

MESSAGE – Momentum: Becoming Invested

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SCRIPTURE Malachi 3:10-12

<sup>10</sup> 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 there will not be room enough to store it. <sup>11</sup> I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not drop their fruit before it is ripe," says the LORD Almighty. <sup>12</sup> "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

SCRIPTURE Acts 4:32-37

<sup>32</sup> All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. <sup>33</sup> With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all <sup>34</sup> that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales <sup>35</sup> and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. <sup>36</sup> Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), <sup>37</sup> sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.

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I've always been completely in awe that churches run as they do.

I remember looking out at one of the congregations I have served, years ago, and being struck by the fact that we were there, making the ministry of the church happen simply because people give. And on a personal level, that I did what I did simply because people give. And I have wondered what motivates people to give in such a way. I share this because I am still in awe of this even though

- I know we are uncomfortable talking about money in church
- And I know we want church to be separate/different/distinguished from the world, that is driven, in many ways, by money.

I share this because I think it is to be celebrated that the existence of the church's mission and ministry – throughout the years - is made possible through people's gifts.

The story in Acts gives such an incredible picture of how that was true in the early church. Some folks don't like this story because it sounds like communism....which of course, is a modern construct. Luke, who wrote Acts, wasn't promoting one form of economy over another.

Rather, he was recording how the common life of Christian faith took shape;  
how the Spirit was working among people;  
and how the Jesus message was creating something new in the world:

The existence of the church's mission and ministry back then, as it is today, was made possible through people's gifts. And I wonder about them as I do about you and all those I have served through the years: what motivates you to give in such a way?

### **Perhaps we give as an act of worship.**

*A heart of gratitude.*

The biblical concept of the tithe traces its roots all the way back to Abraham – who gave 1/10 of his gains to Melchizedek, the high priest of Salem. Melchizedek blessed Abraham in a worship service that took place. Abraham and his people had gone out to battle to retrieve the people and goods that were taken captive by other area kings. The people captured included his nephew Lot. When their mission was accomplished and the people and goods rescued, the great high priest Melchizedek blessed Abraham. And Abraham gave Melchizedek 1/10 of what he had. (Genesis 14)

*Why did Abraham give? His generosity was a part of his worship experience.*

### **Perhaps we give out of a sense of duty.**

*It's what we are supposed to do.*

Years after Abraham, after his descendants were freed from slavery in Egypt, they were formed to be God's people. Their life as God's people was directed by the law. Part of that law included that they were to give a portion of their crops for the Lord's work. – Leviticus 27:30 "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.

Being dutiful can be what faithfulness looks like because when you tithe before making a plan with the rest of your money, your priority is a form of faithfulness. Faithfulness is a priority, not an afterthought. First fruits, not leftovers.

A shift to a mindset of "leftovers" is what Malachi was addressing.....

## **Perhaps we give in order to keep our lives and spirits balanced.**

*Generosity keeps me from being self-consumed...*

Do you get caught up in sale circulars? Facebook Marketplace? Thrifting? Shopping...looking for the next thing? Don't be surprised if you do....Consumerism is the American way of life, what the American dream is based on.... and it can completely overcome the human spirit.

As the great social commentator/comedian, George Carlin said, "Trying to be happy by accumulating possessions is like trying to satisfy hunger by taping sandwiches all over your body."

Ironically, we can be consumed by our material hungers. But generosity can save us from that.

Generosity helps us realign priorities.

Generosity steers us from the deadly sin of greed.

Generosity feeds our spirit where consumption cannot.

Generosity is a way to invest in our own spiritual lives as we are reminded to rely upon God to meet our needs.

## **Perhaps we give to be a part of a greater purpose than just ourselves.**

Giving can make us more aware of the needs of others.

*This last week at VBS, children brought items & coins*

*Sure it was a bit of a competition, but through it they collected a lot of personal and cleaning items for the Friday Food Truck clients and they raised over \$1,000 to add to our giving to Ukraine, bringing the church's total to over \$23,000.*

*Which makes us think of what the needs of the war-torn people of Ukraine are...*

Through their giving, they became a part of something bigger than their own lives and needs.

Generosity makes us a part of something that is eternal that will live beyond our own lives on earth.....*what we give away can never be lost.*

Responding to the needs of the people - was crucial to how Christianity took hold in people's hearts.

Yes, there was proclamation of Jesus' resurrection – that was the outward witness.

But there was also the need for an internal witness – how people lived with each other embodied the new life in Christ. James wrote about this reality:

*"<sup>14</sup> What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? <sup>15</sup> Suppose a brother or a sister is without clothes and*

*daily food. <sup>16</sup> If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead."*

In other words: What good is the proclamation of Jesus if nothing in this world changes because of it?

**Or Perhaps we give as an investment.**

Why would Barnabas liquidate his assets (sell his field) and offer the proceeds?

Why would we continue to give today?

Perhaps because we are investing in what God is doing in the world.

Investing in the Jesus message and movement.

Investing in the momentum of the church in the world.

Maybe that the real reason Barnabas gave; perhaps the real reason we give:

We have experienced God investing in us:

By giving us Jesus.

By giving us the Holy Spirit.

By entrusting us with a message.

By promising us eternal life.

Yes, maybe the real reason we give is because God has first given to us.

Let's pray: