

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon title: The Blessing of the First (Taken From Robert Morris's "The Blessed Life"), Genesis 4:3-5

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INTRODUCTION: There are principles, which run all through scripture, from the Old Testament through the New Testament, which stand true through the ages. Today, we are going to deal with *one* of the most important, if not *the* most important, of those principles—*the principle of first fruits*.

Some of you may be thinking already, *Here the pastor goes again talking about tithing, trying to get us to give money to the church*. But, I hope you will put the idea out of your minds and hearts today and listen to what I have to say about this principle, which is way beyond simply throwing some change in the offering plate.

I have three main points to my message today:

1. When God is first, everything else falls into place.
2. The tithe must be first.
3. Tithing is a faith issue.

First, WHEN GOD IS FIRST, EVERYTHING ELSE FALLS INTO PLACE.

Turn in your Bibles to Genesis 4:3-4.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 4:3-5 ³ *In the course of time Cain brought some of the fruits of the soil as an offering to the LORD.* ⁴ *And Abel also brought an offering—fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock. The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering,* ⁵ *but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.*

EXPLANATION: Have you ever wondered why God rejected Cain's offering, but accepted Abel's? It's right there in the scripture. Cain, *in the course of time* (interesting terminology—did he simply wait until all the rest of his bills were paid and then brought an offering?) brought an offering of the fruit of the ground. Abel

brought the first-born of his flock. Right away, he gave the first-born. He didn't know if there were going to be more sheep, but he sacrificed the first born to the Lord. He gave to God first. It belonged to the Lord.

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 13:2 ² *“Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.”*

EXPLANATION: This universal principle runs through the whole scripture. If the principle of the first is practiced—if God is first in your life—everything else will fall into place. The first of everything belongs to the Lord.

Look down at—

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 13:13 ³ *Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons.*

EXPLANATION: If you don't redeem the unclean with the clean, you're going to lose it anyway. The necks of the unclean had to be broken. The first portion redeems the rest, and it blesses the rest.

APPLICATION: Let me ask you a question: If God came and stood in this pulpit, or came to your house and said, “Look, here's the deal. If you will trust me enough to bring to me the first 10% of all you have, I will pour out provision on you like you won't believe ... and I'll even keep the devil from destroying you and your family. You can trust me on this. You can even put me to the test on this.”—

Would you believe him?

SCRIPTURE: Malachi 3:10-11 ¹⁰ *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. ¹¹ 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.*

EXPLANATION: This is not a “prosperity gospel.” This is employing the principle of first fruits. We don’t tithe to receive a blessing ... we tithe to be a blessing.

APPLICATION: You have two choices when it comes to the tithe. You can either bring it to the storehouse, i.e. the church, or you can steal it. Let me say this again: You either bring the tithe to the storehouse, or you steal it. Because, you see, the Lord has already told us that the first fruits are his. The first fruits belong to him, so if we don’t return them to him, we are stealing from him.

ILLUSTRATION: Suppose my house was going to be remodeled, and my wife and I couldn’t live in it for a month or so. Let’s suppose you and your family were going to be gone on an extended vacation for a month, and I asked you if we could use your house while you were gone. And, you graciously offered to do that and gave me the keys to your house.

So, a month passes by. Our house is finished, and your family returns from your trip.

You come to my house to pick up your keys, and I say to you, “Hey, dear friend, my wife and I have decided we want to give this house to you, so here are the keys. Enjoy!”

What?! Wait just a minute! The house was yours in the first place. It never belonged to me. I am simply returning to you what was yours to begin with.

APPLICATION: This is what many of us do concerning the tithe. We are given provision from the Lord over which we are to be stewards, and we act as if we own it. And, then, if we tithe 10% of it at all, we act as if this is a magnanimous, generous offering we are giving to the Lord.

Nope! That tithe already belongs to the Lord. We are simply returning to him what is already his. The tithe is the Lord’s. Offerings are above and beyond the tithe. When God is first, everything else falls into place.

Second, THE TITHE MUST BE FIRST.

Jesus said, where *our treasure is; is where our heart is* (Matt. 6:21). As your pastor, and I would not do this, but what if, as your pastor, I asked you where your treasure is. I am sure, most of you would say, in the Church—in the Lord. Then, what if I asked you to prove it by showing me your check book? Does your tithe ... what already belongs to the Lord ... come out of your earnings first?

ILLUSTRATION: Suppose I contracted with you to do a job for me, say repair the roof on my house, and we agreed on \$1,000. You do the job, and I pay you \$1,000 in \$100 bills. How much is the tithe? Easy ... \$100. Which \$100 bill is the tithe? Which one?... It's the first one you lay your hands on to spend. You don't buy groceries, a new pair of shoes, pay the electric bill, and only then if there is \$100 left, pay the tithe. No, you take that first \$100 bill and bring it to the church, or mail it, or send it in electronically. However, you take care of your banking.

Now, God's not legalistic. He knows our hearts. Say I forget and write a check for a bill before I get the tithe check written. God is not going to curse our income for the month. But, he knows my heart. He knows the motivation of my heart is to be a generous giver and to bring the tithe into the storehouse.

Let's review—

- When God is first, everything else falls into place.
- The tithe must be first, and—

Third, TITHING IS A FAITH ISSUE.

Let's just be honest here. It takes faith to tithe. It's a struggle. It takes faith to write a check to the church not knowing where the money is going to come from to pay the electric bill. But, it is also a *supernatural* issue. It is the faith of giving the first 10% which allows God to bless the 90%. God will bless the 90% ten times over and bring more provision and blessings through that 90% than he ever could or would if we hoard the whole 100%. God says, *TEST ME!*

ILLUSTRATION: I know a woman who talked about some lean years after her husband lost a job. They had moved on to other jobs but weren't making what they once did. They were barely able to pay rent and buy groceries. One Christmas, her college daughters each got a box of their favorite cereal for Christmas. It was really lean. One Monday, when she got her paycheck, she could either pay the electric bill

or pay the tithe. She very nervously wrote the tithe check and gave it. When I left work that day (she hadn't told anybody about her dilemma), there was an envelope on her desk. She opened it, and inside was a check made out to her for \$1,000. She's remained faithful with her tithe, and God has always provided. Recently, she opened an envelope which had three \$1,000 money orders in it. She has no idea who sent them.

CONCLUSION: Every time we get paid, it is a battle. Jesus said we can't serve God and mammon. Mammon was an Aramaic god of riches to whom pagans paid their money in order to be made rich. You see, when we don't return to God what is rightfully his, we are paying it to mammon. We think we will prosper more if we keep that 10%.

The bottom line is—if you don't tithe, then **YOU DON'T REALLY BELIEVE GOD!** You see, we believe what seems logical and natural to us, not what God says he will do for us supernaturally. I know a pastor friend who challenged his church to tithe for one year, and if they were not satisfied at the end of the year, he personally would return that money to them. I've never encountered a tither who regretted tithing. Ever. Never.

The sad fact is—if a church, our church, any church is struggling financially, it's probably because the members are not faithful in the tithe. It's not the bank's fault or the contractor's fault. God promises us if we bring the tithes into the storehouse, he will provide for us and protect us from the devourer.

Let's keep in mind several things: In the Old Testament, God required the tithe. In the New Testament, God says:

SCRIPTURE: II Corinthians 9:6-7 ⁶ *Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.* ⁷ *Each of you should give what you have decided in your heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.*

Generous people are happy people. If you've a tither, maybe it's time to increase your giving. You might think this is crazy.

On “Prove the Tithe Sunday,” here’s your opportunity to start. You might think you can’t make up for all the years of not tithing. Here’s my answer—Start now! Prove the tithe. Prove whether God’s Word is true or not. Tithe for a month and see what happens.

When I was in high school, I tithed from my meager income. I gave up my summers to work at a Christian youth camp. Camp work was a labor of love. We received \$30 or \$35 per week for our own expenses. One summer, an older woman who worked as a cook at the camp gave me her car. It was a gift from the Lord! And, I got a call from a clothing store in town. Someone had purchased a gift certificate for me to buy clothes for school. All of those were gifts from the Lord. God has been so good to me and to us as a family.

Now, with the tithe, don’t think of it as a tax or a franchise fee. Don’t think of it as something to dread.

How can a person tithe? You can give cash or write a check. You can go to our church website and give online, or you can go to your online bank account and give. I want us to set up a kiosk here at church with a computer so people can give electronically.

Let me talk to married couples right now. There is probably someone here who is married to someone who doesn’t believe in the tithe. This could create a dilemma. If you both have means of income with separate bank accounts, then tithe with your income. But, don’t allow your spouse’s disdain for tithing keep you from doing the right thing. I realize this might be an uncomfortable discussion, but you need to have it.

I hope this sermon hits a strong note with everyone. God is so faithful!

Bow your heads with me and ask yourselves ... *Father God, what are you saying to me today? Maybe you are already a tither and God is telling you to give a bigger offering to a missionary, or a mission’s project, or a needy person. Is there a single mom in your congregation who needs a car? Could you give her a car?*

I talked about first fruits. Have you surrendered your life to Jesus? Have you said to him, “I’m yours, Lord. I’ll do whatever you want me to do.” You can come to faith in Jesus today. We call it “being saved.” Only Jesus can save you from your sins.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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