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Presentation Transcript
Tithing
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The Bible is a unique book. There are also other books that set out other religions – the Koran, for example – but the Bible stands apart. In the Bible, there are quotes from a Being who claims to be God. No other religious book contains that kind of presentation. Further, God, in the Bible, issues certain challenges – challenges that “in your face,” actually. “If you don’t think I exist, then do this, and see what happens.” We’re going to read one of those challenges today. In it, God will tell us to *do* something, then He predicts the results. And if we do as He tells us to do, and the results come out as specified, then we have no leg to stand on. He’s proven Himself. Some people may not want to know that, so they wouldn’t take the challenge. And some may not be willing to do what He orders us to do – even some Christians. But that’s okay. We all get to choose and to reap the consequences of our choices, whether good or bad.

What is the challenge? Well, let’s look at it in Malachi 3:10. It says:

Malachi 3:10 – *“Bring the full tithe 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.”*

The word *tithe* there, that’s an old English word. It means *tenth* – ten percent. All we have to do to know that there is a God is give Him ten percent – not of everything we have, but of all that we make. Unlike the federal government, God is not trying to take away our children’s inheritance from us – just ten percent of what we make in any given year.

And we might say, “I can’t afford that.” Well, I couldn’t either. But I think after doing it for nearly fifty years, that when I was thinking that way, I was missing the point. It’s not just what *we* do. It’s about what *God* will do for us. Because we’re doing what He tells us to do, there’s going to be money to meet every need and then some. How do I know that for

sure? Well, like I said, I took up the challenge forty-nine years ago. I and my family have never wanted for anything we've needed since then.

Right after I read this scripture for the first time, I was facing a financial problem. I had just been accepted to college, but I needed money to pay for it. Of all the places I applied for work, the job that was the most fun and the best paying opened up for me. I worked that job for two summers. And then, when I got to college, a job opened up there. I graduated with no college bill and money in the bank. Think about that! Since then, I've never been unemployed, except by my own choice. And now I get to do work that I love to do and all my financial needs have been met so far. I'm not meaning to boast – just to say that I took the challenge and, consequently, know that He's there like He says He is.

By the way, I don't want to imply that tithing is all a person has to do to become wealthy. I'm not a wealthy person. And I think that's, in part, because I don't seem to possess the skills necessary to be wealthy. But God does not suspend His universal laws of finance if we tithe. And tithing is just one of those laws. But He does promise to take care of us, so that we won't have any needs.

What other financial principles might there be? Well, get rid of that “something for nothing” mentality – to coast off the work of others – parents, the government, fellow employees. To be willing to work hard over time, to attain the ability to assess and take reasonable risk, to organize and focus resources toward goals, vision for what kind of work we're capable of doing, and many more, and all part of being wealthy. Nevertheless, if you tithe, God will take care of you.

What is tithing exactly? Should we do it today? Well, Jesus chided the Pharisees because they were self-righteous about tithing. They thought tithing made them good. That's wrong. Notice the context of the verse we just read back in Malachi. We read 3:10. We're now going to look at 3:8:

Malachi 3:8 – *“Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. And you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In your tithes and offerings – or contributions. God considers the first tenth of everything that we make His, so, if we don't give it back to Him, we're robbing Him. It's not our money. That's how He looks at it. We say, “Well, I look at it the other way.” Well, okay. God looks at it one way, you look at it another. Who's right?*

Notice, too, that it says, “full tithe” or tenth. The issue with the people that He was talking to was not that they weren't giving, they just weren't giving enough. They weren't giving Him back all His money. We're not tithing if we don't give back to God His tenth – His first tenth. We have no right to consider ourselves generous with God, if we're paying back to Him what is His already. There's no reason to get self-righteous about doing the bare minimum we're required to do. We're just doing what we're supposed to do to be like Christ, who died for us. If we want to be generous and show thanks to God for His

blessing, then we give above the ten percent. You did read that, in verse 8, right? – in your tithes and contributions. And what does He say will happen, if we do as He says? Let's read it again.

V-10 – *“Bring the full tithe 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 a blessing for you – a blessing until there is no more need.”* A word here...many people are locked into debt. There's little wiggle worm with all the debt payments they're making. How does one begin to tithe then? It seems like you'd just go further into debt. Well, you have to plan for it. I heard of a plan once, where a person, who owed money on five different credit cards, first eliminated the payment on the one that he owed the least on – the easiest one to pay off. He then took what he had been paying on that card and applied it to the next smallest debt. When that card was paid off, he took the money he was paying on both cards and applied it to the third, and so on, until all his cards were paid off. It didn't really cut in much into what he was using to live on, because he was just using the money from the credit cards that he'd been paying. Somewhere in there is enough money to start making regular contributions to God. Sometimes, before all the cards are free and clear, there is money to pay ten percent, plus pay off the rest of the credit cards. It just goes a little slower – or it *could*. Sometimes God actually bails us out there.

If there is no credit debt, than a person might have to move to a less expensive home or drive a less expensive car. Having done it for forty-nine years, I can say that there *is* a way, if it is important enough. It just depends on what we really want to do. So it gets back to free will.

Let's talk about how God spends His tithe. Let's look first at the Old Testament. There's a point to be made here. The concept of tithing is a general principle, but was followed in different ways in times past. Tithing was first mentioned way back when Abraham gave a tenth of his increase to someone called Melchisedek, who we're told in Genesis was a priest of God during that time. We don't know much about the priesthood of Melchisedek. We learn more about it from the New Testament than we do the Old. We're not told what Melchisedek did with it.

Then, after Melchisedek, came Moses. In the time of Moses, the tenth was spent on the temple service and the Levites who ran it. The tribe of Levi was not given an inheritance with the other eleven tribes. So they lived off the tithe of the rest of the nation. Did they give any of it to the king? No. The king collected his own taxes. It was separate from what was given to the government – no record of any of it going to the government.

How were the poor cared for in those days? The king didn't do it, so what happened? Well, one way was by the people themselves. God told the farmers not to gather up every last grain – to leave some in the field for the poor. If they were not too lazy to get it, it was

theirs for the taking. That was called *gleaning* and the custom was mentioned in the book of Ruth. In fact, it plays heavily on what happens in that book.

The second way the poor were cared for has to do with the seven year land-rest cycle. Every seventh year, no crops were gathered. How did that work? Well, that was called the *land rest* and they didn't harvest a crop that year. That was to rest the land. Was it a matter of faith? Well, not really, because God promised to give them double the sixth year.

Notice something interesting in Deuteronomy 14:28.

Deuteronomy 14:28 - *At the end of every three years, you shall bring out all the tithe of your produce, in the same year, and lay it up within your towns – so the third year and the sixth year in the seven year cycle. And then the seventh year it rested, and then they started over with one, two, and then a third year, where they laid it up. Verse 29:*

V-29 – *And the Levite, because he has no portion or inheritance with you, and the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow, who are within your town, shall come and eat and be filled, that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands that you do.*

So, if people did this, God promised to take care of them. So He used them to take care of the poor and then He took care of them. Every third and sixth year in this cycle, people gave a tenth to the priesthood to take care of the poor they encountered. Now, it's not clear, and there's really a lot of debate about this among commentators, as to whether this tenth was given in addition to the tenth customarily given in the third and sixth years, or whether it was the same tenth, but just distributed differently – some going to the Levites, as usual, and then something else going to the poor. Either way, there are things to be learned from this practice.

Number one – the government didn't take care of the poor; the priesthood did. Two – a relatively small amount from the temple service and priesthood went to the poor. Well, how would I know that? Well, if you divide the two years when the tithes were donated to the poor by the seven years in the cycle, when tithing was done, you get twenty-nine percent – a little less, actually. And, if you figure that the priesthood got a substantial amount of the twenty-eight percent, that doesn't amount to a huge percentage for the poor by any means. Probably, most of the poor gathered enough by gleaning to get by. But have you ever wondered which poor people got that part that was God's to give away – that He used the Levites to administer? Well, they probably knew who was still hungry after gleaning. And who would you think that might be? Well, it would be the disabled, and it would be the widows, and the elderly, and maybe, orphans. So whoever wasn't able to go into the fields and glean for a year's worth of grain, the Levites helped them.

So, in this system, everyone had to pay God His part and everyone had to be generous with the poor. Those that fell through the cracks were taken care of by the Levites. It was a good

system. It worked. And they didn't get ten trillion dollars in debt doing it either. Why not? Because they were giving God His tenth and God promises to bless the whole nation when the whole nation follows His rules. We don't follow those rules, so we suffer the consequences. We're, more or less, on our own financially, as a nation.

Now, let's talk about what happened in the New Testament. We're not told much about how they administered the tithe, but there are a few clues. First, let's go to Matthew 23:23, where Jesus is talking to the scribes and the Pharisees. He says:

Matthew 23:23 – *“Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees – hypocrites! – for you tithe mint, and dill, and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law – justice, and mercy, and faithfulness. These you ought to have done without neglecting the others.”*

So here is Jesus saying that there are more important things than tithing – justice, mercy and faith, for example. And, if tithing isn't as important as these things, why should it be done? God doesn't really need the tenth that we make for Him. He's already rich. He levies His laws on us for *our* benefit – so that He can shower us with blessings. And, according to what He said, it's still one of His rules. There is Jesus, telling the Pharisees that those things should still be done – tithing on even small things. So we know from the scriptures, also, that it is in effect in the church age, it's been in effect in every age in the past, and it's going to be in effect in the Kingdom of God on earth. You can read that in the prophets. So that means that every administration of God on the earth has *always* included tithing in it in some form.

Paul tells us that Jesus is our High Priest now – that He took over from the priesthood of Moses – and that His priesthood is after the order of Melchisedek. It's almost a direct quote. He tells us, too, that His priesthood has expenses. Paul told the local congregations that they should support the ministry. “A laborer was worthy of his hire,” he said. And when he said that, he was quoting Jesus in the New Testament.

So we also see an example where they sold their individual things and pooled them to survive as a group in the New Testament church. And this confuses some people. They think we should be socialists or Communists. But, apparently, this was not a churchwide, regular practice, but something done when times got so hard in a few places that they had to pool what they had so that everyone could survive. And all this, really, is aside from tithing. One doesn't sell his home, for example – like Ananias did in Acts 8 – to pay tithes, or to provide income for the ministry, or to provide a meeting place for a meeting. That was for a special event – a problem they were having. It's pretty disastrous when you have to sell your house to survive financially.

There's also mention of taking care of the poor in the New Testament, but, really, not much emphasis on it. In the New Testament era, the church was out to make disciples and take care of the membership. For the most part, the poor mentioned in the New Testament were poor church members, who were in famine or other duress. If a member of the church saw

someone lying unconscious by the side of the road – perhaps, not a member of the church – maybe, a mugging victim – he was to take care of him and to get help – maybe rent him a room, like Jesus said in the parable of the good Samaritan. And he was to do that out of his pocket rather than his tithe, based on practice across the ages.

So, according to Jesus, tithing remains to be done. That's an implication for today. What are some more? Well, how do we pay our tithes to Him today? Well, we live in a complex world with lots of choices. Two thousand years of church division has made sure of that. Do we give it to an organized church? Do we give it to a goal-specific ministry, like this ministry – LifeResource Ministries, which is a youth advocacy – or to Salvation Army, or to Christian Educational Ministries? Do we give it to the poor? We also know that there is a thing called stewardship. We're somewhat responsible to see that God's money is spent on task. We can't really give God's money to an organization with strings attached, like "I'll donate to you, if you spend it the way I want to spend it," but we can see if they're spending lines up with their stated goals. We also see, sometimes, organizations separating funds for specific purposes. "We're having a fund raiser for the new building for the earthquake relief." That's great! That way people get to work and contribute to the things that they think are important or that line up with their own personal spiritual gifts. That's very satisfying. But those funds, usually, are in addition to the tithes, or contributions, that people give to maintain an organization. Most people realize the job of the church is to make disciples, so they want to see the money spent on that. So we must evaluate the organizations to which we send God's money.

How do we evaluate them? Are they doing God's work with their portion of it? Are they faithful to their mission? What is the mission of the church? Well, to take care of the flock and to make disciples. That's where they should spend most of their money. What about a youth advocacy ministry, like ours? We produce educational materials to strengthen the flock, because we see that strengthening the flock will strengthen the children. And that will stop the hemorrhage of youth flowing out of the church. So, hence, that really is an evangelistic effort. Do we spend the money that God sends us on that? Yes, we do. What about CEM – Christian Educational Ministries? Do they educate Christians about Christianity? Yes, they do – very well. They spend the money on their stated goal. What about the Salvation Army? Do they take care of the poor? That's the goal they've stated. Well, they do it very well. What if you have a burning desire to help children develop a relationship with Jesus Christ, for example? Would you donate all of God's money that He's entrusted to any one of these? Or would you donate some of it and send some to your church, where you attend? If you get anything out of attending your church, you should send some of God's money that way. The laborers who work on your behalf are worthy of some of God's money. What if your church is well-rounded and does all the things God says a church should do? Well, you could send all your money to it in that case. But what if you also listen to Joyce Meyer on TV regularly and get something out of that? It follows that you should support her, too – at least, proportionate to the benefit you receive. She labors, so she's worthy of her hire. What if you spend some time in prison, and became a

Christian there, and are now out free? You would have a soft spot in your heart for prisoners, I would imagine. You could join a church with a strong prison ministry and give some of God's money to it. Or you find a ministry dedicated to evangelizing prisoners and send some of God's money to them.

Jesus said, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Perhaps it would be good if the reverse were also true – where our heart's compassion is, there also is a portion of God's tithe that we've given. I rather suspect that He would like it that way.

So that's a bit about tithing. It's a simple principle of God in effect from the beginning. It's gets a bit complicated because of all the choices available in our complex world, but there shouldn't be anything complicated about our willingness to give to God what is already His. And, if you take up the challenge and pay God what is His, He will make Himself known to you in a way that is completely between you and Him. And there would not be anything complicated about that either.

Well, that's it for now. Check back in two weeks for another presentation. The next one is going to be about another fundamental principle of God – the Sabbath. Until then, check out some of our other videos, audios and transcripts on our Website or our YouTube channel.