THE MAN WHO ROBBED GOD. HOW MUDH DID HE TAKE?

Our message tonight is, “The man who robbed God! How much did he take?”

In the Philadelphia Inquirer Newspaper, a reporter wrote: “We are getting healthier, but our priorities are sick.” I want you to listen to this now. In the last years, Americans spent 15 billion dollars on alcoholic beverages. 8 billion dollars for tobacco. 2 billion for photographic equipment. 900 million on greeting cards. 915 billion dollars on lipsticks and other cosmetics. The money spent on candy and gum was equal to the sum the government gave to the National Institute of Health, the Mental Health Administration, and the Regional Medical Centers all combined.

We have a tendency to beg for what we need and buy what we want. And there’s something wrong with our priorities. Folk come out, and you lift an offering, and they grumble, grumble, grumble. Give a quarter and wished they’d kept it. And go out and waste $750 to every $1 given to the Lord. $915 billion trying to look pretty - and failing miserably.

Naturally, when the Lord has an organization on earth, it must be financed. God’s church must be financed, and ministers should not be ashamed to ask for money. But the reason ministers have to be cautious, is because crooks have ruined things. And that’s what makes so many ministers feel funny about asking for money. Not that it’s wrong to do it. But so many people abuse it and misuse it. And pull all kind of tricks in order to get it. And that’s wring in the sight of God, it’s a sin.

I’ve got all kinds of statements, profound statements, and if you skin over them you’ll miss the point. Here’s one of them: “Your need to give is greater than God’s need of your giving.” If you don’t think God can get along without you, keep yours. God has set the program up to combat selfishness in the human heart. And God requires that we be liberal with Him as a fact of faith. And if it were done honestly and right, nobody would be suspicious every time they go to church. I know somewhere people have given the impression that the church is a racket. I thank God that I belong to a church where we give more money per capita than the Roman Church. And it’s the busiest money in the world. If you don’t believe it, travel around the world and look. Many are surprised that we don’t beg for money. And the fact that we don’t means you can pay more attention to the truth and less attention to the offering plate.

But God has a system, by which His work can be finished, and it is not the will of God that a man with a big church gets rich, and a hardworking pastor with a little church can hardly make ends meet. I’m so happy for God’s system.

In Genesis 14 there is a story told about Abraham and his nephew Lot. Lot had been captured by the heathen kings, and taken away as a slave. And somebody came and told Abraham. Now Abraham was a fabulously rich man. And he had hundreds of servants. And the Bible says he armed his own servants and took off after the people who had captured his nephew, and when he caught them, he defeated them. And he brought back his nephew, and all the spoils of war.

Whoever wins a war, can through conquest take over the riches of the conquered. So Abraham not only brought back his nephew, but all the spoils he had conquered. And when he was on his way back, he met the priest of God who was Melchizedek. And Genesis 14:19, 20 says Abraham payed him tithe. Tithe! Abraham gave him a tithe for the work of God. A tithe of all he had brought back.

Now the word tithe means “a tenth.” It is Jewish either. When Abraham did this there were no Jews. They were the sons of the sons of Jacob. Amen.

In Leviticus 27:30, the Bible says, “…the tithe … is the Lord’s. it is holy unto the Lord.” God says it is His. He didn’t say He wanted you to give it to Him, it’s already His. Now ladies and gentlemen, only a few things are called holy. The Bible is called

holy. God is holy. The commandments are holy. The Sabbath is holy. And now we read that the tithe is holy. And God says it should be given to Him, it is His in the first place, it is not ours.

Now what's it for? The Lord said that this tithe should be brought into a central contribution place. He calls it the storehouse. And should be equally divided for the support of the ministry, and for carrying on of His work. The money is to be used for the support of the ministry and for preaching the gospel around the world. Amen.

Now not only are ministers supposed to live by it, but they are supposed to be paid tithe on what they get. The reason people are suspicious is because so much crookedness and greed is present. And people's confidence has been destroyed. But God's system is the best system.

I. What happens to preacher if people don't?

What if people don't do it? I'm going to the book of Nehemiah. What book did I say? Nehemiah 13:10. "And I perceived that the portions of the Levites had not been given them: for the Levites and the singers, that did the work, were fled every one to his field." The tribe of Levi was God's ministerial tribe. All the priests were of the tribe of Levi. But when the tithe was not paid, the Levites fled to their fields. Ladies and gentlemen, there are men today who will preach and then have to go to work for the city, or for the school department too.

Now there are some things Satan started, and you need to disabuse your mind of these things Satan has started. Number one, he started the idea that the ministry is easy. The reason people feel that way is because men have abused the office of the ministry. But if a minister is called of God and does His work, it is the hardest work in the city of Clearwater. You think it's easy you try doing what I'm doing.

Now these people didn't receive the portion God ordained. The Bible says they had to to go and work their fields. If a minister doesn't get a salary he can live on, he has to go to work. And when he goes to work, you don't get the word every Sunday, because it takes time to study the word. And you don't get the visits you need when you're sick. Amen. You don't get the pastoral care you need when he's gotta go to work, man's tired. No minister that is fulfilling the responsibility God calls him for works 8 hours a day. Plenty times preachers are on the road at 3:00 a.m. while all the working folks are in the bed asleep. Plenty times preachers go to the hospital at 12:00 or 1:00 and stay until daybreak. A minister's work is not regulated by the clock, like public work is. There is more work than he'll ever get done. Now a lazy one can spoil for everybody.

Nehemiah said, I looked for them, and they were all out in the field working. Verse 11 and 12. "11. Then contend I with the rulers, and said, why is the house of God forsaken? And I gathered them together, and set them in their place. 12. Then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasure." Nehemiah reestablished the system God had already set up for the support of hte ministry, for the support of the work. And he brought the preachers off from their jobs, put them back where they belong, that they might teach and feed God's people as God intended. So if the people don't pay it that's what happens to the preachers.

II. What happens to people if they don't?

If the people don't pay, what happens to them? I'm going to the last book of the Old Testament: Malachi 3:8, 9. Listen to what the Bible says. "8. Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation." Verse 10. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse …" You got that folks. God says the tithe is holy. God says the tenth is His.

What's the difference between tithes and offering? Tithe is a tenth of your increase. If you work and make $100 a week, a tithe is $10. If you make $1, a tithe is a dime. It's not the amount. It's the faithfulness. And God says if you don't pay it you're cursed with a curse. Some people say, "I can't afford to." Ladies and gentlemen, you can't afford not to. Anybody with all the debt some of us have ought to pay a double tithe. I wanna tell you something, ladies and gentlemen. We don't make much money. We don't live by the money that we make, we live by the blessings that God gives. You know this is my first year in ministry, and God has spared me sickness, a lot of hospital bills, I've never wrecked my car, you know, that is - that's a blessing! Amen. It's not what you make, it's how you are blessed.

And so the tithe is a tenth, but the offering is whatever you can give. Some of you can't give anything for offering. Offerings are up to you. God gives us all of it, and says give mine back. Someone might say, "Well why didn't God keep His when He had it!" If He did that you wouldn't develop character. It takes character to take God's off the top before you pay Mr. General Motors, Mr. Real Estate, Mr. Winn Dixie, Mr. Burdines. It takes character and faith to serve God first.

Listen, tonight I'm talking out of experience. You're looking at somebody the Lord has proved himself to. Not telling something I heard, I'm telling you what I know. God says, "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it." Ladies and gentlemen, God means what He says. I'm a witness. Don't be stingy with me. Now if you've been in a system where there's a lot of greed and people filling their own pockets God can understand your suspicions. But I wanna tell you, you've never seen such checks and balances in all your life as you see in this church that I belong to. I can produce a statistical report that will tell you how much was given for every man, woman, boy and girl in this church around the world down to the last penny. It's all accounted for. No under table deals. Not in God's system, you don't have to have suspicions. And when money comes into God's treasury, preachers don't even account for it. They could if they wanted to, but they don't want to. We don't touch it. I don't even wanna be around it.

Two things will ruin a minister faster than anything; women and money. My ministry and my calling is worth more than any woman that ever walked the top side of the earth. And there aint enough money in Clearwater to be worth a man's soul.

Now giving to the poor is not paying tithe. That's giving an offering. Tithing is a specified amount, which you give to the Lord, and it doesn't go to one preacher, it doesn't go to one church, it goes to be centrally collected and divided. If it's not done that way, it's not done according according to God's system. Now I hope you won't think I'm hard when I say this; when it comes to Sabbath, they all say God's Old Testament. When it comes to the law, they say that's Old Testament. But they all are teaching tithing now, even the Roman Church, because they need the money. They don't care where it comes from, they want the money, child. We don't make a lot, but we get all we need. Never gonna be rich down here, but we don't have to beg. Don't have to go and bite my tongue when God says preach something cause I want some money. I can say what God tells me, whether you like it or not.

God says let it come into the storehouse. Now you've gotta find a church that you can trust. Now the only one that I know that's doing it this way is the one that keeps the commandments of God. The Jews used to pay not ten percent, but a quarter of all their earning to the Lord. And the richest people in the world to this day are Jews. If we do what God has said we'll be some of the richest people in the world. But our motives

must be pure. We must not do it in order to get, but we must do it because we love. If we do it to get, that's selfishness. And don't give to things, don't give to an organ an a piano, but give to God.
In 2 Chronicles 31:5-10, the Bible says when the people brought to God then God blessed them. But on the other hand in Haggai 1:6, the Bible says, there are some people who look after their own houses, and let the Lord's house go wanting, the Bible says they earn their wages and put it in a bag with holes. Make a lot of money and cant see where it goes. When you do what God says, you'll catch sales. And you'll come home wondering where you got all that stuff with that little bit of money. On the other hand, God says if you're selfish, I'll blow on it. If you made $1,000 a week and spent $950 on doctor bills, you've only made $50. It's not what you make, it's how you're blessed.
If I had time I could stand here and tell you story after story after story of my own experiences, my friends' experiences, and folks I don't even know. One time out in the middle west, a man had a wheat field. And the locust were coming destroying the wheat. And the man dropped on his knees and said, "Lord, you know I've been faithful, I've been paying tithe, you promised that they would not destroy the fruits of my ground." And when the plague passed all the wheat fields were destroyed but his. God keeps His word.
A man in Camden, New Jersey, lived on a big blueberry firm. He worked for a plantation owner and had two acres of his own, and a drought came. And the man who owned the plantation had to bring in hundreds of thousands of dollars worth equipment and shoot water every which-a-way, day and night. But this man couldn't do that. So what did he do? He prayed. And when the blueberry harvest came, you couldn't tell the difference between his blueberries that hadn't been watered, and those of the other man that had. God keeps His word.
Jesus paid it all, all to Him we owe. Christ paid all for us, and He tests our characters by asking us to give Him what belongs to Him. Suppose Jesus had been selfish, suppose he had held back, suppose Christ had decided He would not go along with us. God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have an everlasting life. God gave all. Heaven gave all. Jesus gave all. And God asks His people to be faithful. This is the way God finances His Church. This is the way to pay the preachers without using your own money. And God says I will bless you.
Ladies and gentlemen, the most beautiful life a person can live, is a life of obedience to God. It's a happy life. It's a joyous life. God never fails. Do you love Jesus tonight! Do you love Jesus enough to obey Him? Let's stand and tell Him so in our prayers. God bless you as you stand.
Dear Lord, thank you for all you've done for us. Thank you for the truth that we might know how to live for Thee. Give us grace and wisdom and knowledge and a desire to do thy will. And Lord help us not to let Satan scare us into thinking we're gonna be in bad shape if we obey God. Help us to be faithful, not to see what we can get, but in love to Thee, because Thou hast given so much to us. Bless us now with a spirit of obedience, we ask in Jesus' name.
There is hope for you, who keep not back by stealth.
There is hope for you, He gives us all our wealth.
There is hope for you, from Him comes life and health.
There is hope for you, He blesses in pantry and store.
There is hope, I say, He always gives us more.
There is hope for you, He's standing at the door.