

# 40 Days of Fitness

A daily devotional by Rev Garry Hardingham

## DAY 38 – The Truth about Tithing

*Will anyone rob God? Yet you are robbing me! But you say, 'How are we robbing you?' In your tithes and offerings! You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me—the whole nation of you! Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.*

Malachi 3:8-10

These are really tough words from Malachi.

But, how and why did it get to this and what part does this play in our lives as Christians?

Many churches and pastors preach that Christians should still tithe at least 10%. If you've ever sat through a sermon on giving you know that to be the case. But is that really the case?

The tithe is a term that was common in the Old Testament. In essence the tithe was less of a gift as we think of it today and more of a tax for the Israelites. God commanded them to give back the first fruits of their income, crops, animals, etc... this was how the nation of Israel was funded. The first tithe is found in Genesis 14:18-20 in which Abraham, the father of Israel, offers a tithe. Later, in the books of law where God lays out how his people should live, much more instruction is given on how the tithe should work. What is really important to remember is that tithing was first and foremost an act of worship commanded by God. But it was also how the whole nation of Israel was funded.

So, what changes in the New Testament?

Well, amazingly, the word *tithe* is not found in the New Testament. That doesn't mean there is no talk about money though. Both Jesus and Paul talk quite a lot about money, but NOT about tithing. For Jesus and Paul, the giving of money moved from being an issue of taxation to an issue of how we understand our relationship with God in terms of the new covenant in and through Jesus Christ.

Really what the New Testament does is raise the bar. Giving in the New Testament isn't a checkbox. This is not the church leadership asking you to bring your last tax return so they can calculate your level of giving, or even the Presbytery requesting how much money your congregation will give to the Combined Presbytery Mission Pool (CPMP) to run the work of the Presbytery and some Synod Services while supporting ministry in remote areas. It requires you and your congregation to examine yourself and see if you are living in light of what Jesus has done.

Many Christians still tithe. Some believe this is what they should give. Maybe it's just an easy rule of thumb in order to organise the budget for the next pay or pension cycle. Some still give the same \$5 they were giving in 1990. What their giving demonstrates is where they place God in their lives. I think that is a half-shot caramel soy latte at a swanky coffee shop where coffee is served in a jam jar or a takeaway pizza on a Friday night is more important to you than what you give to Jesus and His church then you have a much bigger problem than you think.

My guess is that if Jesus was directly asked if you should give a tithe, He might have said this *"You have heard it said that you should give the first fruits of the harvest to God, but I tell you you should give it all."* Now that would set the cat off amongst the pigeons...or the moths inside our wallets.

### PRAYER

Lord,

Why is it that we are more comfortable when we are told just to give 10%?

Why is it that we can only respond to Your complete generosity with some kind of spiritual invoice?

Help us to examine our hearts and seek your Spirit as we respond to You in our giving.

And may we grow a generosity of both heart and head.

In the name of Jesus our Redeemer

Amen