

Vision 2005

The Gospel and your wealth

11.6.05 | Malachi 3:8-10;
4:1-2

INTRODUCTION 10 minutes

Last week we discussed being agents of redemption or re-creation in one specific context. How did that go this past week? Was it difficult to consciously see either relationships or your use of your time in this mode? What were some of the challenges you encountered? How did you handle those challenges? Was there anything encouraging about thinking this through?

WORSHIP 20 minutes

Read through this short Psalm slowly, each person taking one couplet (two verses).

Psalm 121:1-8 (NIV)

- ¹ I lift up my eyes to the hills—
 where does my help come from?
- ² My help comes from the LORD,
 the Maker of heaven and earth.
- ³ He will not let your foot slip—
 he who watches over you will not slumber;
- ⁴ indeed, he who watches over Israel
 will neither slumber nor sleep.
- ⁵ The LORD watches over you—
 the LORD is your shade at your right hand;
- ⁶ the sun will not harm you by day,
 nor the moon by night.
- ⁷ The LORD will keep you from all harm—
 he will watch over your life;
- ⁸ the LORD will watch over your coming and going
 both now and forevermore.

Psalm 121 is identified as one of the “Psalms of Ascents,” sung by the Hebrew people at festival time as they ascended the mountain toward Jerusalem. While they climbed and raised their eyes to the highest point, the view was filled with the temple, the house of the Lord.

Read it through again as above—until everyone has had a chance to read at least once.

Praise God as you feel moved to do so, claiming for yourself his promise to care for his people. Praise Him for his faithfulness—that he does not change.

Malachi 3:8-10; 4:1-2 (NIV)

⁸ “Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me.

“But you ask, “How do we rob you?”

“In tithes and offerings. ⁹You are under a curse—the whole nation of you—because you are robbing me. ¹⁰Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this,” says the LORD Almighty, “and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.

^{4:1} “Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire,” says the LORD Almighty. “Not a root or a branch will be left to them. ²But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall.

STUDY & DISCUSSION 40 minutes

We are told to “bring the tithes into the storehouse”—which is often interpreted as being “the local church.” But the storehouse was the treasury of the temple. The “temple” now in our situation is the urban Christian counter-culture we are building in New York City. And the ultimate goal of this counter-culture is the glory of God.

- 1. What purpose did the tithe serve in the Old Testament temple? Why is it such a heinous offense in God’s eyes that his people would take care of their own needs first and forget to look out for those who are needy, oppressed or defenseless?**
- 2. The language of this passage from Malachi 3 is strong. Why do you suppose the prophet uses the term “robbing God”? If he created everything, doesn’t it already belong to him? How can we rob him?**
- 3. 3:10 implies that God wants there to be food in his house. What purpose does the image of food in God’s house serve? Whose physical needs can be cared for by the tithe?**
- 4. What image comes to your mind when you hear the term “floodgates of heaven”? Are the blessings God promises his people physical health and quantifiable wealth? Or something else entirely?**
- 5. It is sometimes awkward to talk with people outside our family about possessions or financial issues. Is this just too uncomfortable? In light of Sunday’s sermon how important is it that we let others into our lives and decision making? For some this is just too weird. What are the personal implications for our life in community?**

DIRECTED PRAYER 20 minutes

This week we are discussing stewardship, which implies a commitment of what we have been entrusted with—giving of what has been given to us. Pray for the future community life of the people in this group.

Is there a connection between community and stewardship? Certainly: without community, stewardship becomes an individual's secret. God has put us in each others' lives to represent him to each other; in theological terms we call this "incarnating Christ" to one another. Where better than in community can we be honest about our commitments of stewardship?

- 1. Pray for your desire to keep what you do with your time, money, and personal commitments a part of your community life. Pray for the challenge that presents to you.**
- 2. Pray for each other in this group that you can actively support each other with humility, knowing your own frailty, and with confidence, knowing that God can and is changing you all.**
- 3. Pray for Redeemer as we respond with joy to God's call to serve our neighbors out of our abundance.**

ACTIVITY

For Vision Groups that committed to meeting for seven weeks: This is week #7! What does your commitment look like right now? If you haven't already settled on a plan discuss this now.

Next week the sermon continues the subject of the gospel's implication for our personal lives: our time, our wealth and everything about our lives. As you go about your week, continue praying for one another, your group, and for NYC. Pray that we hear God's voice calling us as a community: to join him in the renewal of this wonderful city of ours.

Vision Paper #7—The Future of our City

As a follow-up to each study, we invite you to read one Vision Paper every week following your small group meeting. These have been written by Tim Keller to explain in more detail how the biblical aspect of the vision each week is fleshed out in the life of Redeemer. Each paper can be accessed at www.redeemer.com—follow the Vision Campaign Materials link.