

Morning everyone – great to see you all. For those of you who don't know me, my name is JH, and I have the wonderful privilege of being senior pastor here at Frontline church, and the wonderful privilege of being able to share with you today from God's word & *to help us get into God's word today*, I want to begin by getting us to think about the idea of a TEST. A Test – and you'll notice from the screen that I've called my preach today 'the test'. It's an emotive word, the word TEST, isn't it? It evokes an emotional response in many of us. If you know me, you'll know that for many years I was a school teacher – so I know a thing or two about TESTS – as a teacher I had a love hate relationship with them, because on the one hand a test meant you'd have to do loads of marking – but on the plus side, a test is a really good tool to work out what a pupil had understood, OR to be more precise – what learning hadn't taken place... cos pupils will write the craziest answers in tests...

TESTs reveal what you know or don't know. So for some, the word TEST is a negative word, it takes you back to an anxious time, a time that maybe knocked your confidence, a time and season that made you feel inadequate, a failure.

I remember clearly the 1st time I failed a test – it was my driving test – my twin brother, who was like crazy behind the wheel, he took his test the day before me and passed with flying colours... I FAILED. 3 times. Passed on my 4th as all good drivers do. I just don't think the examiner had the experience to recognise my driving brilliance and unique driving style. Come to think of it, I don't think many folks appreciate my driving style... BUT, you know, at the time, it really knocked my confidence – I'd been so used to passing every tests I'd taken. So the idea of a TEST can be negative.

But for many folks, myself included, as you grow older, the idea of a TEST can become more of a positive concept. You begin to want to TEST yourself. PUSH yourself. Particularly if like me you're a competitive person, you want to TEST your limits... so people start challenges like a 10K run, or a marathon, or maybe they set up their own business... to see if they've really got what it takes – because that's what TESTS do, they PROVE, they EXPOSE something hidden... do I have the strength, or the knowledge, or skills – I don't really know till you put it to the TEST.

Now there is a test that we get every time we get paid... And the TEST is this... Who are you going to thank for that money? Who are you going to acknowledge for that pay cheque, or pension, or income? Who are you going to worship for it?

And here's the thing... Your answer to the test is based on what you **do** with the first 10% of that income. Being thankful for our income isn't about what we say... it isn't about our words... it's about what we do. Do we keep the money to ourselves – and distribute it as we see fit? Or do we give 10% of it back to the LORD, as a way of thanking him for all his provision in our lives? AND OF COURSE, we call this 10% that we give back to God a TITHE.

So today I want to teach on TITHING, and I want to explore the concept of a tithe as TEST, as something that reveals the hidden state of our hearts. I'm not embarrassed to be talking about money, I'm not apologetic talking about money - Jesus talked A LOT about money, and my goal in life is to be like Jesus. So it's actually a real JOY for me today to teach on TITHING – this is part of our blessed life series – the word blessed is such a rich word – such a big word – it means happy, joyful, content, lacking nothing, complete – AND THAT's what I want for your life... I want you to live the blessed life... so before you switch off – cos they're talking about money again, NO we're not primarily talking about money in this series... we're talking about living the blessed life... but what we do with our money, how we respond to the TEST... will determine the level of blessing we experience in life. Let's be clear on that... What I'm expecting today, with the exception of guests and visitors is two responses. The first response for those of you who tithe I am praying that you will be encouraged, you will be reminded of the promises of God and the faithfulness of God, I pray you will be encouraged. For those of you who are not quite there yet, perhaps you are working towards it, perhaps it's a challenge for you. I pray that you will be challenged today, because I think that is a good response to God's word, not condemned, that's not from the Holy Spirit, but a challenge to bring our lives into alignment with his word. Truth without a revelation that comes from the Holy Spirit will lead you into legalistic duty and obligation. There is no joy in that. So I pray today that there would be a revelation that comes into each and every heart of the goodness and faithfulness of God and the truth of his word.

That said, let's turn to our key text for today. **Malachi 3.6-12:**

Now before we read this passage I just want to share with you 2 key, helpful principles in reading scripture (Mon-fri 9.15, staff devotions, everyone reads the Moravian texts, always remind staff and visitors of these 2 key questions, especially if it's a tricky passage). FIRST principle is this - **1st Question we always ask of scripture?** What does it teach us about GOD? Bible not about me - about him... What does the

text say about GOD? **SECOND Read it in context**, be aware of what's happening around the verse or word you're looking at.

Malachi 3: 6-12

"I the Lord do not change. So you, the descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed. **7** 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?' **8** "Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings. **9** You are under a curse—your whole nation—because you are robbing me. **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 there will not be room enough to store it. **11** 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. **12** "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.

SO what does this passage teach us about God? It teaches us, among other things, that God is faithful in sustain us... because of his mercy and grace we are not consumed, we don't get what we deserve... it teaches us that God rewards obedience... that he blesses those who follow his decrees... that he's a generous God... it teaches us that everything we have comes from him, and that when we hold back our tithe, we're robbing him of what's rightfully his... **And it teaches us** that God does not change... v.6: "I am the LORD, I do not change" ... We call this immutability... the idea that God is the same yest/today/forever – that God stays the same...

Now what is the context for God declaring of himself that he does not change, his immutability? Remember, we've got to read a verse in context? God says "I do not change" in the context of challenging his people on tithing. God is reminding a bunch of people who'd forgot to tithe, he's reminding them about his nature. Who he is. That he does not change.

Some people think that God's mind on tithing has changed. It has not. And I've never met a person soaked in the scriptures who would say otherwise. And YES we are under GRACE – we cannot earn salvation, for us as NT believers, TITHING has nothing to do with saving grace and salvation... we're not talking about good deeds to get you into heaven... I'm talking about growing in fruitfulness and holiness and intimacy and X-likeness through obedience. SO, in the same way we might say... well I'm saved by grace, but I still follow the commandment "Do not kill"... or I'm saved by grace, but I still observe SABBATH rest... we say, I'm saved by grace... but I respond in obedience and gratitude to God with my tithe.

And this passage teaches us that in the same way there are overall consequences for breaking an OT command... if you murder you'll end up in prison, if you don't observe SABBATH you'll end up weary and burnt out – in the same way, there are consequences when we tithe and when we don't tithe... and remember when we read this passage, it's God who speaking – it's the God who loves you and wants to bless you, he is a generous God and a good father - it's not the accuser speaking – it's not the devil who wants to rob you of your blessing... – it's the LORD. And He says... "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, and **test me in this**, says the LORD of hosts and see if I will not pour out my blessings on you.... Our father says, if you don't bring the tithe, you're robbing from me... you're stealing from m God gives us 100%, all that we have is from him and asks we return 10% - we set aside the first part, the tithe, as sanctified, holy, set apart, belonging to God. It's his. So if you keep the tithe, you are stealing it, scripture teaches us this.

So, tithing is a test. God is testing our hearts. And interestingly, that is what the number 10 represents in scripture... a test, don't know if you know that?

In Numerology 7 represents the holy, 6 imperfection, 12 represents authority and completeness

And 10 represents the test... so here's a quick quiz for you... ready...

1. How many plagues were there in Egypt sent to test the Pharaoh?
2. How many commandments are there in Exodus? 10.
3. How many times did God test Israel in the wilderness? 10.
4. How many times were Jacob's wages changed as a test of his commitment?
5. How many days was Daniel tested for? 10.
6. How many virgins were tested in Matthew 25? 10.
7. How many days of testing in the book of Revelation? 10.
8. How much does God ask of us, when he asks us to tithe? 10%

Tithing is a test – but it is also a 2-way test. God invites us to test Him in this too. Which is pretty amazing really, if you think about it... God says by tithing we will really reveal his true nature... That's what a test does, doesn't it.

We're testing him to see if he will keep his word. Testing him to see if he will deliver. To see if he really is faithful and trustworthy, if he really is the generous God who longs to bless his children... you see if you don't tithe, you'll never really personal discover this to be true. You'll continue to doubt the goodness and faithfulness of God if you don't tithe and put it to the test. Tithing is a two way test.

So that was my 1st point by the way, tithing is a TEST. And point 2 is this... **Tithing is biblical.**

People say... well tithing isn't part of the law... correct... it pre-dates the Law! Melchizedek, King of Salem, was given a tithe by Abraham some 500 years before the law! You can read about it in Gen 14... This mysterious character Mel appears... he's called the king of salem, the king of PEACE... he's described in Hebrews as without genealogy, without father or mother, and he comes to Abe bearing bread and wine...

Well, I wonder who that could be, the king of peace, without human father or mother, bearing bread and wine... it's Jesus... we call this a Christophany – Christ appearing in the OT, Melchizedek, the man Jacob wrestled with, the commander of the Lords armies that appeared to Joshua, the 4th man that stood Shad, Mesh, Ab in the fiery furnace – Melchizedek is Jesus appearing in the old testament, *and Abraham, it says, gave Melchizedek a 10th / a tithe of everything he had...*

Later in Genesis 28.22 (some 400 years before the Law): Jacob sets up an altar, a place of worship and says these words... “This stone will be the *house of God*, and from all that you give me I will give a tenth to you!” This is Jacob talking to God.

So even Jacob understood that it is to the House of God that we give our tithes.

We see this principle of tithing to the house of God consistently throughout scripture. Deuteronomy 26.1-2: “It must be that when you come into the land... you shall take from the first of the produce of the land... go to the *place* where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide.” It's talking the tithe to the temple.

Deuteronomy 26.13-15: “I have removed from my house the sacred portion and have given it to the Levite, the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, **according to all you commanded.** [*how did he give to all those different people? He gave to the House of God. When He did he was giving to the Levite, the widow, the orphan etc.*]

Some Christians say, well I give my tithe to other charities, not to the church, I give some to the church, some to charities, some to overseas missions... well, great, its good to give to those things... but it's not a tithe if it's not given into the house of God to be then distributed. Part of what makes a tithe a tithe is that it is given to God, through the church.

Just as an aside, my father in law, good godly man, use to always say of tithing, if you can't trust your church with your tithe, find another church. Now I don't want to offend you, and I'm not saying if you don't tithe you can't worship here – NOT AT ALL, not in the slightest... but what I am saying is this... if you don't *trust* the leadership to use your 10% as they believe is right... then you probably need to find a church and leadership team that you can trust. We're not perfect as a leadership team. But I do believe we are good stewards of your tithes. A biblical tithe is 10% entrusted to the house of God to be distributed. Amen?

Tithing is biblical. Now, if you're a switch on biblical scholar, you're probably thinking... ok John, so you're teaching on tithing... but it's all Old Testament, what about Jesus and New Testament? Good Question.

Well, let me ask you this Question, if Jesus Himself said "you ought to tithe", in the New Testament would you tithe? Well, turn with me in your bibles to **Matthew 23.23– and I've got to say, when I 1st saw this a number of years ago it blew me away...** "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 practised the latter, **without neglecting the former.**"

What is the former? The tithe. What is Jesus saying? He's saying you ought to do both justice and tithing! Jesus affirms the tithe.

So tithing is a test, tithing is biblical, and finally, Tithing is a blessing.

This is why we go on about it so much.... Because we want each and every person to personally prove God to be faithful and bless them as they give in obedience. I can say that with 100% confidence cos I've always tithed, from my 1st pay check at 16 years old – and God has always been faithful. Not saying we've never had financial difficulties, but God has always brought us through at the right time. Just as an example about a month ago we were having financial difficulties and we got a cheque though the post, completely unexpected of £840, a huge answer to prayer. It was a refund from being delayed at an airport for seven hours two years ago. God knows exactly when the right time is.

And that's why we often say as a church that I personally, you personally as an individual need to give, need to tithe MORE than the church needs your money, it's

for your own benefit. God is quite clear about tithing. If you tithe – you will be blessed. In the widest sense not just money. Your marriage will be blessed, your children will be blessed, and your work will prosper. The LORD will rebuke the devourer from your life. You'll come under divine protection. Tithing is about what we receive as much as it is about what we give.

Let me share with you just one more example of this happening in scripture...

2 Chronicles 31.4-10: “⁴ Also he commanded the people who lived in Jerusalem to give the portion due to the priests and the Levites (10% the tithe), that they might devote themselves to the law of the LORD. ⁵ As soon as the order spread, the sons of Israel provided in abundance the first fruits of grain, new wine, oil, honey and of all the produce of the field; and they brought in abundantly the tithe of all. ⁶ The sons of Israel and Judah who lived in the cities of Judah also brought in the tithe of oxen and sheep, and the tithe of sacred gifts which were consecrated to the LORD their God, and placed *them* in heaps. ⁷ In the third month they began to make the heaps, and finished *them* by the seventh month. ⁸ When Hezekiah and the rulers came and saw the heaps, they blessed the LORD and His people Israel. ⁹ Then Hezekiah questioned the priests and the Levites concerning the heaps. ¹⁰ Azariah the chief priest of the house of Zadok said to him, “Since the contributions began to be brought into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat with plenty left over, for the LORD has blessed His people, and this great quantity is left over.”

Now I really want you to get what's happening here... I really want you to see the context... cos this passage is set during a time of severe hardship for the nation of Israel. This event is set in the middle of an economic downturn. The people had stopped tithing. I want you to know that that is counterproductive, the worst thing you can do. The best thing is to tithe, to give because that's how the kingdom works. And what happens is this, as they begin to bring their tithes once again to the Lord, it's like the whole economy gets kick-started – they give of their 10% and its says Since the contributions began to be brought into the house of the LORD, we have had enough to eat with plenty left over, for the LORD has blessed His people, and there's even these heaps of stuff left over everywhere, mounds of grain and oil, wine and honey... an abundance

Their obedience led them into abundance. There's a line you could tweet, cos I know some of you love the one-liners for Facebook. Obedience leads to abundance. It's just how God has made things to be. It means that in the same way that Israel's obedience led to abundance... the LORD will pour out His blessing on us, when we do this properly and faithfully!

Band up. Just going to conclude... You know, I hope you can hear my heart in all of this. My longing in all of this is not that the church may increase its income. My longing is that each and every person might experience the faithfulness and blessing and favour of God through tithing. That's my heart, and I know it's always been Dave and Nic's heart in teaching on tithing.

Many of you do tithe, this is a generous church and I want to thank you again for all that you give. We reckon that something like 25% of folks at frontline tithe. We have an annual income through giving of £500,000, and 84% of that is standing orders. AMAZING and if you're one of those people, I just want to say thank you. Thankyou. I hope you've been encouraged as you've heard me speak today, I hope you've been reminded of the promises of God. And I pray that you would know and experience a fresh wave of the blessing and favour of God in your life, in your families, in your finances. I pray that you would experience a fresh sense of joy as we partner together in the kingdom, a fresh revelation of the impact your giving has made, in this city, and in the nations. The hearts and lives of many, many people transformed through your generosity.

THANKS

But perhaps tithing is something you haven't done, or something you've stopped doing. Perhaps you've believed the lie, the deception of the enemy that whispers into our ear... "you can't afford to tithe" – it's such a subtle deception, but it will rob you of blessing... cos the truth is this...

You will never be able to afford to tithe until you tithe.

because it's only when you start to tithe that the LORD releases the floodgates of heaven and pours out so much blessing on you that it overflows in generosity into the lives of others.

Obedience leads to abundance. That's the truth. It's our testimony and our experience.