

We live in homes and have home owners’ insurance that covers our house and all our belongings in the house. The insurance company says we own it. Psalm 24 tells a different story: **"The earth is the Lord’s and everything in it, the world and all who live in it?"**

You and I don’t own a thing. That nice shirt or blouse, the pants and dress you’re wearing – the Lord’s! Everything you see inside your wallet – the Lord’s! The car you drive – the Lord’s. The home you drive to when you leave here – the Lord’s! The stuff inside your fridge, cupboard and toy box – the Lord’s! The garden and lawn you take care of – the Lord’s. He owns it all! We don’t!

"Now wait a second. I worked hard for those things. I purchased them. I paid the bills." Agreed! But who made it possible for you to work for and purchase what you have? Who gave your mind the smarts and your hands the skills? Whose idea was it to place you where you are? The Lord’s!

If everything, and I mean everything I have is God’s, the right question should be: **"How Am I Spending God’s Money?"** And for our purposes today, how am I spending God’s money when it comes to my church offerings? Am I ROBBING God? Or, am I RELYING on God?

To find an answer, we’re going to dig into our OT lesson, where God spells it out for us.

When I read from Malachi earlier, did it shock you to hear God bring this accusation against his people: **"Will a mere mortal rob God?"** It should have. Do you like being called a robber or a thief?

While you may have heard them respond: **"How? How are we robbing you, Lord?"** What they really meant was *"Who stole from the temple? Who robbed the offering box?"* They may not have, but they still stole from God. He explains: **"In tithes and offerings."**

When God’s people brought their offerings to the temple, they often gave animals. The Lord had very strict specifications for these animals – 1 year old males, without any flaws, no broken bones or blemishes. Only the best will do! The animals they brought to the temple ... were lame, blind, diseased. They had no value to anyone and had to get rid of them anyway.

Would you want to get expired or rotten meat? Apparently, God wouldn’t either. In fact, this was so upsetting to him, he hoped someone would close the temple doors to keep people from bringing more of those unacceptable offerings.

Our lesson highlighted one of our Lord’s many attributes: **"I the Lord do not change."** He didn’t like the rotten meat offered to him then. He doesn’t like the rotten offerings brought to him now.

We all have the same sinful and selfish Old Adam. It certainly makes itself known whenever the subject of money or offerings comes up. Here are some signs we’re robbing God and that our sinful and selfish Old Adam is thriving instead of dying:

- When we think so little of our God, that putting our first and best in the blue bag hasn’t even crossed our mind.
- When our offerings to our Savior are more like the change we would put in a tip jar on some bar or counter.
- When our envelope contains what’s left-over after we’ve taken care of all the things we wanted to do this week.
- When we see the check we write as our membership dues. Now I can get married and buried here. And, I can get my kids baptized and confirmed here, too.

God accused his people of robbing him by offering him the left-overs of their crops and the damaged of their herds. He also accused them of robbery because they didn’t bring him the prescribed

amount. God expected his OT people to give 10% of his money back to him and they weren't doing it.

Even though they were unfaithful to him, God reminded them why he was still their God: **"I the Lord, do not change"** ... in my faithfulness to you and in my mercy to forgive your sin of robbing me.

That same unchanging Lord shows his faithfulness when we've been unfaithful, and his mercy and forgiveness when we've robbed him.

Malachi has addressed robbing from God when it comes to how I spend God's money. Now he discusses how my spending of God's money can show I am relying on God. God invites us to: **Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.**" The whole tithe sounds like an impossible challenge. We use God's money to cover our monthly expenses - our medical bills, our mortgage, our car loan or repair, our groceries, our phone and utilities, our retirement fund, our ... the list is endless. How can I afford to give so much back!

God says trust me and: **"Test me in this, 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."** If we've trusted our eternal salvation and placed our soul into our Lord's hands, can't we trust him with our belongings, our bills and our daily needs? Can't we trust him when he promises the more you give me, the more I'll give you?

To the world, God's math seems crazy. The world thinks that for all the variety of plants and animals and people to get on this planet that must have taken millions and millions of years. God says: *"Nope, just six days. I'm that powerful."* His math in today's lesson sounds just as hard to accept. The world says: *"Take some of what I have and give it away. I'll have less."* God says: *"Nope, you'll have more. I'm that powerful and loving. I'm going to pour even more of my gifts into your lap."*

For God, in Malachi's day, it really wasn't about their tithe or their offerings. It was about the

problem it uncovered. Their hearts weren't in the right place.

So often in the Bible, God speaks of his relationship with his people in terms of a marriage. In our lesson, his bride - the people he loved - was drifting away from him. She was losing her first love. Her offerings revealed her heart wasn't in it.

What's in your heart? If I love my spouse, I'm not going to feast and let her starve; or wear new clothes and let her wear worn-out rags. In love, God went above and beyond for us. Our thankful response shows the direct connection we have with God. We love him above and beyond everything else! When you set aside for him first, it's only because he already thought of you first.

When we were born we were incapable of hearing God's voice, or knowing his love. But he broke into our lives with his grace, when he broke into our world. And now by faith he helps you hear his voice and believe God so loved you that the Son he gave went to the cross and died in your place so you could be completely forgiven and have eternal life.

That's why we bring a gift to God's House and put our offerings on his altar. That's why we gather our offerings as a part of our worship in his House. Our offerings say: *"God I get it. Apart from you I have nothing. What I'm giving you shows that it's you I worship."*

Robbing from God? Relying on God? Your offering represents what's going on in your heart!