

GROWING IN GOD

PODCAST



GIG100 – Tithing Your Time

In this podcast, I am going to talk to us about tithing. Now this is not going to be a traditional teaching about tithing, as you may have heard in the past. I am sure everyone understands somewhat about tithing; I do not think it is really covered that well any longer in teaching in services that people attend. But this is going to have a little bit of a different emphasis to it, and a different point about it. It is not intended to be a thorough, Biblical teaching about tithing itself. I want to, instead, really make a point about what we should be looking to accomplish in our tithing. I think it is very important for us to reach into the Lord for something new and different with our tithe.

First of all, I want to start with a few Scriptures. I am going to begin with Abraham, out of Genesis, because I want to kind of back up into the concept of tithing with the Patriarchs, and the purpose behind it. Most of the time, when we think about tithing, or hear teachings about tithing, we sort of go into the Law of Moses, about the advent of tithing from that perspective. But this is going to be something a little different than that. I am going to Genesis the fourteenth chapter, and I am going to start with verse 18. This is the story about Abraham having gone out to battle against the kings, because Lot, his relative, had been taken captive, and he went to rescue him. After this battle is over, Abraham is going back home, and verses 18-23 begin: “And Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; now he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him and said, ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand.’ He gave him a tenth of all. The king of Sodom said to Abram, ‘Give the people to me and take the goods for yourself.’ Abram said to the king of Sodom, ‘I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread or a sandal thong or anything that is yours, for fear you would say, ‘I have made Abram rich.’”

This is a very unique encounter; and of course, we believe in Christian teaching that Mel-keh-‘se-dek, as we would pronounce it in Hebrew, or Melchizedek, was, in fact, Christ appearing to Abraham. We know that Christ spoke and said, “Abraham rejoiced to see My day,” and you would say, “Well, where did he have that encounter?” This is one of the places where you would see that encounter happening, in our traditions of belief. But we also know that this is the “king of righteousness” – that is what Melchizedek means in the Hebrew. So he is the king of righteousness, and he is the “king of Salem,” which is the king of peace; and, of course, Salem is representative of Jerusalem. So this king comes out and meets Abram coming back from the battle, and he brings him bread and he brings him wine, and he blesses him. Here we see that there is this covenant relationship that is happening between Abram and God. Abram expresses it again later in verse 22, where he says to the king of Sodom, “‘I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth, that I will not take a thread.’” In other words, God had given him a blessing of wealth, and had promised and covenanted with Abram to bless him and make him wealthy. Therefore Abram says, “I am not going to take anything or receive anything from anybody but God, because that would break my covenant with God.” Also, in part of that process, we then see that Abram himself tithed a tenth of all that he had back to God. And so we begin to understand this idea of tithe – or a tenth, which is what the Hebrew word for tithe means – a tenth of what he had, he gave

back to God. But it was a sign, it was a sign of this covenant, this agreement between himself and God that he had made.

We recognize that there are covenants, and there are signs of the covenant. This is where circumcision comes in with Abraham. Circumcision was a sign of the covenant that had been made between God and Abraham. And so, wherever we have a covenant, or we see this covenant taking place with the Patriarchs between themselves and God, we recognize that there was a sign of the covenant. And really, tithing began as this sign of the covenant; Abraham gave a tenth of everything here to God. He also refused to take wealth from any place, but to only receive it as the blessing from God, and as part of the covenant that God had made with him. So, again, this gives us an idea of tithing that may be a little different from what most people really perceive about it. I think by most people, it is kind of thought about as a requirement that is given somewhere in the Old Testament – we know we are supposed to give a tenth, and so we tithe; and it was directed by God, and therefore we do it. And I think that when we think along those lines, we kind of lose the depth and the intimacy of really what the tithe was all about in the beginning; because it really was an expression, it was a sign, of the relationship that these people had between them and God. It was something of really an intimacy in the relationship, where God was giving to them and blessing them with certain things, and they were giving to God. And so you had this constant relationship back and forth, and the tithe itself, or the tenth, was seen as a sign of that relationship.

I want to go on into Genesis the twenty-eighth chapter, and we want to talk about Jacob, because this speaks of the meeting with the Lord that he had. Genesis 28, beginning with verses 12-22, says, “He had a dream, and behold, a ladder was set on the earth with its top reaching to heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your descendants. Your descendants will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your descendants shall all the families of the earth be blessed. Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you.’ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, ‘Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.’ He was afraid and said, ‘How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.’ So Jacob arose early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up as a pillar and poured oil on its top. He called the name of that place Bethel;” – which means, in Hebrew, the house of God, *Beit El* – “however, previously, the name of the city had been Luz. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, ‘If God will be with me and will keep me on this journey that I take, and will give me food to eat and garments to wear, and I return to my father's house in safety, then the Lord will be my God. This stone, which I have set up as a pillar, will be God's house, and of all that You give me I will surely give a tenth to You.’”

God comes in this dream to Jacob and He gives him this blessing. He proclaims this blessing, or swears this blessing to Jacob, that He is going to give him these things. He is going to multiply his seed; in his seed all the nations and the peoples of the world will be blessed. We see this is the same promise that was given to Abraham. So, in this new covenant, or promise, or blessing, we see a continuation of the blessing that came to Abraham and to Isaac; but, it is given as a new covenant, as a new promise and a new blessing, now to Jacob. So it is very personal. This idea of covenant is not something that we should look back upon and say, “Oh, God had this covenant with Abraham all these thousands of years ago, and so, since I am grafted into Abraham, this is meaningful to me.” No, God is looking to constantly update

His covenant and to bring into *now* His blessing to you on a personal level. And of course, we know that this is what happens in Christ, and we will read out of Hebrews in a moment. But I want us to see that here, Jacob had this meeting with the Lord in which the Lord proclaims this blessing, just as He had proclaimed a blessing to Abram; and as a response to the blessing that God gives, Jacob says, "Okay, if You are going to be with me and take me safely to my father's house, and give me food, and bless me with these things that You are speaking of, then I am going to serve You as God, and this is going to be the house of God; and I am going to give you a tenth of all that You give to me as a sign of my covenant with You, and a sign of Your covenant with me." So here again, we see this idea of a tithe – it was an idea that God had blessed and made a covenant, or brought a blessing and a promise, and because of that, Abraham responded, Isaac responded, Jacob responded; and part of the sign of their response back in covenant – that "You are going to be my God and I am going to serve You alone" – was that "I will bring You this tenth, and tithe to You a tenth of all that You give to me, as a sign of my blessing back to You, and my covenant with You, and my commitment to serve You alone as my God."

So again, this idea of tithe was not in the beginning something of a requirement or a law; it was a response of heart. It was a personal, intimate relationship with God speaking to them, blessing them, meeting them; and they responded back with this idea and commitment that "I also covenant to do something with You, as a sign that You are the God who I serve." So this is the aspect of tithing that I want to emphasize to us – not to take away from other aspects of it. But again, what so many of us think about in tithing today, I think, is more of an evolution out of these ideas. And it concerns me a little bit, because I feel like, really, tithing has maybe degenerated in our minds to the fact that when we go to church, somebody passes a plate around and we drop some money in it – whether that represents a tenth of what we have received or not is up to the individual. I know people talk about tithing, and church talks about tithing; and probably one of the biggest questions I have ever heard is, "Well, do I tithe off of the gross or off of the net?" – because we want to know how closely we can shave this requirement. But that is not where it all began. And the idea of just tithing money becomes a little bit of a concern, not because it is necessarily the wrong thing to do, but because of our ideas and our relationship with money today, our relationship with mammon, if you will.

The problem, really, in our relationship with finances is that we have two basic thoughts. We, number one, see money as something with which we buy what we want; and our tithing should not be connected in any way with the fact that we are trying to buy something from God, or get something from God – like the answer to our prayers, or we are looking to receive something from Him. That is not what it was. It was a sign of our serving back to Him, and of our entering our commitment to be in covenant with Him. The other problem with the finances is that usually in today's world, we pay money for things we do not want to do. You know, we pay a gardener because we do not want to go out and mow our own lawn, or take care of our yard. We pay people to clean our house because we do not want to do that. So, again, we can have these concepts of finance in today's world that can really take away from the intimacy and the meaningfulness of what the tithe was and is to be all about. And that is why I like bringing it back to its origins with the Patriarchs, of this idea of blessing and covenant and intimacy and relationship – rather than it being something else that we must do because of a requirement of law or a requirement of being bound to a responsibility.

Let's go to Hebrews and look again at this idea of the covenant. We find it in several places, but I chose these verses because I think they express this idea that there is a covenant being made here with Christ and in Christ. Hebrews 9:14-15 says, "How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the

living God?” Now notice, we are to come into serving God. “For this reason He is the mediator of a new covenant, so that, since a death has taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were committed under the first covenant, those who have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance.”

Now, to me, the wording that we find here is reminiscent of what we see with the Patriarchs. We are seeing a commitment; we are seeing a new covenant; we are seeing a promise that was given of an eternal inheritance that God brought as a blessing to the Patriarchs. And, as I said, really we see this in the covenants of the past, with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and going on into the children of Israel – because it was more than just the giving of the Law, which, unfortunately, people tend to focus their thoughts on and say it was a legalistic system of law. It was not. It was bringing forward, again, the intimacy of a covenant, the covenant that was with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; as God brought it forward to each of them individually, now He brings it forward individually to the nation of Israel – each individual, a part of Israel, is now included in a covenant. And the tithe should once again be a sign of that intimate relationship and promise that God brought of His Presence and His blessings. He was going to give them the land; He was going to give them homes and wealth; and He was going to give them flocks and herds and crops and all of these things – very reminiscent of this patriarchal blessing. But it gets lost in the concept of people's thinking, especially in the Church, of a legalistic view of Torah – instead of what was really transpiring. What we have is a very personal, intimate covenant that God made now with each individual of Israel, the people of Israel; and this tithing should continue on as a return back to God of thankfulness, and to say, “Yes, we will serve You. You are the God who has provided to us, through the promise and the blessing; and now we return a tenth, which is a sign and a symbol that we serve You only as God. You are the only God, and our only God, and we serve You alone.” So we have this deep sense of intimacy. This is what the tithe should represent to us.

I want to go a little deeper with that thought, because the whole expression of the tithe, and how it was brought and what was done with it, really, even within the context of the Torah, has this sense to it. And that is what I want to impart to us today – to see that this covenant with Christ should be a personal, individual covenant with us, saying that He is now providing these blessings to us, and that we, as an expression that we serve Him only in this promise that He has given, in this blessing that He has given, we are going to bring to Him, and we are going to come to Him, with this sign in return.

Let's look at Deuteronomy the fourteenth chapter, and we are going to start with verses 22-23. This is talking about the tithe, and how it would be brought, and what would be done with it. “You shall surely tithe all the produce from what you sow, which comes out of the field every year. You shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God, at the place where He chooses to establish His name, the tithe of your grain, your new wine, your oil, and your firstborn of your herd and your flock, so that you may learn to fear the Lord your God always.” This is an interesting concept that I think most people do not even recognize, and maybe have never read this idea. What was done with the tithe? The tithes were brought back to the Presence of the Lord, back as Jacob was talking about, back to Bethel, back to the house of God. So you brought the tithe in your hands. What was the tithe? The tithe was the produce, it was the blessings of all the things God had given you; but you brought it back to the Lord. And isn't it interesting that you shall eat of it in the Presence of the Lord your God? You did not come and put it in some offering plate and walk out of the service. You came with yourself, and your family; you came into the Presence of God, and you feasted on the blessings that He had given you; you yourself partook of it. And this was not just the tithe. When you read about the sacrifices, the votive offerings that were brought, other than the burnt offering that was in the Mosaic covenant – all of the other offerings that were

brought you would take to the priest, but the priest would cut them up and give you back, you know, the chunks of the meat, and you would go into the Temple with your family and have a feast with it. You would eat from it, and you would rejoice in the Lord in His Presence. You would rejoice, you would feed on what God had done.

The purpose of the tithe was to bring you into the Presence of the Lord. It was a way of recognizing, and renewing, and expressing, giving a sign of this covenant, and bringing this intimacy of the relationship between you and Him and your family and all that was yours. This is what the purpose of the tithe was, and this is how it was expressed, and this is how it was given. It was something very personal. You did not drop it in the lap of the priest and walk away. He would return it to you, and you would partake of it, and eat of it, and feast upon it; because it was a sign of this deep relationship with the Lord, and this recognition that everything you had, had come from this blessing that God had given.

Let's go on with verse 24. It says, "If the distance is so great for you that you are not able to bring the tithe, since the place where the Lord your God chooses to set His name is too far away from you when the Lord your God blesses you," – what is He talking about? He is talking about when you go in and possess the land of Israel, they were going to divide up the land. Well, if you live way north or way south of where God places His name – where did God place His name? First in Shilo, in Shiloh; then in Jerusalem: David moved the Tent of Meeting, and the Temple was built, and that was the place that you were then supposed to bring your tithe. Well, you are bringing your tithe of all the grain and the wine and everything that you have produced, and everything God has blessed you with; you cannot carry that all the way from Dan or Be'er Sheva, all the way to Jerusalem – it is too bulky, it would spoil, whatever. So, here God is saying, "If the distance between you and where I place My name," which ended up being Jerusalem, the place of the Temple, "If the distance is too great, and it does not work for you to carry all of this up to Jerusalem, then what are you supposed to do?" Well, He goes on and tells you. He says in verses 25-27, "They you shall exchange it for money, and bind the money in your hand and go to the place which the Lord your God chooses." So, if you lived in the Negev, then you sold what you had as your tithe of all this produce. You took the money, you went back up and walked to Jerusalem. And you say, "Aha, see, so we are supposed to give our money." No, He says, then, you shall "spend the money for whatever your heart desires: for oxen, or sheep, or wine, or strong drink, or whatever your heart desires; and there you shall eat in the presence of the Lord your God and rejoice, you and your household." He says, "Also you shall not neglect the Levite who is in your town, for he has no portion or inheritance among you." There was a way that the tithe was distributed to the Levite, to the poor, the widow, the orphan, but think about this: God was so determined to have you in His Presence that He says, "All right, you can't carry all of this. So you sell it, you take the money, you go up to Jerusalem, you buy whatever it is that you want to come into the Temple and have this party with Me – because the purpose is not the grain, the new wine, the oil; the purpose is not the money; the purpose you in My Presence – you coming to Me; you rejoicing with Me; you bringing your thankfulness to Me; you spending your time with Me, with your family with Me" – all of this is truly the purpose of the tithe.

We can go on and we see this again. It is talked about in Deuteronomy 12. I will read from verses 5-7: "But you shall seek the Lord at the place which the Lord your God will choose from all your tribes, to establish His name there for His dwelling, and there you shall come. There you shall bring your burnt offerings, your sacrifices, your tithes, the contribution of your hand, your votive offerings, your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herd and of your flock. There also you and your households shall eat before the Lord your God, and rejoice in all your undertakings in which the Lord your God has blessed you." See, all of this was not about this burnt offering, or that kind of sacrifice, or this tithe; it was about

you spending your time with Him, recognizing, again, your covenant to serve Him only. That was the great prayer of Israel: Shema Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, with all of your means, all of your might, everything you have – you serve Him, you worship Him only. That was the root – is the root – of all Judaism, and it should be the root of all Christianity. It is this new covenant that He has now updated to us, and made it alive to us individually, as He made it alive to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all of Israel. Now He has made a covenant with us, and He has engrafted us into this covenant that began with Abraham. So we, too, in our tithes, should come into His Presence and rejoice before Him, us, and all of our families. We should rejoice in all of our undertakings in which the Lord our God has blessed us.

Deuteronomy 12, verses 17-18, gives another aspect. It says, ““You are not allowed to eat within your gates the tithe of your grain or new wine or oil, or the firstborn of your herd or flock, or any of your votive offerings which you vow, or your freewill offerings, or the contribution of your hand. But you shall eat them before the Lord your God in the place which the Lord your God will choose, you and your son and daughter, and your male and female servants, and the Levite who is within your gates; and you shall rejoice before the Lord your God in all your undertakings.”” See, we are not supposed to do our own thing. We are not supposed to do it our way. We are not supposed to do it outside of Him and His Presence. Why? Because the whole purpose of it is, it is a sign of our covenant with Him. It is a sign of our serving Him. Therefore, we do it in His Presence, and we do it His way. And that is what our tithe should mean.

I want to end this with just a little bit of a direction or a concept that you could pray about. First of all, let's remember that tithes are brought as a sign of your covenant and relationship and intimacy with the Lord. Secondly, you come with your tithes and you feast with the Lord. Number three, the greatest blessing God really gives to us – and the tithe was part of the blessing – the greatest blessing that God gives to us is time. Let's face it: when you run out of time, you are dead. So the greatest gift you have is time. Therefore, we should bring our time and feast on it with the Lord in His Presence. And in this podcast, I really want to come to a very simple conclusion: I want to encourage you to begin spending ten percent of your time in His Presence, feasting with Him. That is a true tithe. Bring your time. Take ten percent of your day – you can figure out how many minutes that is – spend it with Him, praying, reading the Word; feast upon Him, rejoice over the blessings that He has given you. Make it a time of intimacy with Him, and a time in which you express, as a sign, your covenant back to Him in response to the covenant and blessings that He has given to you.

I believe for this to bless you. Lord, help us to learn what true tithing is all about, and to begin to enter Your Presence with thankfulness, with rejoicing, as a sign that we serve You and You alone. We believe for this to be real and life-changing for all who hear it. Amen.