

How Do You Manage?

Part 3

Redeeming the Rest of What We Have

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Matthew 6 has been our theme in verses 19–21 and verse 24 (NIV).

Let's read this. "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moths and vermin destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Have you heard the story of a very wealthy man who arrives in heaven and is greeted by Saint Peter? As he is being shown around, he sees his gardener receiving a huge mansion. The wealthy man thinks, wow, I can't wait to see what I'm getting. As they walk down the street, St. Peter points to an even bigger mansion. He tells him this one is going to the missionary he knew when he was a young man. The man's anticipation begins to build even more what his mansion will be like. Then they come up to this tiny shack. Peter looks at the man, points to the shack and says, "We've arrived. What do you think?" The man looks at it and asks, "Who belongs here?" St. Peter answered, "This is yours." The man says it can't be. I saw the mansion my gardener received and the one a missionary got, and they were huge. St. Peter looks at the man and says, "This was really a stretch for us. We did all we could with what you sent us."

This is not a true story, but it reminds me of Jesus' teaching. He says to "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Remember, your heart follows the treasure. If we didn't talk about this, remember, we would be ignoring 1 out of every 6 verses in gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.

And in Matthew 6:24 NIV it says, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other." Jesus said this, "You cannot serve both God and money." Some versions translate the word money into mammon. Mammon is used because there is a spiritual component to mammon. There was an Old Testament god called Mammon that was the god of materialism. Jesus didn't say you "must not serve God and mammon." He didn't say, "You shouldn't serve God and mammon." Jesus said you cannot serve God and mammon. It's just not going to work.

So, there must be a redemption of our resources. Of all the things that Jesus could have referenced, he said the spirit of materialism or greed or love of money. Money is not the root of all evil. The love of money is. Therefore, our resources need to be redeemed. How do we make it holy? How do we make our money holy? I'm not talking about holes in your pocket. I'm talking about being holy to God. I want God to be my resource. I want

God to be in my account. I want God to be in everything. I want to honor God and have his hand bless everything I am doing.

Let's look at Malachi 3:6-12 NIV. "I the Lord do not change." Remember that. It is important. This principle does not change. Verse 7 says, "Ever since the time of your ancestors 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 mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?'. In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. 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 there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe,' says the Lord Almighty. 'Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land,' says the Lord Almighty."

How do we redeem our resources? The tithe redeems our resource. This is how what's left after we pay our tithe goes way further than it would go if we had all of it to spend.

When I'm redeeming my resources, God will be my priority. God will be first in my life. I can show you all through scripture how God is first. This message is less about finance and more about first place. It's more about priority with God being first.

When we bring the whole tithe, we bring a full tenth. The word tithe is 1/10th. Exodus 23:19 NKJV says, "The first of the first-fruits of your land you shall bring into the house of the Lord your God."

If I had 10 lemons in a bowl, the first of ten - the best, is the tithe. Malachi said to bring the whole tithe. But some of us don't think we can bring a whole lemon as our tithe because I only have 10. This leads us to break open the lemon and give only half of it. But there is no such thing as half of a tithe. Bring the whole tithe, or in this case, the whole lemon.

But you are probably saying, but tithing was under the law in the Old Testament. And it was. I have a question for you. Is everything that was wrong in the law now right under the new covenant? No. So, is it OK to murder now but not in the Old Testament? No. Is it now OK to commit adultery? No. Those things were wrong under the law and guess what? Those principles still make it wrong.

Now our power to not do things is different than it was then. In the same way, is everything that was right under the law now wrong? No. Honoring God is still right. Honor your parents is still the right thing to do. Have no other gods before Him is still right. The principle of God being first pre-dates the law of Moses, it is in the law, and it is after the law in the new covenant.

In Proverbs 3:9-10 NKJV, it says, "Honor the Lord with your possessions, and with the first fruits of all your increase; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine."

Genesis 14:18–20 NKJV, which was 430 years before the law, says, “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; And blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand. And he gave him a tithe of all.” Abram gave Melchizedek a tithe of all he had.” And this was before the law had been written by Moses.

Genesis 28:22 NKJV says, “And this stone which I have set as a pillar shall be God’s house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.” This was written before the law.

Now let’s jump way forward to the New Testament church from the Apostle Paul’s writing. We will take what we just read as a pattern and background.

1 Corinthians NKJV 6:1–2 says, “Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given orders to the churches of Galatia, so you must do also: On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside, storing up as he may prosper.” The New Living Translation says, “In relation to what you have earned” that there will be no collections when I come. So, we’re going to take from the first day of the week, according to what we have earned. I’m going to store that up and have it ready to give.

Now, Paul does not say 10% here. Paul isn’t saying for everyone to give the same amount. Rather, he is saying we should give a portion of it based on what you have and give that.

Now let’s go back to Exodus 13:1–2 NIV. The Lord said to Moses, “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.” Sixteen times in scripture God lays claim to the first born.

Let’s go way back, 1,500 years before the law came through Moses in Genesis chapter 4: 3–5 NKJV. “And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.” God respected Abel’s offering, but with Cain, he didn’t. One of the factors we see in scripture is that Cain brings some fruit. But Abel brings the first of his flock. The first redeems the rest.

In Romans 11:16 NKJV it says, “For if the first-fruit is holy, the lump is also holy; and if the root is holy, so are the branches.” We see the tithe redeems the rest. The tithe redeems everything else.

Now, what if Jesus put his stamp of approval on tithing? Well, he did. In Matthew 23:23 NIV it says, “Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices – mint, dill, and cumin. But you have neglected the more important matters of the law – justice, mercy, and faithfulness. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former.” This would have been a great time for Christ to fulfill the law which he had no problem doing. He often said, “You have heard it said this, but I say this.” Remember reading that? Jesus said you have heard it said, “Don’t commit adultery. But I say to you, don’t even look at a woman lustfully.” You have heard it said, “Do not

murder. I say don't even be mad at someone." He could have said, "It's not about the tithe, it's just about mercy and faithfulness." But that's not what He said. What he said was, "You should have practiced the latter without neglecting the former." He said you should practice mercy and faithfulness without neglecting the tithe and not neglecting that principle of putting God first.

Here's another question. Why does the first fruit redeem the rest? It's not a financial action that redeems it. It's a faith action that redeems it. By faith, I believe to get better results with 90% after giving the tithe than keeping it all myself. Giving my tithe first takes faith before I pay any other bills. It doesn't take faith to pay it last, seeing I still have the money. But where is the faith in that? Where is the excitement trusting God to do more? That would be trusting mammon or money. But I need my money to have His blessing. God can't be anything but first, just as in the first commandment to have no other gods before Him. This is an attribute of God called preeminence.

Colossians 1:18 NKJV says, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." In all things, God is going to be number one. This is a matter of priority. It's less about money and less about lemons. It's about the priority of God being first. And when God is first in your life, things will work out. And when God is not first, you're going to have a tough time, like nothing is working out.

When I'm redeeming my resource, He will be my priority. And when I'm redeeming my resource, He will also be my provision and protection. As we continue to read Malachi 3, verses 10-12, this is what God says through the prophet. "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 there will not be room enough to store it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the Lord Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed..."

Now, here we are on this road of stewardship, this road of right management of our money, and on this road, there are ditches on either side. There are two ditches and the enemy wants you in either one. On one side, there is the ditch of the gospel of poverty. On the other side is the ditch of the gospel of prosperity. The gospel of poverty says you are not allowed to have anything. Matter of fact, it says, to be poor is virtuous. Matter of fact, to be poor is more virtuous than if you have something. So, you're not allowed to have anything.

This gospel of poverty launched about 150 years after the birth of the church. A church father named Tertullian had some favorable writings about Egyptian Christians who had renounced their claims to all earthly possessions, and they just went out and lived in the caves. Then 1,000 years later, Francis of Assisi goes to a whole new level.

Here's the thing. Did Jesus imply this or say this? Yes, He dealt with the rich young ruler, telling him to go and sell everything he had and come follow Him. But Jesus didn't say that to all the other followers that had money and there were some.

The tax collector, Zacchaeus comes to Christ and tells Him he will give away half of what he has. Jesus didn't ask him to give away the other half. Jesus didn't say you can't have stuff. He said stuff can have you!

There were other wealthy followers, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea. These were wealthy people that would have been expected to give away their wealth to follow Him. Jesus didn't say blessed are the poor. He said blessed are the poor in spirit. He was saying blessed are those who are bankrupt in their sin, and they can't do anything about it. Blessed are they because they will call out to Christ for salvation.

Another verse that gets misquoted is "Money is the root of all evil." No. It says, "The love of money is the root of all evil." Our security can't stem from what we have. Our security must stem from our relationship with Christ.

That's why Paul tells Timothy this advice in 1 Timothy 6:17 NKJV. "Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy." So, God has not called us only to live in poverty. God has also not called us to this idea of a prosperity gospel. These ditches become an error.

The main thing is putting God first in your life. And if He speaks to you to be generous, then do it. But there is no manipulation to unlock some secret key to riches. But you will unlock God's provision and his protection in your life.

Knowing God does bless givers, it frees me from the fear of giving. Walking without protection opens me up to the effects of whatever environment I'm in. But with God's protection, then I know God says the devourer is not going to cause any damage and your resource is redeemed.

This is not about you providing for the church. God did not invent tithing so His church could move forward. God invented tithing so that you could move forward in your faith. Your giving will have a major effect on your life.

If you need to say God has not been first in your life but you want to make Him first, I want to encourage you to do that as we pray.