

Pako Morning Service 28<sup>th</sup> August 2016:

Readings: 2 Cor 8:1-9; 2 Cor 9:6-15; Mal 3:6-12; Sermon: "Trust and Obey".

Congregation, there is one thing that always gets people's attention and that is money. Man seems to have this insatiable appetite for money. And if you doubt that, just look at how many people gamble, whether it be the pokies, the TAB, to the most innocent looking scratchy! "Hot seat" or previously known as "Who wants to be a millionaire" was the catchy tune of a television quiz show and the obvious answer is that everyone does! People have this idea that money brings happiness, and therefore the more you have the happier you can be. Well those of us, who have been around for a while, know that this is one of Satan's best deceptions to modern man.

Of course Christians know better. When you are on your death bed, whether you have a \$100, \$1000, \$100,000 or a \$1,000,000 it will not make a scrap of difference. There are no pockets in a shroud or car trailers behind a hearse. They know that there is only one thing in life that can bring happiness, contentment, and a peace that passes understanding and that is to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.

This past week, I went to the doctors and said to him, "give me a miracle pill so that this cough would leave me?" He just smiled and said if he could do that he would be millionaire! Christians generally acknowledge that their Father in heaven has given them everything they have. Yet, there are times we don't seem to behave that way. Sometimes we like to claim that it is our hard work and dogged determination that brings the results. And to some extent that is true. It's a biblical principle, that if you don't work, you will remain poor. But also wonder whether Christians haven't been caught up in the lie that the financial institutions propagate, "It's your money".

The Old Testament Church had also forgotten that everything they had and did came from God's great riches. The food on the table, the clothing on their backs, the roof over their heads, the air they breathed, all came from God's loving hand. He was still the loving God, who had just brought them back from exile. As the writer to the Hebrews says, "God does not change. He is the same yesterday, today and into eternity" (Heb 13:8). This is the reason why the nation of Israel has not been destroyed long ago! God has remained faithful to them.

I don't know why these people thought that God no longer deserved their trust and obedience. But God, continuing to be faithful, pleads with them. "Return to me and I will return to you". But Israel's can't see why they should. They no longer felt a need to have their Covenant faithful God as their God. They seemed to be doing Ok without Him. They think they have everything they desire!

So God asks the question, "Will a man rob God?" God gave them 100%, and all He asked for was 10% in return so that the temple ministry could continue. But the OT people were robbing God by giving far less. And that's the problem here. The Israelites don't even see that they are robbing God. But God doesn't let them off the hook. He accuses them of stealing for they are withholding part of their tithes and offerings. According to Lev 27:30ff, a tithe included a tenth of their income, produce, flocks and cattle (Lev. 27:30, 32). The tithe was to be given to the Levites who gave a tithe to the priests (Num. 18:21-32), so that the ministry of the temple could continue which included looking after strangers, widows, and orphans (Deut. 14:27-29).

This time it wasn't the quality of their offering but the quantity. They thought they could keep God happy with a bit. Reminds you of the story in Acts 5 about Ananias and Sapphira, who tried to cheat God and dropped dead. God wants the whole tithe and not the leftovers. The result of not bringing the whole tithe and offering was that the nation was under a covenant curse as outlined in the Deut. 28:38-40.

That's why we read in v11 that pests were eating the crops, and vines were without grapes. It wasn't global warming that was the problem, it was their lack of love for God and trusting in his provision! So God throws down the challenge. (Mal 3:10). "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need." God's desire is to bless. These blessings simply awaited their trust and obedience.

Now the question is, how do we apply this today? Well let's just speak a little about the elephant in the room and I haven't been prepped by CC or COM. Let's just speak about money. We have a system in this church where there is virtually no accountability. How often haven't I heard the cry, "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand gives". I can live with that, but don't use it to hide a spiritual condition.

## Trust and Obey

In the first place, I don't give a hoot about how much you give for the work of the kingdom, but whether your giving reflects a heart that is spiritually poor or rich towards God your Saviour. Furthermore, you can pull the wool over my eyes and others when it comes to giving, but God knows the heart and for me that is all that counts. Furthermore, the NT is not specific in saying that 10% is what we should give to the work of the Lord. It's a good rule of thumb, but it isn't the law of the Persians and Medes. Nor should we use the argument that Kerry Packer once used for minimizing his tax when he told a senate enquiry that he couldn't see the reason for paying anymore tax, for they weren't spending it all that well.

In the NT, a greater principle applies, and its foundation is what God has done for us in Christ. The NT speaks about generosity and giving. 2 Cor 9:7 "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. The NT also speaks of God's blessing on those who give generously to the needs of the church and especially to those who labour in the Word (Acts 4:31-35; 2 Cor 9:6-12; Gal 6:6; Phil 4:14 -19).

Some years ago now Trudy and I were at Circular Quay in Sydney. Anyhow, we were close to one of these vending machines where you put your ten or twenty dollar note in to pay for something and the change drops in the tray below. One man was having difficulty with his twenty-dollar bill. An assistant came over and assisted. Before too long out popped the ticket and loose change and the assistant said, "some change for the offering bag on Sunday sir". Seriously? God wants the first and best of the crop!

Strangely some people think that the 10% only applies to finances. But what about your time, and other resources? Are you one of these people who think that your time and resources don't belong to the Lord? I speak to people who are quick to comment about various programs or non-programs that the church runs or attempts to, but they themselves never have time to participate. Surely, the earth is still the Lord's and everything you have is his, and that includes your time, your health and your resources.

So congregation what drives us today in our giving and participation in kingdom work which includes the work of the local church? In Malachi's day, people forgot God and his faithfulness and that He was the One who brought them back from exile to the Promised Land. Sometimes when I have opportunity to examine students for the ministry at a classis level, I ask the question, "What is the more-so" that drives you to ministry today?"

You know some students don't know how to answer what I think is a reasonably simple question. Perhaps they're were looking for a difficult answer when the simple answer is staring them in the face. The 'more so' we have is Jesus. It's not that God was stingy in the OT – not at all. Even when God's OT people were faithless and disobedient, God did not forget them and returned them to the Promised Land. But now, God has opened the floodgates of heaven and blessed us with himself. God came in the person of his Son to save us from eternal death.

What did that old man Simeon say, "My eyes have seen your salvation" (Lk 2:30). We read in Scripture that God's Son dwelt among us. He died for our sin, and He rose and ascended and lives forever! We know that He lives in us with his Holy Spirit. We know that He intercedes before the Father on our behalf. We know that he has promised to return and to take us to himself.

We have so many blessings that we cannot store them all in our storehouses. And yet Christians rob God. In my vicariate year, my mentor asked me to preach on this passage. So that's about 20 years ago. It was before the days of electronic fund transfers, and most people had envelopes with the weeks numbered. In my preparation I went to the treasurer and asked, give me an idea of what the average giving is. And she told me at that time only 20% of the congregation used the envelope system, but that they gave 80% of the budget. The rest was given through the offering plate on Sunday. That meant that 80% of the congregation gave less than a McDonalds' burger a week.

All God asks is for us to respond in thankfulness to his great blessing of provision, not least our great salvation. 10% seems cheap when we compare it to such a great a salvation! Congregation if we are really fair dinkum about reaching people with the light of the gospel, then we would give and give generously. Surely our desire is that the gospel continues to go forth through our various ministries, whether that be pulpit ministry, Gems and Cadets, missions to Niger, Myanmar, Indonesia, refugees, Lifted Up, Connect 3216.

We desire to show the people in this city that we trust in God for all our needs. Now perhaps some are thinking that they are in the season of their lives when Christian school fees need to be paid, or they have some Christian project on the go. Congregation these are legitimate things to support, but I would suggest, not at the expense of the church. Without the church, without the preaching of the Word, without the fellowship of the saints, all the above work would

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soon come to a standstill. Others have just bought a new home or business and the mortgage has crept into their giving. Nothing wrong with buying a new business, or block or house or whatever. But remember to put God first. Test him. Trust him. Other's don't give because they blame the slack preaching or CC has made a decision with which they conveniently cannot agree. Others are just bad stewards. I am also aware of hardships and trials we suffer. I refer you to the women who gave more with her two copper coins than the rich did with their abundance in Luke 21:1-4.

Congregation, God doesn't want leftovers. He deserves and wants the first and best.

Look at what the Corinthians did in Ch 8:2-4

"...out of the most severe trial their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity For I testify says Paul, that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own. The Corinthians urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints."

Now, wouldn't it be wonderful if we could live like that. If a family couldn't pay the School fees we would be lining up to help! Congregation many people can testify to the fact that when they have trusted God in their giving, that God has never left them short. Test God, he does not change. The God who kept that greatest promise of all will not disappoint us.

A text without a context is a pretext. The previous passage speaks about the just judge who is coming. Could you imagine what the just judge is thinking when you slip him second best, or the left overs, especially when we know that He himself gave the very best! (Mt 10:8 ESV) "Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay." "Freely we have received, so freely we give" (Matthew 10:8 NIV).

Proverbs 11:24-25 says, "One gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want. Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.

Congregation, may we not be guilty of stealing! Amen.