

Vines in your fields will not cast their fruit (Malachi, chapter 3, verses 7 to 12)

Ever since the time of your forefathers you have turned away from my decrees and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you," says the Lord Almighty. "But you ask, 'How are we to return?' "Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. You are under a curse--the whole nation of you because you are robbing me. Bring 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. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the Lord Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the Lord Almighty.

In our lives, we have a lot of important events. There are a lot of important things in our lives. Whether it is choosing what is more important, making a choice, we really have a lot of important things going on. I think out of all, the most important thing is making a promise. Only the human beings are able to make the promises as only human beings have personality. Have you seen dogs or cats making promises to each other that they will not fight against each other? Have you seen lions or tigers making a negotiation agenda together? Vines in your fields will not cast their fruit. Making promise is something that only human beings can do, out of all the creation that He made in His image. When you make promises, you do not do it by yourself but for sure, the other party exists. In making a promise, mutual trust for each other needs to be there, and if people do not trust each other, they cannot make a promise. The reason that the whole world rates North Korea as a country that cannot be trusted is because they do not keep their promises and they cannot be trusted. The most important thing in the relationship between the North and the South Koreans is trust for the promises made to each other. Depending on how well the people keep to their promises made, the standard of the citizens of the country can be rated, whether the country is an advanced country or a third world country. It is the same thing with the individuals. A person that keeps to the promises made is a person that can be trusted. A society or a nation has its credit rating. That is a degree of trust for the promises made. A relationship between God and people is the same. It is about believing the covenant about the promises made with God which cannot be seen. The Old Testament and the New Testament mean a promise of God. A promise is really important, so when God made a promise with human beings, He killed animals and took them as a sacrifice and with that blood, He made a promise. A promise means a life. The thing that we need to keep to, like our lives, is a promise. Our passage in the Bible also shows a promise. When Israelites were having a difficult time as captives in Babylon, they cried out and they promised God that they would go back to God and worship Him freely. God made a

promise with them and made them to be free from slavery. But people that were freed, as time went by, they didn't not keep to their promises. The worship service was just a formality, and even the priests began to be corrupt. In Malachi, chapter 1, verse 8, it talks about how when they were giving a sacrifice, people brought diseased, crippled, blind animals to God and said these were their gifts to God. When they did that, God called prophet Malachi and criticized him hard. In Malachi, chapter 1, verse 10, it says, 'oh, that one of you would shut the temple doors, so that you would not light useless fires on my altar! I am not pleased with you," says the Lord Almighty, "and I will accept no offering from your hands. Try to go and sell what you brought forward to me, try selling these animals in the market, would there be people that would buy these from you? Try giving it to the governor, would he be pleased with it? How could you give such a thing to God? When He was saying it, He was furious and said that it would have been good if there was a person that could close the door of the temple. It shows that people were that corrupt and their faith was deteriorated. God gave a hard time to the people that were corrupt. They were attacked by the Persian Empire and became a colony. With heavy tax imposed on them, their belongings were all taken away. Also, due to severe draught, pests and so on, extreme disasters began to happen. They were like a torn net. It was not a mere coincidence. But the problem was that people did not realize about their own faults, but they doubted about the promise of God. They were lazy about worshipping God, and they did tithing as a mere formality. They got married to non-Christian women and fell into debauchery. Their faith fell apart. Society had more crimes and began to be corrupt. In this kind of situation, God told people through prophet Malachi that the reason behind this pain was because they stole what was God's, as shown in Malachi, chapter 3, verse 8. He pointed out that it is the tithe and told them that tithing is a promise of a blessing. Try tithing properly. He will stop pests and will stop fruit from falling from the trees before the harvest time. He promised that He will take care of it. This is not just an one-time event. This is a lesson for all the believers of today and we need to know that this is a short cut to restore the blessings of God. I want all of you to live a happy life. I want you to live a blessed life. At least, I pray that you will not have any difficulty financially. The base for these kinds of blessings is tithing properly. It is a bit embarrassing to share it but this is my testimony. When I was starting a new church, in the very beginning, there was an eldress. She said that in a newly established church, if you talk about tithing, people would feel burdened and they will never come back, so do not share this. I thought it was one of best sayings, so whenever I preached, I said for months, that in our church, you do not have to do tithing. Please just enjoy receiving the grace of God. But one day in the early morning, I was preaching about the book of Malachi, the Holy Spirit told me off harshly in my heart. Are you trying to be a pastor that just wants to gather more people? Why do you not teach as per the Bible, why are you trying to block the door of the blessings for these people? I had this feeling. In that morning, I did not go back home and stayed there till next morning in tears. On that day, at

Sunday service, I shared about what the Holy Spirit was telling me about and confessed it honestly. I then made a confession that I will only share a sermon based on the Bible. That is right. When it comes to faith, you should not make a compromise. When you need more blood, if you add more water to your blood, the blood will get hardened and you will die. If we only live our lives according to the promise of God, He will take care of us, and will guide our way till the heaven. Let us pray that we will live by faith only. God needs to bless us, we cannot get it by force. In Severance hospital, there is a writing saying, 'We treat and God heals.' It says that the owner of life is God. That is right. This is a true confession of faith. First of all, we do our own studies, but God needs to allow us to succeed. Just because you had good scores, it does not mean that you will be successful. Secondly, we love but God needs to give us happiness. Not everyone that claims they love each other, is happy. Health, children, family, businesses, nations, God needs to bless them. Let us pray to live according to the way of God. Today's passage is about the tithing. Why did God say that we need to tithe? First of all, it is because everything is God's. Let us read verse 8. Will a man rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How do we rob you?' "In tithes and offerings. He said that not tithing is stealing. In this society, people that steal belongings of others are called as sinners. They go to jail. They do not get recognition from people. It is the same thing in a spiritual sense as well. Would God give blessings to thieves? How could he use a robber in a precious way? I will share a short testimony with you. This was what happened in a church a long time ago. When we were praying for offerings and tithes, a thief took offerings and fled away. On that day, there was a newcomer to church and this person had eyes open. This person saw a fleeing thief and used his legs to knock this person down. He also yelled that out loudly and this is a thief. That thief was caught. Elders insisted that they will send him off to police but a pastor said let him go, how this person could be an only thief? Among ourselves, how many people would be there that steal what is God's property? That day, I heard that there was a repentance movement across the whole church congregation. That is right. Israelites did not do their tithing properly to God. Just out of a formality, they did it to some extent. God said that they stole what belongs to God. Why did not God say that people took some of his property but said that people stole it? It is because He tried to say that the owner of the material property is not you but God. Do you know who the owner is of your time? Do you know who the owner of your business is? Do you know who the owner of your life is? It is saying, it is God. We are just stewards. Stewards mean that we do not own these things but managers of these things. We are the people that look after what is God's. We should not touch what belongs to God. But people thought that things that they were theirs and they touched these. So God called it a stealing. We should be honest when it comes to material things so that we can also become honest about other things. I heard that it is the Jews that do tithing most properly in the world. People ask why America only stands on the side of the Jews, not the Arabs. But there is a reason that America does it so. The Jews that live in America have

enormous influence in the areas that they work in, whether it is in politics, economy, social issues and also in legal field. If you go to New York in America, especially Manhattan area, there is a section where banks and financial securities institutions are all located together. Almost everywhere here, the Jews are placed and have an influence where they are placed. These people have about eighty percent of the world's diamonds. I saw a book titled as 'How could the Jews have wealth', here it says, the Jews are the people that do the tithing most properly in the whole world. When tithing is done properly, our nation prospers. Our next generations prosper and it is a promise that everything will go well and these blessings will be upon us. Setting aside what is God's is tithing. Let us look at verse 10 together. Bring 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. It says, bring the whole tithe into the storehouse. Whole tithe means everything, also in other words, sacrifice without defects, giving it wholly. It does not talk about giving to some extent. Tithing is not saving or helping others nor donating. It is giving wholly to God without any defects. It is setting what is God's aside. In Leviticus, chapter 27, verse 30, it says, 'A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the Lord, it is holy to the Lord'. It says, that it is giving a sacrifice to God what has been set side aside for God. In Genesis, chapter 14, verse 20, Abraham gave his tithe to Melchizedek king of Salem. Melchizedek that was a priest, blessed Abraham. In Luke, chapter 11, verse 42, it says, "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone." It says, even Jesus needs to do tithing. It says, we should practice giving without leaving the tithing undone. Tithing was done by a king, by a Levite, a prophet, and by people in general. Everyone should do tithing. In faith, there should be three kinds of attitudes. First of all, it is an attitude of having the Ten Commandments. God gave the Ten Commandments through Moses and commanded people to keep to these laws. Secondly, it is an attitude of having a cross in us. A son of God, that is greater than Moses, that is Jesus Christ, came to this earth, died on the cross and rose again. God promised that whoever believes in Jesus will have an eternal life. Thirdly, it is about having an attitude of giving tithes. In Malachi, chapter 3, verse 10, it says, 'bring 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'. He promised like this. We easily think that giving 1 out of 10 to God is tithing. But no, what I have, all ten of them are actually God's. It is not giving what I own. It is giving what God gave us back to God. We need to know that this is an attitude of tithing. Have a look at the blessings that God pours on the people that give tithe properly. Let us read from verses 10 to 12. It is a promise that He will open the gates of heaven. Let us read verse

10. 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. If the floodgates of heaven get opened, then gates of grace and gates of blessings will also be opened. If we believe in the Word of God and obey, gates of heaven will be opened, and there is a promise that He will pour out so much blessing that we will not have a room enough for it. The word that says, test whether He does it or not, it only comes out once here. Also He promises that we will not suffer from pests. Let us read verse 11. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit," says the Lord Almighty. Pests mean a herd of grasshoppers. In those areas, if grasshoppers came by, then almost everywhere, even the trace of grain could not be found as they devastated the whole region so people thought it as a disaster. Pests are thieves, burglars, disease, disaster and a catastrophe. Everywhere in rural areas, due to AI bird flu epidemic, a few hundred thousands of duck, chickens are buried alive under the ground. Also, these days, there is an emergency situation due to MERS epidemic. There is no way that we can stop these epidemic from spreading around all over the country. It is the same as damage that pests would have. God needs to stop this. We cannot do it with our strength. It is a promise that if we tithe properly, He will stop a disaster of pests. Thirdly, also there is a promise that vines in our fields will not cast fruit. In the latter part of verse 11, it says, vines in your fields will not cast their fruit. Pay a special attention to a part where it says, before harvest. In rural society, people need to have their fruit ripe so that they need to enjoy the joy of harvest. But when you have done all the hard work and before harvest, in many cases, due to typhoons or pests, many fruit is lost. It is a promise that God will stop all these things from happening. My dear brothers and sisters in Christ! Puritans that were going to go to the land of America on a ship Mayflower, to live by faith only, at the end, when they were dying, when their loved ones, their children were dying, they did not feed the seeds to them. When they had to eat the raw meat, alive animals, they did not try to eat the seeds. It is because that with these seeds, they had to help these to reproduce and spread around the new continent. They believed that in that way, they would have tomorrow. Tithing is like seeds. These need to be set aside and keep these so that we would have the future. I am not saying these just to give you a heavy burden or a guilty feeling this time. But faith is about living according to the Word of God, and it is a way to enjoy the blessings of God. If you have come to church for the first time, you can wait until your faith grows. But, if you have been serving and you call yourself a servant, I hope that you will do your tithing properly and honestly. Tithing is a promise of blessings. Vines in your fields will not cast their fruit before the harvest season. I pray all these in Jesus mighty name. Amen.