

98-11-01c

We're back now from our break and we're resuming our brief look at the concept of tithing since it is introduced for us in the story of Abram when he meets Melchizedek. Melchizedek, who is a priest of the Most High God, comes out with bread and wine, blesses Abram, and says blessed be Abram of God Most High, El Elyon, 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.

So this idea of rendering ten percent, what exactly is it? So we've gone to the passage in Numbers 18 where tithing is a part of the Mosaic law and it is clearly for the support of the priests since they don't grow crops, they don't manage herds and so forth, they don't have an inheritance in the land, the Lord is their portion. God, to whom the tithe is rendered, gives that to the priests for their sustenance. And we have seen in Deuteronomy 26 where we left off that this is also a means of providing for the stranger, the fatherless and the widow.

There were several provisions in the law of Moses including the idea of not cleaning out every corner of your field. When you reap your grain you leave some of the grain standing in the corners and this would be gleaned by the poor and the widows and so forth. This of course is how Ruth ends up hooking up with Boaz going out to glean when she comes back from Moab and she eventually becomes the grandmother, great grandmother of King David.

But there is a principle here of provision of various sorts because the tithe meal was a celebration. It was to express a heart of rejoicing at the goodness of God, the prosperity and the bounty that he had bestowed on them as individuals in the nation. If you trace this out, there is the idea of celebration involved here.

There is provision in the law so that if you are too far from the place of worship to be able to celebrate the tithe, this is the part of Leviticus 27, or Numbers 18 rather that we didn't read all the way to the end, but it talks about once they are in the land, if they are too far from the place of worship to actually render this, then they are to take their tithe and purchase the things necessary for a celebration meal and then eat that meal of celebration before the Lord. So the celebration and the rejoicing are the true element of the tithe. The principle of the tithe is rejoicing before the Lord.

It has a material aspect, but the material gets transferred to the priest for their support. It gets transferred to the needy for their support. But the primary principle in tithing is rejoicing before the Lord and acknowledging him as the possessor of heaven and earth, as the originator of all good things.

Every good thing cometh down from above in the Father of lights. And the tithe was an acknowledgment, it was a formal acknowledgment, a regulation prescribing this

acknowledgment in Israel. Like most things that are part of that prescription or that set of regulations, it has an analogy or the principle is the same in our age, but the implementation of the principle is different.

There was a principle of sacrifice of animals in the Old Testament law of Moses. We don't sacrifice animals today. What is our sacrifice? You go to passages like Romans 12, 1 and 2 where you present yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.

Our reasonable service is in the spiritual realm. If the principle here is rejoicing before the Lord and acknowledging him first and foremost, that's something that we can do. We can do that with our time.

We can do that with our meditation, our thought life. If the principle is support for those who render service to God, who are the teachers and the worship leaders in Israel, that's something we can do. It's a shame that we keep wanting to go back to the literal all the time.

We say, they literally gave 10%, we should literally give 10%. They gave money and goods, we should give money and goods. We are operating at a higher level of responsibility in this age.

God doesn't give any regulations about tithing. There's no mention. Paul in all of his letters to the churches and all of his letters to the pastors never mentions tithing because the principle is what we express.

He does mention rejoicing before the Lord. He does mention looking out for the widows and orphans and those who are in need, putting the interests and the needs of others ahead of yourself. That is what was regulated by the offerings and by the tithes in the Old Testament.

It is regulated by the spirit of grace and by the fruit of the spirit that we should be bearing in this age. It is a backward step to try to impose a regulation on ourselves and especially on others and saying, well, I am going to tithe 10% or 20% or 30% because that's what's in the law of Moses. It's far more important to observe the principle.

The Israelites paid their tithes and missed the point. Turn with me to Matthew chapter 23. We don't want to miss the point the way Israel did.

Chapter 23 of Matthew, Jesus pronounces woe upon the scribes and Pharisees, the hypocrites in Israel. Seven woes. Seven times He pronounces disaster on their heads.

He calls them fools and blind and blind. Look at verse 23, Matthew 23, 23. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for you pay a tithe of mint and anise and cumin and have neglected the weightier matters of the law.

Why does it mention these three things? These are spices that are little powders that you use to season your food. It's a very small item, but they were so careful to take the law literally and to bring it down to the microscopic level. You could imagine going into the kitchen to your spice cabinet, if you have a spice cabinet, and open it up and look in there and you've got the little short cans of cinnamon and so forth.

Well, you could imagine going in there and saying, well, you know, a tenth of everything I have belongs to the Lord. So, you pour the cinnamon out onto the countertop there and get a knife and figure out about ten percent of it and scrape it off into a little jar or something and go take it down and give it to the church. Well, this is how literal and how microscopically accurate the scribes and Pharisees were trying to be in keeping the law.

But Jesus says, you're tithing right down to the finest and smallest quantities in your household and you've neglected the important matters of the law. And then He says what they are. This is the greatest part of this whole section here is Jesus tells us what are the weighty matters of the law.

Have you ever wondered, well, what was really the point of the law? What was Israel supposed to get out of the law? It wasn't a means of righteousness. It wasn't a means of salvation. What was it supposed to do? Well, Jesus tells us right here.

Here are the weighty matters of the law. Justice, mercy, and faith. Justice, mercy, and faith.

Justice means what is right, what is fitting, what is proper, what meets the standard of righteousness, what avoids falling into sin or iniquity. It's right. It's just.

Mercy is looking out for others even at one's own expense. We saw this in our study in Colossians on Friday night, looking out for others, putting others ahead of oneself. It's the sacrificial nature of being Christlike and following Christ's example.

So the same principles that we understand and value and try to live by in the New Testament are the weighty matters of the law. Righteousness and justice, mercy, and faith. When you take the very best of your flock and sacrifice it to God, when you take 10% of your firstfruits and send it down there to the Levites, this is an act of faith.

If it's done properly, you're saying even though this is the very best and even though this is costing me something, I am grateful that God gave me anything at all and the least I can do is render this to Him. It's an expression of faith when it's done properly and not done grudgingly and out of necessity the way it generally was in Israel and the way it's often done today. It's an expression of faith.

God gave me this much, He can certainly provide for my needs. He'll give me 110% so that when I render my 10% I still have everything that I need. Justice, mercy, and faith.

These are the weighty matters of the law and they're the weighty matters in our lives as well. We're not restricted and we shouldn't give ourselves an out by saying, well, tithing 10%, I'll go look at my bank balance and write out a check for 10% and be done with it. We're operating at a higher level.

We don't just go and sacrifice an animal, we sacrifice ourselves. Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. We can't go find the spotless animal and send it to the priest for a sacrifice.

We have to ensure that we ourselves are holy and blameless. It's a much higher responsibility to make sure that we ourselves are an acceptable sacrifice before God when we bring ourselves before Him. We don't just look in the checkbook and figure out what a tithe is going to be.

It's our entire life that is before God. It's not just a tithe, it is rendering to God the things that are God's. God has first place.

We do things heartily as unto Him. In a sense, we tithe in every way. We tithe our time, we tithe our attention.

In computer terms, when you look at the power of a processor to do what computers do, it's measured in MIPS, millions of instructions per second. How many million instructions, little short machine language instructions, can a Pentium II chip running at 300 megahertz, how many of them can it process? Well, there's a measure for that. Well, our minds are running all during our conscious waking hours.

What portion of that time and those cycles of thought is devoted to anything related to God, to remembering who we are and why we're here, who He is and what His calling is and what the hope of our calling is and so forth. If you want to look at tithing, you want to look at rendering to God the things that are God's, this is the area to look. It's too easy.

People say, oh gosh, it's hard to sacrifice that 10%. A, it's not a sacrifice because it isn't ours to begin with, and B, it's so limited to think that it's just money and it's just a check to the church or something. Ourselves are the sacrifice.

Ourselves are the first fruits. Ourselves constitute the portion that should be tithed to the Lord. We do have a foot in this world.

We have to pay attention to our duties and responsibilities, but the first and best part, you know, I used to think about this, I would get home late at night and at the closing of my day, I would sit down for my Bible study. That's when my brain is the tireddest and I'm the most fatigued and I have the least ability to concentrate. If you're a morning person and the best part of your day is the morning, why not use that time for meditation and reflection and devoting yourself to making sure your spiritual life is hitting on all eight

cylinders? Why give God the latter end, the leavings, the tattered, frayed, fatigued ending of the day? Why not give Him the best part? Some of us do better late at night, and I actually do better at night than I do in the morning.

Some of us wake up and we don't even remember who we are for the first hour and a half, until the first couple of cups of coffee. Well, that's not the time to get up and try to study when you're still in a fog and so forth. But what's the best part of the day? Spend that time in fellowship with God, meditating on His Word in whatever form you do that.

It doesn't have to be in formal Bible study. We hopefully have accumulated a lot of things in our soul that we ought to meditate on. We shouldn't have to necessarily play a tape or attend a class or watch a TV show or whatever, a Christian to surface something in our soul from all of these days and years of Bible study and meditate on it and reflect and examine ourselves to see if we're in the faith.

Well, let's do that when we're fresh and alert and fully conscious. That's tithing of the increased, tithing of the best, giving the first fruits of our talent, our time, our attention, our opportunities, our energy to God. There is also a component, as we have seen in Old Testament tithing, of looking out for others, supporting those who engage in the ministry as their primary function, and supporting those who are in need.

And these, of course, also we see clearly in New Testament days and in New Testament teaching. Paul, in talking about the function of the apostles and ministers, says, you know, do not muzzle the ox when he's treading out the grain and so forth. There's a legitimate opportunity to support those who teach the Word of God, who function as pastors, as missionaries, as Sunday school teachers, and also those who function in any other way that is beneficial to us.

Every believer has a spiritual gift. Every believer, therefore, has a ministry to other believers. So every believer is someone that we have the privilege of supporting.

We don't just have the segment of the Levites bearing the iniquity of the nation for us now. Every believer is a member of the body of Christ. Every believer is gifted by God the Holy Spirit.

We tend to think, well, muzzle not the ox, let's make sure the pastor gets a check or whatever. Every single believer is a minister to the body of Christ, at least potentially, because everyone has a spiritual gift that is specifically designed to edify and build up the body. All of us also are often in need in some way, shape, or form.

And it's such a shame to limit these things to the financial area. People have need for encouragement. They have need for the truth spoken in love.

They have the need for fellowship, the need for comradeship, the need for a feeling of esprit. I'm not Elijah by the brook chariot here. There are other people who understand

life and who appreciate the things and who are concerned and upset about some of the bad things that happen in our country and in life in general and so forth.

And I'm not a voice crying in the wilderness and I'm not wandering out here. There are other believers of like mind. Just assembling, even if you don't say a word, just showing up and being a believer who by worshipping and spending time with other people, you can engage in a ministry that is of huge benefit.

I'm sure all of you all can think as I can think of people in the past who have no idea of the encouragement or of the example that they have set. You can think back to people you've known, maybe people you know currently or people that you've run across in the past, believers who just because of their natural function, just the way God built them as believers, they contributed something in your soul that you carry around and that God uses to be a blessing and a building up factor. Well, we can be that sort of person if we're looking for the opportunities to tithe, looking for the opportunities to render to God the firstfruits and to have that attitude of rejoicing.

What a privilege it is just to be alive. What a privilege it is to be a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, to live in this age and have these kinds of opportunities. We have challenges.

We have tests. We have great blessings that sometimes can be a distraction. We have things that seem to pull us in the wrong direction.

But first things first. This, by the way, is the lesson as we return back to Genesis chapter 14, because you will notice that Abram here is met in the valley by two kings, isn't he? He's met by the king of righteousness and he's met by the king of Sodom. You couldn't ask for a better set of pegs on each side of the meter.

You've got Melchizedek, the king of righteousness, living in the city of peace, coming out with bread and wine and bringing a blessing from the Most High God. And then you've got, in verse 21, the king of Sodom. What's the king of Sodom concerned with? Melchizedek is talking about God Most High, blessing in the intangible sense.

He says, Blessing on you, Abram, from God Most High, the possessor of heaven and earth. And blessed be God, because he has given you this great victory. These are things up in the spiritual realm.

Then, you know, on my left hand, we now have the king of Sodom who says, Well, we got people and stuff here. Let's split it up. I'll take the people.

You can have the stuff. He's just so completely down in the mundane world of the opposite pull from God and the things of God. You remember, the Bible has already explicitly stated in 1313 of Genesis, the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the Lord.

Well, here's their king. He's the leader. He's the policy center.

He's the guy that embodies everything that's significant about Sodom. And he comes out to meet Abram. So you just can't imagine.

This is another one of those scenes I want to see rerun in the eternal future. You've got Melchizedek coming out from what will eventually be Jerusalem or Mount Moriah and the temple will eventually be built. David's going to rule from there.

Jesus Christ is going to minister there. He's going to sit on the millennial throne there. Here comes Melchizedek, the archetype and precursor of all these wonderful things.

And then you've got the king of Sodom. We saw a we saw an animated feature called the the thief and the cobbler, which I recommend to you if you happen to see it and you're looking for something to watch. It's animated.

It's aimed sort of at children. It's sort of an Aladdin type story. But one of the characters in this is the thief.

And he's this shuffling, bedraggled individual that's just aggrandizing himself. He's looking for anything he can steal, anything shiny. He sees something gold and he's got to have it.

We'll go to extraordinary lengths. He'll pole vault at the top of these turnip shaped domes to try to get gold things and so forth. But his voice is done by Jonathan Winters.

And it's worth seeing just for that. Because you know that they didn't have a script. They would not have been able to tie him to a script anyway.

And so he just mumbles along and puts all these words in the mouth of the thief. It's really classic. But this thief, when they animated him, he's this shuffling, demeaned looking person.

And there's a swarm of flies around him all the time. Everywhere he goes, there's a swarm of flies. And all the things that happen to him, they're around him.

And when I picture this in my mind in the Valley of Kings here, you've got Melchizedek imagined in robes of white coming out from Jerusalem. And then I imagine the thief, this sinful king of the evil city of Sodom. And I just imagine a swarm of flies around him.

And he's coming out saying, oh, there's all this stuff. But I'll be magnanimous. Just give me the people and I can put them to work and get more stuff.

You can keep the stuff. But it's a great contrast between the mundane and the eternal, between the things of the earth and the things of heaven. Melchizedek reminds Abram that God is possessor of both.

But obviously, the king of Sodom can't see that. But Abram is faced with a choice here because he has the opportunity. What Melchizedek says is potential.

God is the possessor of heaven and earth. God has made promises to Abram that have not yet been fulfilled. Here's the king of Sodom standing on the ground.

Here's the piles of stuff. And he can give it to him right now. So Abram has the two poles presented to him in the person of these two kings.

And what does Abram say? And Abram is absolutely in this section of Genesis. You can see why God is pleased with him because his thinking is so straight. He's learned his lesson from going down to Egypt and humiliating himself in the deception with Sarah and so forth.

Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have raised my hand to the Lord, God most high, possessor of heaven and earth. We've talked about this before. This is one of the things that we a lot of times avoid doing.

When we have to explain ourselves, whether to family or friends or in casual conversation, well, why did you do that? Why did you move here? Why did you make this choice in life? We typically say, well, you know, it seemed good to me at the time. There were factors involved. And we don't say, well, actually, there was a biblical principle involved that really drove this decision.

I felt like I was engaged in evil over here and I had to get out of it. And that's why we moved here. That's why we did this.

I just looked like a great opportunity. But from a spiritual point of view, I could not associate myself with that. I couldn't make that choice before the Lord.

Well, we don't want to say that casual. Abram here is talking to the king of Sodom. And he says, look, the reason I'm not going to take the stuff that you're offering me here, these huge piles of loot from Sodom, you know how rich cities they were.

He says, I'm not going to take so much as a shoestring from this. Why? Because I have raised my hand. I have made a vow.

I pledged myself and dedicated myself to the Lord, God most high, the possessor of heaven and earth. And he repeats the very same phrase that Melchizedek used. And so you can see here, Abram identifying himself with Melchizedek, with the priest of the most high God.

And look at what happens here. Abram either has the choice to give or to receive. Jesus said what? It is more blessed to give than to receive.

What transfer of goods takes place here with Abram? He gives to Melchizedek. The king

of Sodom tries to give to Abram and he won't take it. Because these things came from Sodom.

They need to go back to Sodom. They take out the portion to support the allies and so forth. But the king of Sodom is trying to give Abram something.

Abram says, I serve the Lord who is possessor of heaven and earth. And if anything, I give to him. So he pays the tithe to Melchizedek and he won't take anything from the king of Sodom.

It's a terrific example of good priorities and sound thinking and application, particularly at this time. We are weakest and most vulnerable at the time of a victory, when we've done something right, when we actually did the right thing and things turned out well. Abram has gone up there with his tiny band, whipped this big coalition of kings.

He's a hero. He's famous. People are coming with offers, you know, endorse our product.

Come down, endorse our city. We'll give you this stuff and so forth. And Abram keeps his focus.

And he says, I'm pitching in with the Lord, God most high, possessor of heaven and earth. I honor him with my tithe to Melchizedek and I'm not taking so much as a shoestring from the king of Sodom. Verse 23, I will take nothing from a thread to a sandal strap.

And I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, I have made Abram rich. If Abram's going to be rich, it's going to be because God, the possessor of heaven and earth, has made him so. And he's not going to give anyone room to say that they have taken God's place as the sustaining factor in Abram's life.

The only exception he makes in verse 24, only what the young men have eaten, this is rations for the journey, and the portion of the men who went with me, Aner, Eshcol and Mamre, let them take their portion. And you will notice also here that Abram does not speak for others. He speaks for himself, like Joshua will do.

Choose you this day whom you will serve. As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Abram doesn't presume, even though these men are his allies and they fought with him and they're apparently on very close terms, he gives them the freedom.

Today people say, well, give him his space. Let them have their space. Well, Abram gives these men their, it's their call.

A portion of this spoil is theirs by right of conquest. They can decide whether or not they're going to keep it, return it. It's up to them.

He's not going to speak for them. A lot of times we try to speak for others. We try to

make others' decisions.

We cajole them, we coerce them, we suggest, we put pressure on people in one form or another to do a certain thing. And it's not our place. And Abram does everything right in this situation.

He leaves them the freedom to choose. They have it by right. It's their call.

So in this example, we see the choice that faces us. We have a choice between choosing the King of Righteousness or the King of Sodom. We have the choice between the hope of glory, Christ in us, which in many ways and often in our lives is intangible, and seizing upon that which is tangible, that which is earthly, that which is immediately gratifying.

Do you want to wait for the fulfillment of a promise from God or do you want to grab this big pile of loot that's right here in front of you being offered by the King of Sodom? It seems like a simple choice when you look at Abram standing in the valley of Shaveh, but it isn't always an easy choice for us when we look at the situations and the choices that face us. Is a bird in the hand really worth two in the bush? The promises of God in many ways are potential and immaterial in the sense of not being material. They are intangible.

Peace is not something you can point to and show to others and show off and be proud of. The dedication, the commitment that Abram expresses here is a great example for us. It also, in connection with Melchizedek, reminds us.

We've talked about chiasms and the structure where you have this X, the outermost brackets, and then the innermost things and the thing at the center. Some people say, well, this structure stuff kind of gets me down. Chiasm, schmiasm, I'm not really worried about it.

This is important. As we saw in Psalm 110 in our scripture reading this morning, the fact that there is a priesthood that precedes and that is higher than the priesthood that will come from the loins of Abraham. This point is going to be made over in Hebrews chapter 7. Levi, the great, great grandson of Abram, is not even here yet.

Abram recognizes the priesthood of Melchizedek. It's the only time that Abram renders any worship outside of his own building of altars and so forth. He recognizes Melchizedek as a higher priest, higher in the sense of relationship with God.

Well, there's going to be a closing bracket to this. The Levitical priesthood is going to have a close to its bracket and you're going to come back to the Melchizedekian type of priesthood that is higher and greater. Israel should have seen this coming.

If there was a priesthood before Levi, there can be a priesthood after Levi of the same order. It's a reminder to us that in the same way we don't worry about origin, we don't

worry about genealogy. Melchizedek, nobody knows for sure where he came from.

Some people have even suggested that he is a theophany, that he is a pre-incarnate, that he's a Christophany, that it's Jesus Christ himself that came out in a pre-incarnate form. There's no more support for that than there is that it's Shem or anybody else. He could have been a Gentile.

Nobody knows until the Lord returns who he was. And that's the way God wants it. Because it tells us that his priesthood is not based on lineage.

It wasn't handed down from father to son in the scriptures. It seems to come out of nowhere. But whatever it is, it's higher than the Levitical priesthood.

And the one that follows the Levitical priesthood is higher. That is the priesthood to which we are subscribers. Jesus Christ is a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

He is our high priest. And when we resume our study next time, we'll take a quick look at Hebrews chapter 7. And then we're going to see God engage in conversation with Abram for the first time. Abram is at such a high point in his operation spiritually.

He is not going to just get monologue. Always in the past, the word of the Lord came to Abram saying, get thee up, go here, do this. Now he's going to have two-way conversation with God.

He's going to ask questions and get answers in chapter 15. And that's where we will resume next time. But let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank you for the privilege we have of living in this age. And as we learn more and more about our position in your plan and the privileges to which we are heir, we are once again reminded of the greatness of the work that Jesus Christ has accomplished on our behalf. We thank you for your daily provision, your daily expressions of grace and compassion on us.

We pray that the things we have seen this morning will strengthen us and fortify our souls and enable us through the active ministry of God the Holy Spirit to live in a way that pleases you, to render our tithes and offerings in a way that is fitting and in a way that glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray these things in his name. Amen.