

BON AIR BAPTIST CHURCH  
James D. Pardue, Pastor

October 17, 1999

Scripture: *Malachi 3:6-12*

Sermon: *Taking What Belongs to God*

The text for us today is Malachi 3, verses 6-12, and I will be reading from the New American Standard Version.

*For I the Lord, do not change. Therefore, you O sons of Jacob are not consumed. From the days of your fathers you have 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 a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me.*

*But you say, How have we robbed thee? In tithes and contributions. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole Nation of you.*

*Bring the whole tithes into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and test 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 a blessing until there is no more need. Then I will rebuke the devourer for you so that it may not destroy the fruits of the ground, nor will your vine in the field cast its grapes, says the Lord of Hosts.*

*And all the nations will call you blessed for you shall be a delightful land, said the Lord of Hosts.*

May God add his blessing to the reading of his word. Now I would like to give you a brief testimony concerning stewardship and lordship, and how God has worked in my life. Fifty years ago when I was a college sophomore, God confronted me that I gave financial resources to the Lord's work on a sporadic basis rather than proportional and systematic as taught in the Bible. My rationale for sporadic giving was my limited funds for I was responsible for my college and living expenses as family resources and financial aid resources for college expenses were not available to me. I was obedient in that confrontation, and it changed my life forever in giving to God's work. But another event also took place in my life that changed my life in far more significant ways. This event has been progressive in nature

and continues to take place in my life. This event is the lordship of Jesus Christ. Perhaps some of you today are unfamiliar with the concept of lordship living. Chuck Swindoll, President of Dallas Seminary, describes it better than anyone else when he says that in order to engage in Lordship living, one must be willing to receive what God gives, lack what God withholds, relinquish what God takes, suffer what God inflicts, be what God requires. As we begin a moment of meditation, consider seriously the claims of Jesus Christ upon your life for stewardship giving and lordship living.

This fall we are walking through the Book of Malachi. The book is put together very simply. Everytime God says something, the people say prove it. Everytime he makes a charge, they say we don't believe it. So it is an age where authority is not respected, where skepticism reigns, and where people say we are going to do what we want to do. So today we come to one of these sections where God raises an issue, and the people immediately began to backtalk and began to say we don't believe what you are saying. If you felt really bad, you would go to a physician. The physician would ask you questions and run some tests, and after a while he would come back, and he would say this is the source of your problem. The people in Jerusalem in this period of time were not feeling good about their faith. You can hear them talking in their small groups. You know I feel like I pray, and it doesn't seem to be going anywhere. When I go down to the temple to worship, it seems like my mind is going in all different kind of directions, or I try to read the Torah and it doesn't make any sense to me anymore. So they begin to wonder why do I feel so bad in my spiritual life. So God comes to them and diagnoses the problem, and he says you have Jacob's syndrome.

Let me remind you about Jacob. Jacob is one of those people in the Bible who is known by two names. When he was a middle aged adult, he had an adventure with God that changed and transformed his life, so much so that God said I am going to give you a different name. I am going to call you Israel. Israel means Prince of God. This man walked so close with God that the whole country is now named after him. But before then he was called Jacob. The word Jacob means manipulator, twister, con artist. He was a man who was always looking out for himself, always had his best interest at heart. He always was saying how can I get ahead economically, how can I make things work for me. He learned very early that it was the Jewish custom that when the father died, the oldest brother received the majority of the wealth. Now he was going to receive a portion, but he was

not going to get as much as his brother. So like many individuals who get into this comparative business, he began to say he's got more than I have, not that I have more than he has. So he manipulated and worked around to where he could get the money that his brother had. A person who has Jacob's syndrome is a person who feels like they are in charge of their economic life, that it all depends on me, that it is my talents, my ability, my planning, my health, my good sense that is going to enable me to get ahead in life. And I am the only one in charge. If I don't look out for myself, who is going to look out for me? What I have is mine and I am going to work to do whatever I need to meet the needs of my life. You don't even have to plan to do bad things with the money. You can plan on doing good stuff with the money, but all the time you are sitting there thinking, now how am I in charge and what am I going to do.

When I lived in another place I met one of the most delightful couples I have ever met. He was in full time Christian service. She was a treasurer in a large automobile group. One day some plainclothes policemen walked into her, arrested her on the spot, and walked her out of her office because she had been convicted to embezzling \$100,000. When she went to court, she said it this way. I did not use one dime of that for myself. I gave it to my children. I gave it to my grandchildren. But there is just one thing wrong with that. It wasn't her money to give.

In having a Jacob's syndrome, you don't have to good had asked from them, and they began to use it for themselves. God said you are taking what is mine and using it for yourself. He said that is what is wrong with your spiritual life. Now listen very carefully. When God put this finger on them, he did not say your problem is your prayer life. He did not say your problem is your Bible reading. He did not say you don't to church enough. He said because of Jacob's syndrome where you feel like you are in charge and you are trying to manipulate, and you are trying to use what is rightfully mine, that is now affecting all the other things in your life. You need to understand that the Bible says very clearly that God has made how we handle our economics a test of how well we do spiritually.

In the Book of Luke, Chapter 16, it says it this way, if you will handle small things, you can handle big things. But he says if you can't handle small things, you can't handle big things. And he said I have given you material things to teach you so that I can give you things that are spiritual so you can handle that. So all of us in the room need to understand that God has set into the very pattern of this universe that your spiritual life and your economic life are all tied together. If you have the Jacob syndrome in which

you are withholding from God that which He wants, it is going to affect your spiritual life. Sometimes people come to me and say I know you don't like to get up in the pulpit and talk about money. That is the same thing to me as going to a physician and saying I know you don't like to talk about cancer. But he is saying if I don't cure the cancer, you are not going to get well. Why when you come to church on Sunday morning where the preacher is saying one of the things you need to work on in your life is God taking over your economic life because I understand from the Bible that if you don't do, then your spiritual life will never get well. The reason that so many of us are having problems with our spiritual life is that we are looking for the answer in the wrong place. The problem is many times in our economic life.

Let me remind you what the Bible says. God says that you are taking the tithe that is mine. What is a tithe? A tithe means a tenth. Very early in the Bible it says that we are to bring one tenth of what God gives us back to Him. He gives us everything. Nothing you have before God really belongs to you anyway. Everything you have is a gift from Him. He says part of this gift is I want you to bring one tenth of it back to me. That is the way I am going to carry on all of my ministry in the world. In the 14th Chapter of the Book of Genesis is the first time we ever come across the word. Abraham had a great spiritual victory. The Bible says he brought a tenth to the priest. There are not any commands before Chapter 14th, so it must have been a normal procedure that all of them did, and Abraham came and did it. When you come to the end of the Old Testament, the passage of scripture that was read for you earlier, it talks about the tithe. When you turn to the New Testament, Matthew 23: 23, Jesus talks about the tithe. When you turn to Hebrews Chapter 7, it talks about Jesus being our high priest, and it says Jesus received our prayers and our tithes. So we understand from the Bible that the way in which God asks us to share in his work is that we give back to Him a tithe. That is the reason in his church we try to operate on what God's word says. That is the reason we don't sell raffle tickets and we don't sell lottery tickets, and we don't have spaghetti suppers, and we don't have yard sales, and we don't have a stewardship committee that sits around for months and says when can we plan another spaghetti supper and how can we raise more money. We simply do it this way. The Bible says that this is the way God wants his kingdom to be financed, and so what we do, we teach it, and at the close of the service we just pass a plate by and the people put the money in. We simply say to you if it is not worth supporting, then we don't want to get into cheapening it

and say we will get some money out of you by getting you some spaghetti supper to try to get some more money. We believe that when you come that you do in great gratitude to God for all that He has given us and in obedience to Him, we just gladly give our tithes back to him.

There is just one other person in this world who can sign my check. She can put her name on the bottom of my check and spend every dime I've got. It won't take long. But she can spend every dime I've got. Why do I give her access to all of my economics? Because I love her. Why have I entered into a partnership with God in all of my economic life? Because I love Him. It is hard for me to let my wife sign a check. Of course, not. Is it hard for me when the plate comes in front of me to say, Lord, here I want to give to you. Of course, not! It gives me great joy. And God says that's the way in which I carry on. Now He said, if you do that you will also bring offerings to me. An offering is above the tithe. Many individuals have extra money that they want to give for a specific thing. In our congregation we take in hundreds of thousands of dollars every year because people say I want to give to this, and I want to give to that. We have some men, as you know, today who are in the country of Slovakia doing their work. You need to be reminded those men paid their own way. They say this is a joy. I have some extra money. This is what I want to do. I want to invest if in God's work. People all in our congregation do that on a regular basis. It is something that they want to do and accomplish it in that way. Now we don't have to wonder what would happen in our congregation if every one of our families did how God has said to carry on his work. You are aware that the budget of this church is about \$2,000,000. We understand just general census statistics that if all of the members of this congregation simply did what God told us to do that we would probably take in twice that much. Now I want to ask you a question. Wouldn't it be a wonderful problem for the Stewardship Committee to have to meet every month and say you know, we have an extra \$100,000 this month. What are we going to do for the cause of Christ? You need to be aware that while you sit there and say well \$2,000,000--that's a lot of money. You need to understand but if all of us whom God has sent to just be members of this congregation, if all of us just did what God wants us to do, we would have a budget of \$4,000,000. I can build a church in Mozambique for \$5,000. I could build more churches in Africa than you can find people to put in them. Just think what would happen! If you and I came to say this is what God teaches. I

am going to enter a partnership with God. I am going to be cured of my Jacob syndrome. I tell you a revival would break out in this congregation.

Now let me ask you a question. Why does God do that? It sounds kind of hard. Why would God do that? One reason he would do it is because God is in the business--not of raising money--but of raising people. God wants us to become like Him. The passage of scripture all of you know "For God so loved the world, He "...did what? He gave. God is the great giver. There is not anybody in heaven sitting over there saying you know, this fellow is going to give away the whole store. There is not anyone in heaven sitting over here saying God, you are eternal. I mean if you keep giving it all away in the year 2000, you are not going to have anything left for the year 3000. Everybody in heaven is sitting there saying give, give, give! What's our problem? Get, get, get! So God says I want you to learn that it is lots more joy in giving than in receiving.

One of the members of my family said the other day, Christmas is coming. We got a Dad problem again. You know what the Dad problem is. Dad, what do you want? I don't know. I've got about everything I need. You know what my joy at Christmas is? Watching my kids and grandkids open their gifts. After a while they turn to me and say all right, Dad, open one of your gifts. Why? It is a lots more fun. It is a lot more fun in giving. He wants to help us to become like Him.

Second thing, he wants us to understand that we are in partnership with Him. You remember that passage of scripture in Romans 10, which says it this way. "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Wonderful. But then it goes on to say it this way. "But how can they hear if they have not heard. How can they hear without a preacher?" There are a lot of folks who are hungry. Where are they going to get the food? From you. There are a lot of folks who are sick. How are they going to get well? From you. There are a lot of people who are lost. How are they going to learn about Jesus? From you. God doesn't sit in heaven and do all of it. He gives it to us, and he puts it in our heart, and we are the ones who are blessed, and we are the ones who go out and do it. The greatest understanding of life I ever had is when I recognized as a Christian, I am joining God to try to change the world of hurt and sin in which I live.

In the Bible in this passage of scripture it says: "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse." Let me tell you my own interpretation, and if you want to disagree with me, you can as wrong on this as you are in some other things. I believe in storehouse tithing. You say, what does that mean? That

means is this: I give my tithe to my local church. Now I give offerings to lots of different things, but my tithe comes to this church. I find it interesting that every significant Christian ministry in America always says, Billy Graham, all the way through, give your tithe to your church. If you want to give us an offering, give it after you have given to the church. Why do I believe that? Well, first God said it, and why does God say it? I think he said it because that the primary instrument of carrying out the kingdom of God is the local church. If we don't take care of this, you can get all the Billy Graham's in the world. You are not going to be able to carry on the work of the church.

The second thing you need to be aware is one reason I believe it is because the local church along with people like Billy Graham are the ones who have a built in system to make sure the money is used well. If a person comes on television and says send me your gifts. How do you know how many people are sending him gifts? Who is in charge of making sure that money is being used well? We've got twelve of the most astute people in our congregation who every month sit down and say is the money being used well? Now you have people like Billy Graham who have a national system. They will tell you how the money is being used. Not everybody has that. I believe that you ought to bring your tithe to the local church because I think if we don't win America through the local church, we are not going to do it through any other means. Listen to what God says. God says if you don't do this, you are taking from me. That's mine, and you are taking it and using it for yourself. So you rob me, and you rob yourself, and you rob others.

Listen to the way he closed. He said I want you to put me to a test. To my knowledge it is the only time in the Bible ever said that, the only time He said put me to a test. This is what He said. You enter into an economic partnership with me. You do your part, and I'll do my part. Your part is acknowledge that all that you have is a gift from me, and you come and give the tenth to me. What I will do. I will bless you and take care of you, and I will meet all of your needs. I don't know about you, but I think that is a pretty good partnership.

I earned my first paycheck when I was 12 years old. I went in and gave it to my Dad. My Dad said here is the money, cashed it for me, and put it in his bank account until I was able to get one for myself. Then he said this is the money. What are you going to do with it? I said what do you mean what am I going to do with it? He said I know you are going to spend it. He said are you planning to give any of it to God? To my

knowledge the first time I ever had money I could call my own, somebody was there asking me am I going to give that which belongs to God. I want to share a testimony with you, that is, from the age 12 until this year I have tried to enter that economic partnership with God, and I want to say to you God has fulfilled his promise to this life and to our family. He has met every need that I have. I have given it, and I have to confess to you I never miss it, and that He has met all of the needs of my life, and I believe He will meet all of my needs until I go personally to see Him. I have no hesitation at all from my own personal experience. I have no hesitation at all on the authority of God's word to ask you to enter into a partnership with Him and to believe that God will meet the needs of your life. I know what some of you are saying. You don't know my situation. You don't know my bills. You don't know what I have. I just say to you. Yes, I don't know that, but I tell you what I do know. I do know a God who keeps His word, and God will keep His word in your life, and God will meet whatever needs that you have. God will bless you if you will continue to do it.

Let me read for you a passage of scripture, and with this I am going to close. Listen to this from the Book of Second Corinthians, Chapter 9:

*God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having everything you need, you will be able to do good work. You will be made rich in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.*

I don't know any clearer way you can say it. If you will say God, I will give. God says I will make it possible for you to live up to your commitments. And He said people that you never meet will give thanks to God for you. I sat in my daughter's backyard in Africa this summer, and handed a preacher, who was as old as I was, some reading glasses that some of you bought, and I took them to Africa and I gave them to him. You will never see that man, but I can tell you those cloudy eyes had tears in them because he said tell the people in your congregation thank you for the set of glasses. For the first time now I can go back home and read my Bible. When that offering plate comes back in a moment it is going to be given to people you will never see. But I'll tell you what is going to happen. One day when you get to heaven somebody is going to come up to you. That's the reason eternity has to be so long. They will come up to you and shake your hand, and they are going to say you didn't know that putting that \$100



in the offering plate helped to change and transform my life, but God has revealed it to me, and I want to say thanks.

This is my challenge to you based on God's word. I would ask you to try for 90 days. If you prove God wrong, then stop. If you find God faithful, you will find a lifetime of joy and privilege that you never dreamed possible. I don't have any hesitation to tell you what I think you are going to find. If you ever get started, you will never want to stop. If you are here this morning and say what's wrong with my spiritual life? Well, our passage of scripture says today maybe what is wrong is your economic life. If you can begin to get that right, then everything else will begin to work out.