

Generous God Malachi 3:6-12

Today we start a new series on the Generous Life. Generosity means more than what you do with your money, it is a whole-life thing, and it's about how you view God.

God's character: If you think wrong thoughts about God, your relationship with him will suffer. The people's circumstances were going badly. When that happens you can think God is against you. So the Lord says he has not changed. He is just as gracious and generous as he always was. Whilst God had not changed in his generosity, they were more interested in getting. That can be the case for us too.

God's Call: God calls the people to return to him – to the One whose character will shape and mould their character. To do that he focuses on their failure to give the tithe (10%) of their produce. So often it's how we use our money that tells what we most value.

God says they're robbing him. That is because everything belongs to God. We are just stewards of his good gifts. So God calls this failure to mirror his generosity, *robbery*. The tithe was to be used to support the Levites in teaching God's word, and to feed the poor. Their lack of generosity said that what really mattered to them was not God's word, or their neighbour, it was their own personal comfort. So it wasn't tithing they had turned their backs on, it was God.

Does the tithe still apply for Christians? The answer is: yes and no. 'No' because this was part of Israel's covenant law that has been abolished in Christ. 'Yes' because we are still only stewards and are still called to support the teaching of God's word and care for the poor. It would be strange to give less than them, when we know more of God's generosity in Christ. But it is not a law – it is a joy to give.

God's Challenge: God challenges them to challenge him, to test him: To let him prove to them how much more generous he can be. They can do that by being generous themselves. God says if they do that he will pour out blessing upon them. Is this a promise of rain, or something more? Whichever it is, God's challenge is clear: let me prove to you that you cannot out-give me. However, this was not about God meeting their *greed*. He says he will pour out blessing until there is no more *need*. Sometimes we can mistake the two.

Then God promises that as the people turn back to him, and to generosity, the impact will be felt in far wider circles: they will once again become a blessing to the nations.

God's character still hasn't changed. He is still the generous God. His call to turn back to him and rediscover generosity is still there, and his challenge still stands. In 2 Cor 9:6-11 we are told that we too can experience more of God's generosity, by being generous, as he is generous. This may be in financial or non-financial ways. Whichever it is, it is not so we can live the high-life, it is so that we can be even more generous, and give to the work of teaching God's word and caring for the poor.

It is to the exciting life of experiencing God's generosity in ever-deeper ways that he calls us.