

Church & Money – a worthy portion? (Malachi 3:6-12; 1 Corinthians 16:1-4)

“When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my dear fellow Christians, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

Now about the collection..." (1 Corinthians 15:54-16:1 NIV)

Quite a contrast there in Paul's first letter to the church of God at Corinth. He has been waxing lyrical for some eleven hundred words about resurrection. Firstly the resurrection of Jesus and what that means for us, or rather if Jesus did not rise again from the dead what that would mean for us. He says

“...if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”
(1 Corinthians 15:16-17 NIV)

He then goes on to talk about our resurrection bodies and we reach the climate of the chapter with the words

“Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
(1 Corinthians 5:55 NIV)

And on this high note he then goes on to say

“Now about the collection for God's people....” (1 Corinthians 16:1 NIV)

Now about the money. Paul could not have been British, and certainly not a Christian and British because here he is talking about money. British people do not talk about money and certainly not in church – that is between me and God and is of no-one else's concern.

But it is there and it seems treated with the respect that resurrection is as it comes straight after this wonderful passage on resurrection and what we are to look forward to and what we have now.

Malachi, in the reading we had earlier is certain very direct. Keep a finger in 1 Corinthians 16, but turn to Malachi 3:6, page 962. Malachi was written some four hundred years before was born and it was the last word given to the people of God before God spoke supremely through Jesus Christ, by God coming to earth and living amongst us.

“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

"But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’

"Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

"But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’ "In tithes and offerings.” (Malachi 3:6-8 NIV)

"Will a person rob God? Yet you rob me (Malachi 3:8). Will a person rob God and the Israelites were doing that. God has said that he does not change, he is still as generous and giving as ever and this is seen in the fact that Israel, that Jacob is still there, verse 6

“I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.”
(Malachi 3:6 NIV)

But to be fair, Israel had not changed either, verse 7

“Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you,” says the LORD Almighty.

"But you ask, ‘How are we to return?’” (Malachi 3:7 NIV)

There had been wayward, and they were still wayward and it showed in the area of money as it did in other areas of their lives as can be seen if you read through the book of Malachi.

So this morning we look at the subject of Church & Money – a worthy portion? And we are going to do this by looking at a series of questions.

1. Why Should I Give?

• **It speaks of God**

One reason is given in the Malachi passage. Verse 10

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, "and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.”
(Malachi 3:10-12 NIV)

We will get blessing from God if we are faithful in our money, in our giving to God, in bringing the money into the storehouse. God is generous to us. The way we give speaks of the God we follow

Again Paul writes in his second letter to the church of God in Corinth

“Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work. As it is written:

"He has scattered abroad his gifts to the poor; his righteousness endures for ever."

Now he who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness. 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.

This service that you perform is not only supplying the needs of God’s people but is also overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God. Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else. And in their prayers for you their hearts will go out to you, because of the surpassing grace God has given you. Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!” (2 Corinthians 9:6-15 NIV)

God gives us so much, as Paul said

“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.”
(2 Corinthians 9:11 NIV)

Does your money say that you believe in a generous God, a God so rich but who became poor for us? What God does your giving speak of

- **It is giving thanks**

It is also a way of our expression of thanks to God for all that he has done for us. Again Paul said

“...your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.” (2 Corinthians 9:11 NIV)

We have so much to be thankful for. Our salvation through Jesus. The fact that we have everlasting life because of the resurrection of Jesus. Maybe this is why Paul put together, under God the glorious resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15, followed by

“Now about the collection...”(1 Corinthians 16:1 NIV)

We show our thanks for the fact that

“...we know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, so that we through his poverty might become rich.”
(2 Corinthians 8:9 NIV)

Does your money signify how thankful you are to God? Do you give it grudgingly, not carefully thinking it out first, but scuffle around finding a few pieces of change to drop in the bag? Or are you one of these that puts one's hand over the bag as it comes round but nothing drops from the hand? Having an offering plate is so much more embarrassing if you have to do that procedure!

- **It shows our priority**

It also shows where our heart is, our priorities. You can always tell in people's lives where their heart is by how they portion out their time and also their money. Just last week I heard about a grown up person in her fifties who has spent pounds and pounds and has these things all over her house so that there is little room to sit down – what is it? It is dolls, the ones with the eyes that seem to follow you as you walk round the room. Apparently when her brother visits here, he turns the dolls round so they face the wall of the back of the chair and settee and whatever else they are on. He does this for two reasons

1. He gets uncomfortable having the eyes follow him
2. He knows that it winds his sister up some awful

Where our money is, that demonstrates our priority. For the people in the time of Haggai, another Old Testament prophet who lived not that long before Malachi, Haggai had to tell them concerning the Temple which was in ruins and their own houses

“Is it a time for you yourselves to be living in your panelled houses, while this house remains a ruin?” (Haggai 1:4 NIV)

Or as the Message, a paraphrase of the Bible, puts it

"How is it that it's the 'right time' for you to live in your fine new homes while GOD's Temple is in ruins?" (Haggai 1:4 MSG)

They were showing their priority. Their priority was their own comfort, not God. What does your money say about your priority and where is God is that?

- **It helps others**

The collection spoken of in 1 Corinthians is for the helping other Christians in need. Money given here is for the help of other Christians in need. Some of it goes to Home Mission. Home Mission is the Baptist Family sharing together to enable mission throughout Great Britain. The Baptist family funds and supports mission both locally and nationally. The finance for this comes through Home Mission. All churches in membership of the Baptist Union of Great Britain have the opportunity to be a recipient of the many and varied materials and services provided by Home Mission.

Home Mission helps churches in strategic mission situations, that could not have otherwise afford a minister, to have one. It funds chaplains working in education and industry. It supports evangelists and missionaries. Associations, like the London Baptist Association, here in London, are financed by Home Mission. It also provides materials, help and advice from the national resource at Didcot.

By sharing together, by giving money, we enable the spread of the Gospel and the growth of the Church.

We also give a portion of the church money to BMS World Mission who say of themselves:

As a leading Christian mission organisation we aim to share life in all its fullness with the world's peoples by:

- **ENABLING THEM TO KNOW CHRIST**

- **ALLEVIATING SUFFERING AND INJUSTICE**
- **IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF LIFE**

With people as our primary agent of change - motivating, training, sending and resourcing them.

What does your money say about helping others?

2. How Much Should I Give?

If the first question was ‘Why Should I Give?’ Then the second is ‘How Much Should I Give?’ In Malachi we read the words

““Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, ‘How do we rob you?’

"In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house....” (Malachi 3:8-10 NIV)

In 1 Corinthians we read

“On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside a sum of money in keeping with his income, saving it up, so that when I come no collections will have to be made.” (1 Corinthians 16:2 NIV)

...a sum of money in keeping with his income (1 Corinthians 16:2 NIV). A worthy portion? The tithe is a tenth of one’s income, the New Testament does not specify an amount, a percentage, a portion or proportion but it does talk about

- o a regular sum put aside - **On the first day of every week, each one of you should set aside**
- o a sum in keeping with one’s income - **a sum of money in keeping with his income**
- o something for all and not just the domain of the rich - **a sum of money in keeping with his income**

I heard of a Millionaire who gave a double tithe to his church, not just 10%, but 20% of his income. He then went bankrupt and he was asked if he regretted giving the church such a large portion of his income because he may have been able to have turned the company around if he had only given 10% and not 20% as the money would have lasted longer. His answer was that he had no regrets because God had done so much for him and that he would rather have treasure in heaven, than riches on earth.

What to give these days? There is no compulsion, but many, many Christian still live by the tithing rule, the 10% rule and it seems as if they are quite able to live off the 90% that is left, but we also need to know that all we have is for God, the tithe is just what is given specifically.

Do you think, take time to consider what you are giving? Do you take advantage of the fact that

The taxman, HM Government, has offered to give Ashurst Drive Baptist Church money for nothing! Yes, that’s right – if you are a taxpayer, then the taxman will give more to ADBC – all you need to do is to make sure that the treasurer can trace how much you’ve given.

And it is quite simple

- **NO COVENANT FORMS NEEDED**
- **NO MINIMUM AMOUNT**
- **NO MINIMUM COMMITMENT PERIOD**

See Graham Pumfrett, the treasurer for more details and a Gift Aid form to make this happen.

3. What Do I Give To?

We have had why and how much, now we move on to the where. Where Do I Give To? I know the English is bad, but it fitted in with the other two questions! Malachi talks of the storehouse, the God calls his house

“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house...”

(Malachi 3:10 NIV)

We do not have a storehouse, but we do have a central place of worship, Ashurst Drive Baptist Church. There are those who would say that the tithe should go to the church and Malachi mentions **tithes and offerings** (Malachi 3:8) that it is the offerings that go elsewhere, or for things like the Gift Day which we have on our Anniversary to thank God for his provision to us.

So tithes go to the local church, offerings go to parachurch organisations.

Money and Church, Church and Money, not a subject we really like talking about or hearing about, but something that

- Says a lot about the God we say we follow
- Speaks a lot about how thankful we are to God
- Tells where our priorities are

Without money the task of the church is made very, very difficult in this day and age. Remember that the only money ADBC get is through the giving of its people – we do not get money from an outside source, only from within. With money, the church can plan, can enable mission without being held to ransom by those who might give if they agree with a particular project.

Some fifteen years ago, there was slump in the giving of churches to Home Mission, this led to the unenviable task of having to lay staff off at Didcot, at BUGB. The staff who worked there were not paid a large salary, but even that was too much for the income. That situation has changed, but it would be a shame if that was repeated in church after church because God’s people were withholding money from God.