

20th Century Bible Course

Dear Friend:

Jesus said, "Which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it?" (Luke 14:28). Read the whole story (verses 25-35).

When a person has experienced his first encounter with Jesus and is seriously considering whether or not he should make a commitment to follow Him, it is only natural- and right- that he ask some important questions first. How much is this going to cost? Is it worth the price? Am I foolish to take such a step? Or foolish not to?

He has been told that if he steps out, it must be on faith. Some people have never thought much about faith and aren't quite sure if they know what it is. Are you? Is it optimism? Is it positive thinking? Is it some latent, mystic power within man? Is it confidence in one's self? Is it simply taking God at His word? If you mentally checked the last answer, you are ready for some deeper, more probing questions.

Does this mean taking His word in spite of circumstances? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Can a man trust God even when his business is involved? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Are paychecks more tangible than promises? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Paychecks may fail, but do the promises of God ever let you down? ☐ Yes ☐ No

To be even more specific-

If a person, when he meets his Lord, is engaged in a questionable business, should he give it up immediately, or wait until he locates a position with an equally adequate income? Your answer: _____

If a person sees that love and loyalty to his Lord require him to observe as a day of rest the original Sabbath given to man at creation, is he safe in taking that step even though it may cost him his job? Your answer: _____

Jesus said that those who put the kingdom of God *first*, will have every need supplied (Matthew 6:33). Do you believe that? ☐ Yes ☐ No

David claimed that he never saw one of God's people forsaken or begging bread (Psalm 37:25). Have you? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Paul challenged his readers with this question: Will not the One who spared not His own Son, but was so willing to give Him up for our sakes, freely give us all that we need? (Romans 8:32). Do you think He will? _____

In Isaiah 58:13, 14, there is a special promise for those who keep God's Sabbath. After you read it, ask yourself: Does this sound like the Lord will let anyone down who steps out in faith to keep His day holy? Your answer: _____

There are many more such promises. But do we need more? One last question the would-be Christian might ask: I have heard that God requires a man to give a tenth of his income to the church. I have a restricted budget, and I don't see how I could do it. Is it true? Yes, it is true. Today's lesson will consider this question in detail, including one of the most fantastic promises in all the Bible. May God bless you as you study.

Your Bible Instructor

LESSON 24

PAYCHECKS AND PROMISES

SCRIPTURE READING: MALACHI 3 (OT 745 [582]); MATTHEW 25:14-46 (NT 26, 27 [19,20])

Part 1-- WHAT BELONGS TO WHOM?

1. What does God claim belongs to Him?

Psalm 24:1 (1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____

Psalm 50:10,11 _____

Haggai 2:8 (OT 735 [574]) _____

During the Civil War a runaway slave was picked up in Vermont and brought to court. Upon being told by the judge that the evidence of ownership was not adequate, the slaveholder's attorney asked, "Well, what does your honor require?"

"Nothing less than a bill of sale from the Creator Himself," the daring judge replied.

2. On what three grounds does God claim ownership of everything?

a. Exodus 20:11 _____

God made the earth out of nothing (Hebrews 11:3) and hung it upon nothing (Job 26:7). He took of the dust of the earth and made man (Genesis 2:7). He made everything and furnished the material; therefore, He owns everything. Some people think they own it, or at least some part of it. Some say they are going to rule it. But the true owner and ruler is God. How comforting is this thought in a day when the world is threatened with atomic destruction. Said David: God "laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever" (Psalm 104:5).

b. Hebrews 1:3 He _____ "all things by the word of his power."

Acts 17:28 "For in him we _____, and _____, and _____."

"Upholding all things." Men call it gravitation-the power that keeps the earth going around the sun! Well, what is this power that makes the earth go around the sun? That's gravitation! And so we think in circles. What is that power but the will and power of God? Our very lives are sustained by Him. Every heartbeat is a response to the touch of God. We eat and drink, work and play, think and love and worship, and we may not, cannot, understand it all, but in our hearts we know that in Him we live, and move, and have our being.

c. 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 (NT 150 [118]); Isaiah 43:1 _____

Every loaf of bread, every blessing we have, comes marked with the cross of Calvary. Had it not been for God there would be neither man nor bread. Shall any man withhold himself or anything the Lord might ask, from this gracious Creator and Saviour?

3. Where do we get the ability to earn a living? Deuteronomy 8:18

4. How is man to relate to these possessions? Luke 12:42; Matthew 25:14

A steward is one who is entrusted with the supervision or administration of the estate or affairs of another. He manages what belongs to another. God has made us His stewards by entrusting to us His possession. We will be judged, not by the amount we have, but by what we do with it and how we handle it.

Part 2--THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOD'S STEWARDS

1. What is required of stewards? 1 Corinthians 4:2

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much" (Luke 16:10). Unfaithfulness works the same way. To the faithful steward the Owner will say, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21).

2. How does God check up on His stewards? Matthew 25:19; Luke 16:1

Surely every man who has not crushed out the thought, knows that in the judgment he must render an account to God for life, health, wealth, time, and all things.

3. What is the steward's first responsibility? Matthew 6:33

"What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits?"the psalmist asked (Psalm 116:12). Could we ever do too much for Jesus? What if it did cost us everything?

4. How may we honor our Lord? Proverbs 3:9 _____

A steward is to make the best possible use of that which is entrusted to him, not for himself, but for the owner. The sinful steward makes himself first; the Christian steward makes God first.

5. How much of our time does God claim as holy unto Him? Exodus 20:8-11

6. How much of our possessions does God claim are holy to Him? Leviticus 27:30

God requires one-seventh of our time and one-tenth of our possessions. Not that He needs these, for everything belongs to Him. But by asking for some of our time and a portion of our income, He reminds us of our stewardship and tests our love for Him. Just as tribute money paid to Caesar was recognition of his authority, so the holy tithe and holy Sabbath acknowledge God's Lordship. Christ said, "Render. . . unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21).

The word *tithe* means one-tenth. If a man earns \$1, his tithe is 10 cents. If he earns \$100, it is \$10. If he earns \$1,000, his tithe is \$100. And that's when it may get hard. Strangely, the more God blesses, the harder it is for some to return to Him the tithe.

"I was so poor, my purse so small, I hardly felt one-tenth at all. I gladly gave from my poor store with but the wish I could give more. But now my purse, which was so small, contains a million, all in all; And wonder I each passing day if I can give one-tenth away!"

7. What is another area in which the faithful steward is tested? 1 Corinthians 6:19, 20 "Ye are bought with a price: therefore _____."

Romans 12:1. 2 "Present your bodies a holy, acceptable unto God, which is your _____."

Part 3-- TITHING THROUGH THE CENTURIES

1. How did Abraham reveal that tithing was in effect in his day? Genesis 14:18-20

2. What did Jacob promise God? Genesis 28:20-22 _____ -

This vow was the outflow of a heart filled with gratitude for the assurance of God's love and mercy. Every blessing from the hand of God calls for a response from our hearts.

3. In what words did Jesus show approval of tithing? Matthew 23:23 "These [tithing even small things] _____, and not to leave the other undone."

Jesus reproached the Pharisees for tithing small herbs but neglecting to be honest and just, which was equally important. Yet He hastened to assure them that they were to continue to tithe. He wanted to teach them that they cannot compensate for a lack in one area of their lives by being overly righteous in some other area.

Part 4--THE PURPOSE OF THE TITHING

At first the family was the unit of organization in spiritual matters-there was no centralized worship. Just as soon as a priest appeared (Abraham's time), the tithe was given to Him.

1. For what was the tithe to be used after Israel became a nation? Numbers 18:21 "I have given the children of _____ all the _____ in Israel for an inheritance, for their _____ which they serve, even the service of the _____."

When Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan, each tribe was given a portion of land except the Levites, who were to spend their time serving the Lord. The other tribes gave one-tenth of their income, or increase, to support them. As long as the sacrificial system was in force, the Levitical priests were to be supported by the tithe

2. How is the ministry to be supported today? 1 Corinthians 9:13,14

Paul insisted that those who preached the gospel should live of it, just as the Levites lived of their temple work. If the Jews paid tithe and offerings at God's request to keep up one temple service, should Christians, with the whole world to reach with the gospel, do less? We should learn a lesson from the early Christians, who gave sacrificially (Acts 4:34, 35) to care for needs within and without the church. They gave themselves, going from door to door and city to city-despite persecution-with the gospel (Acts 5:42; 8:1-4). Paul worked unceasingly so that he "might by all means save some" (1 Corinthians 9:22).

And isn't it better that ministers of the gospel be paid from the tithe instead of depending on the collection plate, church bazaars, bake sales, or the goodwill of some rich man in the church who might be offended and stop giving if the preacher preached God's message straight? How much better God's plan is than man's! No minister forsaking a smaller church for a larger one so he can get more pay! No minister afraid to speak the truth to his congregation for fear his source of income will be cut off!

3. By what two ways are we to keep God's storehouse full? Malachi 3:8; Psalm 96:8

The tenth belongs to God. It is His holy tithe. As long as His church exists we are not free to withhold our support. Tithe tests our honesty with God; offerings test our generosity.

Man's heart, by nature, is selfish, and God wants to make us like Himself-unselfish. He could do His work without our assistance, but He does not do this because He knows that giving our time, our money, and our service does something *to us*! It does not save us-God's grace alone has done that. Yet every act of faithful stewardship on our part, performed lovingly and willingly, becomes a means through which God slowly removes our selfishness and smallness, and through which He fills us with more of His love and selflessness until His image is completely restored in us.

Part 5-- BLESSINGS OR CURSES?

1. What does God call a person who fails to tithe? Malachi 3:8, 9

The selfish man reaps his own sowing. The unprofitable servant who merely receives, but does not impart, will be cast out (Matthew 25:30).

2. What does God promise to those who faithfully tithe? (verses 10,11; Proverbs 3:9, 10)

A command? Yes. Robbery if it is withheld? Yes. But did you ever read a promise like that? Do you see the adventure involved? Windows of heaven open! A blessing too too big to receive! The devourer rebuked! Wouldn't you like to experience that? You see, God's mathematics is not like man's. In His arithmetic, nine-tenths of an income with His blessing, is far more than ten-tenths without it! No man understands how it works, but every man who has tried it will tell you that it does. So really, it isn't costing anything at all! But even if it cost everything, would that be too much for the One who died for you?

3. How will God reward the liberal giver? Luke 6:38

Paul said, "He which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:6, 7).

There are three kinds of givers-the flint, the sponge, and the honeycomb. To get anything from a flint, you hammer it; then you get only chips and sparks. To get water from a sponge, it must be

squeezed. The more you squeeze, the more you get. The honeycomb, however, overflows with its own sweetness. Those who delight to give are the cheerful givers.

Thousands of stories could be told about those who have tried God's plan and have discovered that it is impossible to outgive God. One day a farmer who had always faithfully tithed, saw a dark cloud of locusts headed toward his farm. If the locusts ate his crop he faced financial ruin. With his family gathered about him he reminded God of the promise in Malachi 3:10, 11. Then they retired, sleeping securely in the knowledge that their heavenly Father never sleeps, but watches over His own. The next morning the farmer arose to examine his fields. The locusts had come right up to his fences on every side. Not a green stem was left on the other side, but God had rewarded the farmer's faithfulness by protecting his crops from the locusts.

4. Where does Jesus tell us to put our treasure? Matthew 6:20-21_____

Why?_____

Mark 8:36 "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall_____ and _____,"

God's great heart of love wants everyone to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). The value of one individual can never be estimated except in the light of Calvary. Although we have nothing to offer Him but a heart to be cleansed, and a commitment we cannot even keep in our own power, Jesus considered you and I of such inestimable worth that He was willing to go all the way to Calvary so that we might be His-His by our own choice. He wanted us so much that the cross was not too great a price to pay. And He would have paid that price if only one man, one woman, one child could be rescued. He would have done it just for you. The heart of the Saviour is lonely-just like your heart and mine. The heartache of separation from His prodigal children cannot be described. And it can be ended only by ending the separation. Only you and I can end it. Would you like to?

SUGGESTIONS FOR ADDITIONAL READING: *God's Plan for Social Security* by Q Mel Rees.