



Worship – Part 36
Acts of Worship – Part 24
Worshipping God with Our Treasure – Part 8
GCSP – 02/02/2008

If I had to summarize the first seven sermons I have preached in this series, "Worshipping God with Your Treasure," I would simply say they primarily dealt with having a proper, biblical attitude about money and possessions. There was obviously a lot more detail and, with any series of sermons I preach, a lot of rabbit trails followed, but the primary spotlight has been shining on our attitudes and thoughts and pursuit of money and possessions.

I have hopefully clearly made the point that Jesus made a little less than 2,000 years ago; **you cannot serve both God and mammon**, or money and possessions.

The love of money, the pursuit of money, and the improper use of money is arguably the most prominent sin that derails Christians from experiencing all of the blessings God has in store.

Last week in **Deuteronomy 8:1-14** we discovered the keys to God's blessing through a series of conditions He gave to the children of Israel just prior to their entrance into the Promised Land; the summary of which was: Obedience = unimaginable blessing; disobedience = perishing. The progression of conditions went like this:

v. 1 – *Be careful to do.*

If you want to experience the unimaginable, divine, miraculous, abundant blessing of God, you can. It is within your power to experience all that God has in store for you. All you have to do is to **be careful to do** what He says.

v. 2 – *Remember.*

We must take the time to examine our victories and our failures. We must see God's hand in all of it to ascertain what He was teaching us and how He led us through. Probably the greatest single motivator for us to endure and persevere through the tough times is to **remember** the past times when God brought us through the storms of life. Focusing on God's faithfulness is a tremendous way to get your mind off of the current struggles and afflictions; and it will also help you see the tremendous work God is doing in your life through your trial.

Our trials are the times when we have the golden opportunity to prove that the Lord is our God; it is a time when we can shout, "Yes, Lord, my heart belongs to You and I will keep Your commandments despite the temporary troubles I am experiencing!"

v. 3-4 – *Understand.*

When you reach the point of understanding; when you have been humbled by the Lord; you are then able to look back and see how God was providing for you all along. Your minds are now clear enough to see His provision and His love and His care and His compassion for you. Before you reach that point you are blind to these things. Before you reach that point all you see is the pain and the heartache; you cannot see the hand of God because your focus is much too narrow, like a horse with blinders on.

v. 5 – *Knowledge.*

After understanding comes knowledge. You will **know in your heart** that the Lord disciplines you out of a heart of divine love. You will **know in your heart** that God will do everything it takes to get your life on the right track. You will **know in your heart** that God has pursued you and will pursue you regardless of how low you have been, or how sinful you have been, or how rebellious you have been. God loves you with an everlasting love, and that love will not allow Him to let you go too far in your sin, or to let you run away too far or too long.

v. 6 – *Fear God.*

After understanding and knowledge you will truly fear the Lord. You will **keep His commandments** and you will **walk in His ways**. God's ways will become your ways. God's words will become your words. God's thoughts will become your thoughts. The fear of the Lord will keep you in a constant state of drawing near to Him, and thus He will constantly be drawing near to you. Your relationship with God will be more intimate and vibrant than you could possibly imagine.

v. 7-9 – *Blessing.*

After understanding and knowledge and the fear of the Lord will come unimaginable blessing; and what you have in your mind as blessing does not even compare to what God's idea of blessing is.

v. 10 – *Praise.*

After you experience God's unimaginable blessing you will spontaneously break out in praise and worship to your awesome God! You will not take anything He has given you for granted. Your heart will overflow with thanksgiving. Your praise will not be stifled or restrained. You will dance and lift up your hands and shout to the top of your lungs the magnificence of your God!

v. 11-14 – *Beware.*

We get little tastes of the joy and blessing that God has for us, but unfortunately we settle for the counterfeit. Satan lures us with the counterfeit blessings of the world or he deceives us into believing that we are responsible for the things we have. And before you know it; in a flash you have traded in God for money and possessions. You have perverted God's blessing by making it an idol; making it your god.

Tonight, we are finally going to begin looking at worshipping God with our treasure through the act of giving.

Let's pray.

This sermon will probably come across more as a Bible study lesson than a sermon in the technical sense. There is a lot of information that we will go through to understand what God's Word has to say about the tithe. I won't be challenging you to tithe and I won't be handing out commitment cards and barring the doors until you fill one out. I am simply going to take you on a journey through the Old Testament so you and I can fully understand what the tithe was and to determine if there is any connection with the church today.

One of the basic arguments made for the continuance of tithing in the church today goes back before God gave Moses the various tithes commanded of the children of Israel. Since the Old Testament accounts of Abraham and Jacob giving tithes happened before the Law of Moses, the proponents of tithing say that this is a command of God that transcends the Law; meaning that since it was a practice before the Law it continues still today even though many components of the Law were fulfilled and done away with at the Cross.

That view is very weak and seriously flawed. We also see the Sabbath being kept and animal sacrifices before the Law of Moses, yet these practices are clearly not commanded for the church today.

Before we start looking at Scripture, let me make one other observation from pagan history. Giving a tithe to a deity was a common pagan practice in most ancient cultures. They believed that the number ten was the number of completeness, and thus giving a tenth of their money and possessions to their god or gods was symbolic of them giving completely of themselves. This practice in pagan cultures was common well before Abraham, let alone before Moses.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Genesis 4**.

Genesis 4:1-5

I am not going to delve into why God accepted Abel's offering and rejected Cain's, the point for tonight is simply the fact that they were bringing offerings to the Lord. You could infer that the Lord required animal sacrifice but you cannot infer that this offering was in any way, shape, or form, a tithe. You also cannot infer that the offering was mandated; the biblical evidence leads us to believe that both Cain and Abel were voluntarily giving these offerings.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Genesis 8**.

Genesis 8:13-22

Between chapter 4 and chapter 8, about 2,000 years have elapsed and there is not a single mention of tithing, giving, or sacrificing until Noah comes off the ark. This account with Noah is completely voluntary and without regard to the specific amount of the offering. God did not require Noah to offer any specific amount, nor did He require Noah to offer anything; Noah gave the offering as a means of worshipping God. Noah did not count out how many clean animals he had and separate a tenth for his offering. It was spontaneous and voluntary, and we have no indication that any percentage or formula was used to determine the amount of the offering; and we definitely have no indication that God mandated this offering in any way.

The next significant mention of an offering is found in **Genesis 12**.

Genesis 12:7

Abraham freely responds to the Lord's promise of blessing by giving an offering. If you want to draw an application from this passage, consider this; Abraham's offering to the Lord was based on the promise of blessing, not on a blessing already received. Abraham

did not wait until the Lord gave in order for him to give back. How different it is for most of God's children today – I can't tell you how many times I have heard Christians tell me how much they would give if the Lord allowed them to win the lottery. Statements like that are wrong on so many levels, but in light of this verse it is totally backwards; the giving comes before the blessing.

The first time we see the term tithe in the Bible is in **Genesis 14**.

Genesis 14:17-20

God had just given Abraham a tremendous victory in battle when we are introduced to Melchizedek. Who Melchizedek was and where he came from is not a topic I am prepared to expound upon tonight; so we will just take what Scripture says that he was a king and a priest of El Elyon; God Most High. Spontaneously and joyfully, Abraham gives Melchizedek, the priest of God, a tenth, or a tithe, of all the spoils of war God had blessed him with.

It is important to note that this passage does not imply that Abraham gave a tithe of all he owned or of all of his income, but only a tithe of the spoils of this particular incident. It is also important to note that we never again see an incident where Abraham gives a tithe of anything. We simply cannot read anything else into this account and thus determine that the tithe was instituted here or continues on for us today.

Genesis 28 is the next mention of the tithe and the only other mention of it prior to the Mosaic Law.

Genesis 28:18-22

Jacob vows to give a tithe of everything God blesses him with. We must be very careful to draw the conclusion that this is a practice that we should follow based upon this account. First, Jacob was the most pagan and materialistic of the patriarchs, so it could be that he was simply following the pagan practice of the region, as I mentioned in the introduction. Secondly, the motivation of this vow was to receive blessing from the Lord. Jacob's attitude was off; he was giving to get, not getting to give. Jacob was in essence trying to buy God's blessing; his motive for giving was hardly sincere. Thirdly, and most importantly, God did not command Jacob to give a tithe of all he had or all that he would receive in the future.

That's the end of tithing in the Book of Genesis. There is an account of mandated giving in **Genesis 41**, but that was when Joseph was ruler of Egypt and mandated a 20% tithe of all the people in preparation for the great famine that was coming after seven years of plenty. This mandate had nothing to do with God's law or even God's people.

Mandated tithes are mentioned in the Book of **Leviticus**, but turn with me in your Bibles to **Number 18** for a more detailed look at the first tithe that was commanded of the Israelites.

Numbers 18:21-30

God chose the Levites to be His priests to operate the Tabernacle and later the Temple. The tithe given to Israel was thus a tax to fund this operation. The Levites were not to own land and they were not to pursue other means of employment. Their livelihood and

existence was to be provided for them by those they served. The other eleven tribes of Israel were mandated to give a tithe of everything each year to support the Levites.

It is this context that the prophet Malachi (**3:8**) states that the Israelites were robbing God when they refused to give their tithes and offerings. The Levites were called to be God's special servants for the nation and God's design was for His leaders to be provided for in such a way that they could completely focus on their spiritual service and responsibilities.

But there is more. If you really desire to tithe as Israel did in the Old Testament, then you can't stop at 10%. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Deuteronomy 12**.

Deuteronomy 12:10-11, 17-18

I will not take the time to go through all that God is setting the stage for here, but a second tithe, or a second tenth of the increase of Israel is being set in place for the operation and maintenance of the various festivals and feasts that the Lord was requiring. Passover, the Day of Atonement, the Feast of Booths, etc., were commanded by God and it would take a considerable amount of means to institute, operate, and maintain these festivals.

This second tithe could be considered a tax for the sake of the Jewish national religious worship, and for the promotion of national unity and fellowship.

And there is still more. Turn with me in your Bibles to **Deuteronomy 14**.

Deuteronomy 14:22-29

All three tithes are mentioned or implied in this short passage, the third of which being another tenth that was given every third year. This tithe was in essence a welfare tax for the poor, the stranger, the orphan, and the widow.

When you combine these three tithes you actually had a tax base of 23% for the running and maintaining of Israel's government. Besides these tithes, you also had other regulations and requirements much like we have gasoline taxes and sales taxes today. The Israelite was not allowed to harvest the corners of their fields nor were they allowed to stop and pick up any produce they dropped in the process of harvesting. Every seventh year they were to give the land rest and forfeit an entire year's wages from their land, and there was also an annual temple tax.

When you look at the various tithes based upon what they were for, you will rightfully conclude that they were mandated, they were specific to the nation of Israel, they were taxes, and they amounted to more than 25%, not the 10% so many churches attempt to mandate on their congregations today.

Proponents of tithing today may then point to the fact that Jesus commended the tithe. So before we look at the voluntary offerings in the Old Testament, turn with me in your Bibles to **Matthew 23**.

Matthew 23:23

Jesus says that you should not neglect tithing. That settles it; it's in the New Testament.

What event in the New Testament is the dividing point? Until we reach the Cross, Israel is still living under the Old Testament economy, Old Testament laws, Old Testament sacrificial system, and Old Testament tithing and taxation system. When Jesus commends the tithe, the ceremonial Mosaic Law was still in effect; that didn't change until the Cross.

After the Cross you will not find a single mention of the need or necessity of the tithe. Why? Because the sacrificial system was done away with at the Cross; the need to support a tribe of priests was done away with at the Cross; the need to operate and maintain a Temple was done away with at the Cross; in short, the nation of Israel was in essence done away with, temporarily, at the Cross.

Let me illustrate that last statement. Turn with me to **Luke 13**.

Luke 13:34-35

Israel's apostasy is complete. Because they have rejected Jesus, their long-awaited Messiah, they have been left on their own. **"Behold, your house is left to you desolate."** Even before the Cross, the keeping of the Law no longer held any meaning for unbelieving Israel. God was no longer accepting any of their offerings or sacrifices. The rejection of God's Son in essence ended the nation of Israel for a season; and that season is still going on today.

This season, this temporary abandonment of unbelieving Israel will continue until the Second Coming of our Lord. At that point in time, all Israel will believe and say, **"Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord."** But until then, until Israel acknowledges Jesus as their Messiah, until they repent of the sin of rejecting God, they have been left to themselves.

So the tithe is no longer mandated and no longer valid. I will have more to say on the tithe as it could pertain to the church today in a later sermon, so if you are a tither and have been blessed by God for doing so through the years, hang in there and be sure to hear the whole series. There is more to say and I am not condemning you for tithing, okay?

Let's wrap up tonight with a quick look at voluntary giving in the Old Testament. We will look at just a few instances, starting with **Numbers 18**.

Numbers 18:12

This verse and the verses surrounding introduce the aspect of what most Christians call "first fruits." God set the example of giving your very best. To be pleasing to the Lord in our giving we should give the Lord the first and best of what we earn. When you give from the top like this – from the cream of the crop, so to speak – you are giving what have believing in Him for what you don't have.

Proverbs 3:9-10, says, **"Honor the Lord from your wealth and from the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty and your vats will overflow with new wine."**

That is the essence of voluntary free-will offerings. It is generous, it is by faith, and it is of the very best we have to give.

Turn with me in your Bibles to **Exodus 35**.

Exodus 35:4-5; 21-22; 29; 36:5-7

This is the essence of voluntary, free-will giving. All needs being met and a surplus collected. Let me ask you a question: Have you ever sat in a church service where the pastor got up and restrained you from giving? Have you ever heard from the lips of a pastor, "Stop giving, we can't handle it all!"?

Well, I could take you through many more passages dealing with Old Testament giving and tithing, but I hopefully have made my point. We will begin to look at giving in the New Testament next time.

Let's pray.