

Credit Where Credit is Due

Practices of the Faith: Tithing

Relentless Series: Invocavit Sunday

Lent Week 1 - March 6th, 2022

Rev. Rynn Parraw

Genesis 14: 17-24

Genesis 28: 10-22

1 Chronicles 29: 1-19

Psalms 51

Mark 12: 13-17

Romans 13

Malachi 3: 6-18

Did you know that the practice of Tithing actually came from a willing offering? It was not a command from a greedy God who felt taken advantage of. Rather, on several separate occasions, different founders of the faith offered a tithe to God as a reciprocal acknowledgement for what God had promised or provided. The original design of the practice was not that we would buy in by giving what we scraped together but actually gave a kick-back to support the ministry and show appreciation - more like tipping a practitioner or service provider.

Tithing is about dedicating our resources to a higher cause knowing that we will ultimately benefit as a result of what we are getting in that exchange. But, following our lead, God developed expectations and holds high standards. Though, with an adaptation based on the *original* prayer of offering: a tenth of EVERYTHING that God gives should be reinvested in your future and relationship with Him.

Tithing is traditionally the practice of giving 10% of your finances to the church. It is your way of contributing to the ministry and financially supporting those who support you in other ways. Now, in the ancient Hebrew times, the church was their governing board. We saw pretty quick how those resources were misused or squandered. The Levitical priests had a lot to deal with and did not necessarily do it with the utmost integrity. By Yeshua's time, not only were the Hebrews expected to pay tithes to the church, but also taxes to the Roman empire.

He was challenged with the question: which one is our authority and therefore are we to pay to? Essentially, the priestly sects did not recognize the authority of the empire government and functioned separately from it. This was true since wandering in the desert with Moses. It was the design of their social structure. But the Romans had other ideas and so the church has to start paying taxes too. And the people, who mostly didn't make enough to live as it was, we obligated to pay 10% to the church AND 20% to the empire.

Most of us have stopped paying the church and so the practice of tithing is seen as an abstract obligation rather than a standard of conduct. We look at tithing from a lack perspective as though we already don't have much, so can't afford to do more. Rather, the ancient perspective was that the tithe went first and the rest was ours to play with. It was a premise not an afterthought. And on top of that, most of us have a LOT of feelings about paying taxes too.

Your feelings about the government's misuse of resources at this point in the story are irrelevant. Because those resources are how God pays for His ministers. It's how the people who are servants to society get paid and infrastructure is provided for us. Yes, there is a lot of corruption in leadership, but if we don't support then we are actually robbing from the hands of those who are trying to make things available to us: the servants at the civil level.

If you are going to be a conscious participant in society then you need to contribute to it. By design, withdrawing your support of some things that you don't agree with doesn't result in change. Voicing those concerns and actively participating in the reformation of it by being a contributor, not just of money, but of time and ideas. An alternative perspective is offered as an option to be invested in.

We've seen before that when government resources get tight it's not the big one that you had a problem with that is the one who financially suffers. It's the servants who lose their job and ability to support themselves and opportunity to continue to show up with the best of intentions. They are the first ones to be cut off and hurt by that withdrawal and refusal.

The social supports that the Bible talks about, practitioners are expected to support and look after the widow, the disenfranchised, the poor, and the orphans. We're expected to look after our elderly. When we pay our taxes that is our way of doing that.

The social infrastructures come from that pool of resources. When you pay your taxes you are contributing to the care of those individuals. And I know that gets lost in the shuffle with a corrupt government that isn't necessarily working in integrity. And we're lucky here in Canada, we're more or less doing all right on the balance between those things.

The government didn't use to do that. Individual practitioners were expected to take care of each other and society. So when Yeshua said to give to Caesar what is Caesars and give it to God what is God, those two things, taxes and social supports infrastructures, were separate. In our current Socio-economic perspective, we actually have it better than they did, because by doing one we naturally are doing the other. And though for some of us we feel like we need to do more and be more active on the social support part of that commission, by paying your taxes you are contributing to the benefit of a much broader community.

Even if we don't agree with the distribution of resources by the government's agenda, by contributing our resources with that intention, those resources would become available as support for the servants who are working with integrity trying to get great things done through a contaminated system despite everything that they deal with and face as they are restricted by the constraints that they have to try and maneuver around in order to get that service and ministry done. The support is for the disenfranchised.

If we give and pay our taxes as a tribute and a contribution towards that social infrastructure with a clear heart and clear intention infused in those finances then we have an opportunity. If enough of us shift that intention, from an unseen perspective to pressurize that need and those resources. Working from the covert angle, we can start to shift the perspective and the priorities in that agenda.

Most of us benefitted from those social supports throughout Covid. So we have a little bit more of a perspective of when it comes down to it our government does try and help us - provided we don't look too closely at the details. But they're doing the best they can with what they've got to work with. And they are always working from behind the curve trying to catch up to their own story responding to the needs and complaints of the people while trying to push the boundaries of what they make us capable of and can provide for us. It's a very delicate balance that they have to walk. I don't envy them.

Now looking beyond just finances to be a payment or a tribute, Jacob's pledge doesn't say 'income', but that he would give 10% of *all* of his resources thus tithing 'everything'. What would your home look like if you dedicated 10% of that space? Often the way we think of it is that off the top we give 10% of any income and therefore our belongings are only made up out of the 90%. But to have sacred space within your home, you would have belongings that are treated as sacred. Not necessarily set aside for only God's use like icons on an altar, but things that were to be used only *with* Him. Every time you engage with that object your mind turns to God.

There's also non-monetary gifts. So what would it look like if you gave 10% of everything including non-monetary gifts like your time and your attention. To have a devotional practice or a worship practice where 10% of your time is dedicated to turning your eyes and heart to God. What would your life look like if you set aside 10% of your time and attention to be dedicated to connecting with God and cultivating that relationship?

10% of your time is 2-1/2 hours. I know it sounds like a lot of time but it's really not. Look at all of the time that gets squandered in a day: how much time you spend preparing your meals and going to the bathroom and staring blankly at a screen while trying to think of what to do next. How much time you spend in commute? All of that time is eaten up by day-to-day activities in your life.

What if for those of us who are too busy to set aside 2-1/2 hours every day for a devotional practices, what if during lent we fasted 10% of our time and attention towards cultivating that relationship with God. What would your life look like? To be mindful and present and bring that element into your day-to-day activities.

When we looked at fasting we talked about how fasting is not about the withdrawal or the losses or the suffering and sacrifice. It's supposed to be about re-dedicating your resources that would've been spent on those everyday activities or those vices and instead using that same amount of resources towards connecting and cultivating your relationship with God. So what I'm talking about here is pairing your fasting practice with your tithing practice, where it becomes about how you dedicate your resources towards the goals that you were working for.

Where your attention goes so does your heart. God asks that with the whole heart and mind and soul we would pursue Him. So, as you're making your meals, as you're commuting, as you're having those moments in a day or you're not sure what to do next, just drop into a very quick prayer. Here's a suggestion for how to re-dedicate 10% of your time and attention towards focussing on the filter of God. You have no idea how different your life would be if you used God as your filter through which you navigate your reality.

30min devotional practice, 3x 10min intentional mindfulness, 15min meditation, 2x 15min in bathroom, that gives 45min left: 45 x 1min prayers throughout the day. Or rededicate your attention while making dinner and commuting, etc. Use the time you are already spending and spend that time with God.

When we look at ungifting which is an expression used to describe a person who gives a gift and then later wants it back or someone who expects a reciprocal gift, something of equivalent worth in return for their gift. They may even do this intentionally, only giving in order to get. Often what that looks like is more how we can give a gift to someone else and then turn around and take it back. But how do we do that with God's gifts?

The first thing that comes to mind is of course going to be how we try and surrender something that we don't want to God or we surrender something that we do want to God for Him to take care of the details in bringing it to us as co-creators. But when we look at ungifting when you've surrendered something to God then it's the habit of taking it back up. You say that prayer to be free of something and then you do that thing again and you habitually start saying those empty prayers.

The Bible talks a lot about that, especially in Yeshua's ministry, chastising people for empty prayers and empty practices. God doesn't want sacrifices, He wants a surrendered heart. And so when we want change, when we want growth, we are to give those details up to God because He's way more creative and way more capable of pulling it off than we are. The hardest part is not in surrendering, but leaving it there on the altar.

We living sacrifices like to wriggle ourselves right back off the altar after we've dedicated ourselves. It's a gross habit for humanity. We've been doing it since the beginning of time. We certainly act like unappreciative children. But beyond just taking

back something we've tried to surrender to God whether as a tribute or as a sacrifice, or as an offering, the other side of ungiving is when God gives us something.

It's clear that everything we have was a gift from God. And we've talked about finances, and we talked about resources, but what about abilities? Everything that you are capable of, not just what you have. It's all gifts from God: your mental faculties, your physical abilities, even your psychic abilities, your qualities, your characteristics, and your capabilities. All of it was by His design and therefore as the Artist and Creator every part of that, every part of you, is a gift from God. And yet we squander them and contaminate them and defile them.

So, if we're going to give back and tithe 10% of **everything** God gives us as tribute then what does that mean about you? It's a great start to tithe your time and attention. It helps you to be more present and to understand how to live in that flow of the divine. But life really gets on point and in alignment when we take that moment and realize that 10% of not only everything that we have, but everything that we do, but taking it to that deepest level of subtlety to everything that we are.

What happens when not just your time and attention and your resources are dedicated towards cultivating that relationship but also 10% of everything that you are, and therefore everything that you do as an expression of *who* you are. Not just tasks as you go about your daily life. We're looking from the starting point of that. I think this one is usually one of the most shocking to people. But if you've been on a conscious evolution journey then this one may have seemed the most obvious to you.

*We give the but thine own
What e'er the gifts may be;
All that we have is thine alone,
A trust, O God, from thee.*

Maybe the whole reason you wanted to become conscious was so that you could be more in alignment and living in the divine flow of God's design for your life. Tithing who you are as a tribute to God is more than just making an offering of yourself. It's actually to live up to the original covenant. God made you for a purpose therefore you were expected to be living in surrender to that purpose. As the embodiment of that purpose.

To make yourself not a sacrifice as in the old way of doing the empty practises from an unconscious motivation or perspective, to make yourself not an offering in the middle way of contributing something to a common goal, but to make yourself a tribute where in the very living of your being you are not only making effort to turn your own attention to God, but simply by showing up and being yourself, naturally, you are turning those who witness you - turning their eyes and hearts to God.

I don't mean that in by the way of an evangelist. For you going around and trying to convert people, but simply by being the embodiment of a faithful practitioner, and the embodiment of an agent for God's chaos and creation, as an angel on earth in human disguise. As the hands and feet and voice of God living and moving in this world doing the work that He needs done.

If you're wondering why we're singing so much in today's sermon, it's because a part of giving back that portion, that 10% of everything God gave you, is to use your abilities for God's glory. You may find that today's sermon is a little sing-songy. And there is a semi-valid reason for that. When I was a child I had a voice that did a lot of turning people's attention to God. And at one point I stopped singing. I remember my mother saying that that was offensive to God. That He made that voice for His purposes and by refusing to use it and refusing to share it I was betraying His gift and His plan.

There are periods in life where you do want to be quiet and you don't want to share parts of yourself. And that is a very healthy part of the journey to withdraw so that you can actually build something and allow it to stabilize and allow it to grow and cultivate in the privacy of your own practice but then there are other points where the only way for you to grow is to share of yourself. Not as a sacrifice or even an offering, but as an embodiment of God's design, as the divine finger-pointing to the plan, and as an ally who is working with God towards the fulfilment of His plans and promises.

But, why only give 10%? God wants *everything*.

A practice of mindfulness is all about being completely present and in the moment. It would not be a difficult extension of such a practice to focus the connection within that practice by adding your relationship with God like a filter through which you see your reality. In this way, *everything* you do becomes a way you see God.

But, for now, let's just start with trying 10%...

Sung:

*Take my life and let it be
Set apart and holy
Take my time and the rest of my days
And let them be a river of praise*

*Take my hands and let them move
Guided by my love for You
Take my feet and let them be
Messengers of mercy*

*I give You my life
I give You my dreams
See my open hands before you
All that I am
And all that I'll be
I give them as an offering*

*Take my riches
Take my gold
Tear them from my heart and soul
Take these gifts and all that I own
Lord, I pour them out for you alone...
All that I am
And all that I'll be
I give them as an offering*

May the Lord bless you and keep your eyes and your heart open. May you be open to the moving of His Spirit. And may you be moved to stand up for your faith. Go forth and be strong in the Lord.

'Therefore, I urge you, dear brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — His good, pleasing and perfect will.' (Romans 12:1-2)

God wants all of us: 'So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God'. (1 Cor 10:31) Soli Deo Gloria, *Selah*