



### **"TEST ME IN THIS"**

If like me you bought a lot of DVDS in the mid-2000s, you would have had to sit through this warning:

*You wouldn't steal a car. You wouldn't steal a handbag. You wouldn't steal a television. You wouldn't steal a movie ... Downloading pirated films is stealing. Stealing is against the law. Piracy. It's a crime.*

Irony is, recent studies would suggest that the ad actually encouraged piracy, in that it made it sound like everyone was doing it, and compared it to far more serious crimes, which just led to ridicule. But it does remind us that theft is an all-too familiar part of the world in which we live.

In the passage we're going to look at today, God raises a similar issue for ancient Israel –

And perhaps for us, too.

### **Malachi 3:6-18**

What's the biggest gift you've ever been given ('biggest' being the most costly in money, time, or effort)?

Now, why does it matter? I mean, if the adage "It's the thought that counts" is true, why do we feel so touched when someone gives us something that has obviously cost them a lot?

Because it says, "This is what you mean to me."

What we give to a person is an indication of the value that we place upon them. And the same principle applies to God. According to the *Torah*, the Israelites were to give a tithe, or 10%, of their crops and earnings, to the Temple, as part of their worship. But they'd failed to do it.

Which is why God says, "You have robbed Me. So bring the whole tithe in ..." (vs10). What does that mean?

**1) Worship With Your Money.** Now I know everyone is probably thinking: "Are we still expected to give a tithe to God?" To which my answer is a tentative "Yes." I say 'tentative', because people might interpret that to mean, "10% of your income should come to me, or to MFC." And I'm not saying that. But I do believe that 10% of our income should go to God's Kingdom, whether church or para-church organisation or sponsor child or friend in need (the amounts are between you and God to decide).

But the other reason is because you might assume that 10% is it. But the NT encourages us to see *everything* as belonging to God, making 10% the *least* we should give. You can see it reflected in the songs we sing:

*I - I surrender, all to You, all to You ...*

Imagine if we were to sing, "I - I surrender, 10%, 10% ..." Doesn't quite have the same ring about it, does it?

The words might scan, but the sentiment does not.

**2) Worship With Your Time.** The Israelites were told to honour God in their calendars (Sabbath, festivals, etc). And that can be a challenge. "I've had a busy week, and Sunday's the only lie-in I get ... it's hard work getting the kids out the door – we have to drag them from the TV, kicking and screaming ... there's too much competition for the bathroom, and I'm not going out without a shower!"

I can appreciate all that. But sometimes it's because there are *other* priorities competing for our attention: days out, DIY jobs, sporting events on TV. And the truth is this:

We make time for the things that matter most to us.

So what would giving of our time mean? It might mean spending more time with God (prayer, reading the Bible); with God's people (church, home-group); with those who don't know God – yet (meals, helping out).

Whatever it is, if we want to see results, we need to put the time in.

**3) Worship With Your Skills.** God has given every one of us abilities and talents and skills, both natural and supernatural, to use for Him. Hence the fact that one of the Hebrew words for worship, *avodah*, literally means 'service' (it comes from the word *avod*, meaning 'to work', 'to serve'), and God uses it of His people in vs17-18.

The point being: God has set us free from slavery to sin in order that we can serve Him. Now It's worth noting that these things must be done first-and-foremost to serve God, then His people, with ourselves last on the list. Like

Jesus Himself, who came “not to be served, but to serve.” But even so, service can be a rewarding thing, too.

So how are you serving? What part are you playing? Whether you’re intensely practical or expressly creative, there is a place for you in God’s Kingdom.

To use an acronym: TRIO ‘The Responsibility Is Ours.’

**4) Worship With Your Hearts.** What we’re really talking about here is love, isn’t it? And as we established earlier, what we give to a person is an indication of what that person means to us. How do we know God loves us? He demonstrated it, on the cross, where He paid the price for His “treasured possession” (vs17). How does God know that we love *Him*?

We have to demonstrate it back.

Because if it doesn’t cost us anything, it’s not *worth* anything.

So, if the amount of money, time and effort we commit to God is a reflection of our love for Him, what does it say about our love for Him? You might be thinking, “I don’t see it that way.” But God does. When we stand before Jesus at the end of time, we’re told in Revelation that “the books will be opened.” One is the Book of Life; what are the others? Bank statements? Calendars? Journals? What will Jesus see in them on judgement day?

What will those things say about our relationship with God?

### **Testing, Testing**

That’s what God means by “Bring the whole tithe in.” But He also says, “Test Me in this” (vs10-12). Usually we’re told *not* to test God, but in this one verse, He invites us to do so. Because giving to God is a test in itself – a test of our faith. Perhaps we’re afraid that if we give of our money, we won’t have enough for ourselves. God says, “Test Me in this.” Or if we give of our time, we’ll over-commit and let everyone down. God says, “Test Me in this.” Or if we give of our skills, we’ll mess up or embarrass ourselves in some way. God says, “Test Me in this.”

How then should we respond to this today? The Israelites made up a ‘scroll of remembrance’, for those willing to re-commit themselves to God. We’re not told what they wrote on it – what do you think? “I’m sorry”? “I will”? “I promise”? Maybe just a name. What would *you* write?

To help you figure that out, ask yourself this question:

What do I need to give to God that I’m not giving at this moment? Am I honouring God with my life, or not?