to me that one of those nickels was the tithe portion that belonged to God. From that day to this day, I have given a tithe and more of all of my income. That may not be your testimony. You may be struggling with what you've heard today and thinking, "*There's no way that I can afford it – there's no way that we can afford it!*" Because tithing will never be affordable, when will you start?

Next Sunday has been designated Harvest Sunday, in response to our budget deficit. We've challenged ourselves to reduce and perhaps even eliminate this deficit in a one-time offering. Will you pray about your response? If you are tithing already, would you prayerfully consider giving a double tithe next Sunday? That what Vicki and I have decided to do. If you are not tithing, would you start tithing next Sunday? God may lead some of you to do much more than that, but I sometimes wonder – could real revival break out in a church through a giving revival?