

Sermon for Sunday, November 14, 1976, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"A TIME FOR TESTING"
Malachi 3:6-12

Text: "Bring the full tithes 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 an overflowing blessing."
--Malachi 3:10

What is the most serious threat to the world today? Is it Russia or China? Is it the dope traffic or liquor or sex? Well, certainly all of those things pose a threat to the world today. But I want to share with you this morning what the Bible says is the most serious threat to man. Listen to the words of Jesus, "Beware of all covetousness; for a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (Luke 12:15) Jesus says, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:24) Listen to St. Paul, "For the love of money is the root of all evils; it is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced their hearts with many pangs." (I Timothy 6:10) Listen to the apostle James, "Come, now, you rich, weep and howl for the miseries that are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver have rusted, and their rust will be evidence against you and will eat your flesh like fire." (James 5:1ff) Or listen to the apostle John, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him." (I John 2:15) So the Bible says that the most serious threat to man is money. Money can do more to ruin your heart and your life and your character than any other thing.

Did you ever stop to realize how many good, religious men had their lives ruined by money? I am thinking of a religious student. He studied under the greatest religious professor who ever taught for three years. And after three years he sold his teacher down the river for 30 pieces of silver. His name was Judas. What ruined him? Money.

I am thinking of a young attorney. One day he confronted a man of God and he said to him, "Look, I want to go to heaven when I die. What good thing should I do?" And Jesus said for him to give up what he had and follow him. The young man turned with his head down and walked away into nowhere. What tripped him up? Money.

I am thinking of two very respectable church members, a man and his wife. They let it be known that they were selling some property and giving the money to the church. But when the property sold, it brought more than they had anticipated and they must have thought, "That's too much money to give the church." So when they gave the money to the preacher they kept part of it back, they lied to the church, and they dropped dead. What got Ananias and Sapphira? Money.

I am thinking of an assistant pastor. He worked with one of the greatest pastors ever to walk the earth, the apostle Paul. One day, with tears in his eyes, St. Paul picked up his pen and wrote of his young assistant, "Demos hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." What ruined him? Money.

Did you ever stop to think what has opposed the work of God in the world more than any other thing? What ended the work of Paul in Philippi? Well, he cured a girl who had been bringing in money for her masters. And when they saw that their income had been cut off they said, "this man is a fanatic" and they had him thrown in jail. What ended the work of Paul in Ephesus after three and a half years? Well, Ephesus was the city of the god Diana. Some men made their living selling statues of Diana. But with Paul preaching about Jesus, people quit buying the statues. The makers

of the silver images said, "This man has got to go." So they stirred up a riot and brought Paul's work to an end. And what ended the ministry of Jesus--what was the straw that broke the camel's back so that his enemies decided to kill him? Why, Jesus went into the temple and broke up the money racket going on in God's own house.

Yes, money is the most dangerous enemy you and I have. It can surely destroy us. Money is more dangerous than the fallout of a hydrogen bomb. Money ruins, money wrecks, money blights the human character. But God has a way for dealing with money. God has a plan for the use of money so that it will not get the best of a man. God's plan is laid out for us in our scripture for this morning, and I would like to share that plan with you.

First, our text says, "put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts". How do we put God to the test in this matter of money? Well, the first thing you do is put everything you have in God's hands. You put your body, your mind, your money, your family--everything--into God's hands. Have you ever done that? Have you ever told God to take your future? Have you put your family in God's hands? Have you ever put your body, your mind, and your money totally in God's hands? To do that assumes three things. First, it assumes that God owns everything. He created all things, he bought you with the precious blood of Jesus. All you have is his. When you put everything in God's hands you assume it is his. Second, you assume that you yourself do not own anything. All you have is only a loan from God to you to be used for Him and His glory. Nothing belongs to you--God is only letting you use it. And then thirdly, you assume that one of these days you will have to give an accounting of all that God has let you use. Every penny that has gone through your hands, every child God has given you, every opportunity you have had, every second of time you have lived, you are going to have to give an account of what you have done with what God has loaned you. That's the first step in God's plan--to put him to the test by putting all we have in his hands. In doing that we assume it belongs to him, we are only allowed to use it, and we will be held accountable for how we have used it.

Have you ever done that? Have you ever deliberately said, "Lord, I don't own anything. It is all yours. I turn it over to you because I know you have only loaned it to me." Have you ever done that? Well, that's the first step in putting God to the test.

The second thing our text says is the word "thereby". "Thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of Hosts." What does that "thereby" mean? "Bring the full tithes", says the Bible, "thereby put me to the test." So step one is to turn all you have over to God. Step two is to prove you have by bringing the tithe--the first one-tenth of all that comes to you. Before income tax, before house notes, before grocery costs, before anything comes the first ten-percent, the tithe. That's how you prove that you don't own anything but it all belongs to God. That one-tenth is proof of your partnership with God.

Now, suppose a Christian doesn't do that. Can he say he truly trusts God? Well, a man says, I trust God for everything, but I can't afford to tithe. I've got so many obligations. No, that man doesn't trust God. If God says he will make things come out for you on your nine-tenths and then you won't give him his one-tenth, you are not trusting God. God says, "The tithe is mine." God says, "Thou shalt not keep the tithe." God says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse." Can you say you trust God if you are not doing that?

Somebody might say, "But the tithe is Old Testament. We are under grace, we are under the New Testament." Do you want the New Testament way? There are three of them. The first one is the way of the rich young ruler. Jesus said to this man who

wanted to be his follower, "Go sell all you have." That's one hundred percent--that is a New Testament way. The second one is the way of Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus wanted to follow Jesus, so he said, "Half my goods I give..." That's fifty percent--that's a New Testament way. The third one is the Jesus way. He said, "You tithe, this you ought to have done." And that's the same as the Old Testament way. So take your pick--one hundred percent, fifty percent, or ten percent. They are all biblical!

Is a man being honest with God if he doesn't do that? God said to the Hebrews, "You've robbed me!" And they said, "How have we robbed you?" God replied, "In tithes and offerings." Will a man rob a woman of her virtue? Some will. Will a man rob a child of his chance in life? Some will. Will a man rob another of his rights? Some will. Will a man rob God? Lots of Christians do. What gets the first cut out of a man's income? Why, the thing most precious to him. And Jesus says where a man's treasure is, there will his heart be also. Who gets first cut from your income?

The third step in God's plan is the little word "if". "Put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven..." It means "see if". See if what? See if two things won't happen to you. First, God will open the windows of heaven and pour out a blessing. Does this mean God will make us rich--that we will get back more than we give? No, it doesn't mean that at all. It means you will be blessed. A man doesn't have to worry about his family--it is God's family; he doesn't have to worry about his business, it's God's business. He has peace, he has a satisfied heart because he knows he is doing the right thing. Yes, he is blessed. But secondly, God says, "I will rebuke the devourer for you" (verse 11). A fire is a devourer--it can leave you ashes; a storm is a devourer--it can leave you rubble; sickness is a devourer--it can leave you crippled and penniless. Inflation is a devourer--it can eat up your income; depression is a devourer--it can sweep away everything we have; war is a devourer--it can wipe out everything. A child gone wrong is a devourer that eats up your heart. A bad relationship is a devourer that can destroy a marriage. God says, "I will rebuke the devourer for you." God says, give the proof that you love me--put everything in my hands--and see if I won't bless you and see if I won't rebuke the devourer.

Finally, the fourth step in God's plan is the timing. The RSV leaves out a word that is in the Hebrew. It is there by implication however, for the entire text for this morning is in the present imperative. It is the little word, "now". "Put me to the test now, says the Lord of hosts." God is a now God. He says, "Remember now thy creator in the days of thy youth." He says, "Now is the accepted time, today is the day of salvation." Yes, put me to the test now.

Dr. William Hill, a Presbyterian minister, tells a little story I would like to share with you. He tells it this way: "One afternoon one of the Elders of my church was over in the yard helping me. He laid down his tools and asked me if I remembered the sermon I had preached Sunday on tithing. When I said I remembered he went on, 'That sermon got next to me. I went home and I talked it over with my wife and we got out all of our bills and all of our papers and figured up all of our finances--our income and our bills--and we worked out a schedule by which in one year we can pay off all those debts that we owe. We'll be absolutely square with the world, and we made up our minds that one year from now we are going into partnership with God and we are going to start tithing.' I said, 'Carl, what does the verse say?' And he had a kind of sheepish grin on his face and said, 'Yes, preacher, I know it says 'now', but you see I owe all this money and I just can't do this now. It might throw me into bankruptcy. I just can't do it now. One year from now I'm going to do it.'

I said, 'Carl, do you trust God?' "Oh, you know I do. Why, I trust God for everything.' 'Don't you think God can make your nine-tenths work out to meet your obligations and do what you have to do if you will trust God and do what God tells you to do?' 'Oh, pastor, I do trust God, but I just can't do it now. A year from now I promise you, we are going into partnership with God.' Well, forty years have passed since then, and I've watched Carl. He never did it. He didn't do it while God was speaking to his heart and now he still hasn't done it. And I've watched his children, four of them. There's only one of them who ever makes a pretention of being a Christian." God says "now".

Well, God's plan for helping us deal with the most dangerous of things--money--is this: put all in his hands and trust him. Put down one-tenth as the proof of your partnership. Then God will bless you and protect you. And do it now. Do it while God is speaking to your heart.

(With thanks to Rev. William Hill to whom I am indebted for most of the thoughts for this sermon.)