

# Bring the whole tithe into my storehouse

A few years ago some members of All Saints went to hear the evangelist J. John speaking on 'Deepening your relationship with God'. They were expecting to hear about prayer, Bible reading and that sort of thing. Instead, the only thing J. John spoke about was tithing. But what is tithing, does the Bible call us to do it and what can we get out of it?

## What is tithing?

Tithing is the practice of giving the first 10% of one's income to God. In Leviticus 27:30 we read, "A tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain or fruit, belongs to the Lord and must be set apart to him as holy."

Giving the tithe was a way of teaching the ancient Israelites to depend on the Lord for all their needs. However, it also had a more practical purpose. It was a way of providing an income for the Levites, who were the clergy of the day. The Levites, in their turn, gave a tithe to the priests, who were set aside for special duties among the Levites.

The problem was that the system broke down. The Israelites found it hard to trust that God would really provide for them. If the weather wasn't too good one year, they might think, "I'm not sure I can spare the full tithe this year. I'll give a bit less." This resulted in God withdrawing his blessing on the land and, the following year, the harvest was smaller still. The Israelites then gave even less, and the next harvest was even smaller.

Worse still was that, as the harvest became poorer and poorer, the Israelites turned to the worship of fertility gods such as Baal. Baal worship involved visiting shrine prostitutes and drew the people further and further from true worship.

So, with harvests getting poorer and poorer, and tithing becoming a thing that no one dared to do, what was God's solution? "Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do," says the Lord Almighty, "I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Let me prove it to you!" *Malachi 3:10*

The people were invited to make a leap of faith. Take the risk of giving away a tenth of a bad crop, on the promise that God would start to increase the harvest.

## Does the Bible call us to tithe?

In Old Testament times, yes. In New Testament times it is less clear. We are not bound by Old Testament regulations, with the main exception of the Ten Commandments. However, Jesus seems to approve of tithing (Matt 23:23) but

does not command it. What we are called to do, however, is to trust God in a radical way. As Christians we are called to demonstrate our trust in God. As Jesus tells us, we can either worship God or money. Tithing is a way of putting our money where our mouth is.

## What can we get out of tithing?

It is my belief that God's promise, made through the prophet Malachi, still holds. Giving God the first 10% of our money is like investing it in the heavenly bank. Jesus says "Don't store up treasures here on earth, where they can be eaten by moths and get rusty, and where thieves break in and steal. Store your treasures in heaven, where they will never become moth-eaten or rusty and where they will be safe from thieves. Wherever your treasure is, there your heart and thoughts will also be." *Matthew 6:19*

The heavenly bank pays out exactly what we need, when we need it. It is a far better investment than anything on earth.

Lavinia and I have tithed for many years. Our current way of doing so is by 'Payroll Giving'. Under this scheme, the first 10% of our income, before tax, is taken from my income. It is then sent to our PCC treasurer, minus a small admin fee.

Many people say, "Oh, it's easy for you clergy. You don't have mortgages to worry about." In fact we do have a large monthly mortgage payment. We believe that we are able to live comfortably only because we continue to tithe.

A couple of years ago we had some very large expenses on our home in Chichester. The bill amounted to around £10,000. We did not have the money. Giving up our tithe for a couple of years would have covered this bill, but we continued to tithe. I still don't quite understand how it happened but the bills all got paid - all from the heavenly bank.

## A final thought

I am told that our diocese will have a £1 million shortfall this year. There are rumours of cuts in the number of clergy and possible closure of churches. This is tragic. More to the point, if every Church member started to tithe, there would be money to spare. Clergy could be paid and individual parishes could give up fund-raising activities and get on with the Great Commission.

If your family income is £30,000, then tithing would give £3,000, each year to your Church. You would pay less tax and God would more than make up for what you have given. As this happened your faith in His provision would grow and deepen. Are you prepared to let God prove it to you?

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