

Anglican Church Noosa

SOW GROW GIVE

Malachi 3:1-12, 2 Corth 9:6-15

Rev'd Chris Johnson

The title of our series is Sow Grow Give and this morning we come to a verse which speaks into this theme so well, *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."* This is generally true in everyday life and it is especially true in the spiritual realm.

I say generally true in every day life because there are seasons in life when you put in lots and lots of effort and there seems to be very little reaping. An obvious example is a farmer in a time of drought. He can put in a lot of time preparing the ground. Planting the seed; but if the rain doesn't come there is little or no harvest.

But on the whole,

-If you invest wisely or put in the hard work, you reap a great harvest.

-If you are lazy and don't put in the effort there is little reward.

I think of my first year at University. I didn't really know what I wanted to do when I left High School so a Business degree was a good general course that could open up doors in any number of areas, even the church; although I don't think any other graduates headed in that direction.

But my first year in this Business degree was a disaster; I only passed 4 out of 10 subjects. I had this idea that if I put in the same effort I put in at High School I would sail through Uni and get a degree. I was to be a bitterly disappointed.

Mind you I thought I was working hard. But I came to learn what it really meant to work hard, to sow bountifully and eventually reap the reward of a degree.

Think about the parable of the talents, or the bags of gold. The first two servants were given five bags and two bags of gold, and invested it well. They sowed generously, and they reaped generously – the first one turned five bags into 10 bags of gold and the second one turned two bags into four bags of gold.

But then we have the third servant who buried his one bag of gold in the ground. He sowed sparingly, and didn't just reap sparingly, he reaped nothing. The money he was trusted with produced nothing. We are told he was lazy. He didn't put in any effort, and what he reaped was the Master's displeasure.

By telling this parable Jesus endorses this principle, *"Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously."*

Jesus of course was talking about the Kingdom of God. And Paul writing to the Corinthians is also talking about the Kingdom of God. His exhortation is for the

Corinthians to sow generously into the Kingdom. And in this case, the Kingdom is the Jewish church in Jerusalem which was in need. Paul is exhorting the Gentiles in Corinth to support their Jewish brothers and sisters who were facing a drought and in great need.

What is the harvest for the Kingdom of God if the Corinthians respond generously? Paul talks about four things,

1. Generous givers will be blessed with a harvest of righteousness V10. Notice the blending here of the physical and spiritual. Generous giving will provide bread for the hungry Jewish church. There will be a literal physical harvest of food for God's people. But there will also be a harvest for the givers. They are not promised great riches but a harvest of righteousness. This is talking about -their character, their life with Christ, their growth into the righteousness that comes from God. So there is a harvest for the receiver and the giver. Food for the receiver, righteousness for the giver.
2. Secondly, generous giving doesn't diminish the pie, it simply creates a wider spirit of giving. v11 you will be enriched in every way, so that you can be generous on every occasion. As someone said to me after my sermon last week, "You know the more I give away the more he seems to give me." Now that may not be universally true, but I can certainly testify to the same thing.
3. Thirdly, generous giving promotes great thanksgiving to God.
End v11, "Your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God."

V12 talks about, "supplying the needs of the Lord's people overflowing in many expressions of thanks to God." So as the Jewish Christians enjoy their bread they will give thanks to God.

And then in **V13** when others hear about this giving and receiving and that it is motivated by the gospel they also will give praise to God. Outstanding acts of obedience always lift believers hearts and they want to praise God.

4. Fourthly, such practical acts of kindness create bonds of affection between the giver and receiver. V14 talks about the hearts of the Jewish believers going out to the Gentile believers in Corinth. Jewish believers will recognise the grace of God at work in the Corinthians.

One of the reasons Paul was so keen about this collection was his conviction that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile. And he wanted the original Christians, the Jewish church in Jerusalem to recognise that God was at work in the Gentiles bringing them to genuine saving faith.

So this practical act of giving has deep theological roots. Yes, it is because there are poor brothers and sisters in Christ who are hungry; but it is also because

Christ has broken down every barrier that cuts people off from one another. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

“If we sow sparingly we also reap sparingly, if we so generously we will reap generously”; and here Paul sees this generous reaping in terms of

1. a harvest of righteousness in the giver;
2. a wider spirit of giving
3. an outpouring of thanksgiving to God;
4. and new bonds of affection created between people who were originally enemies Jew and Gentile.

Paul is so excited he concludes this section with an outburst of praise, v15 *“Thanks be to God for his indescribable gift!”*

Now let’s look at our Old Testament passage, Malachi Chapter 3.
The prophet here is calling the people of God to repentance.

The people of God in the 5th Century BC had forgotten God. They were skimping on their tithes and offerings, robbing God. Through the prophet, God says to the people, *“Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house.”*

And God promises an abundant harvest if they will truly repent. The Old Testament did promise physical blessings such as a large crop.

In the New Testament God may sometimes bring physical blessings for example a healing, a successful business, a good marriage, but none of these things are guaranteed in the New Testament.

In the New Covenant, we have all the blessings of the Gospel –

- the forgiveness of our sins,
 - the gift of the Holy Spirit,
 - the blessing of belonging to God’s church,
 - adoption as God’s sons and daughters,
 - the armour of God for the spiritual battle,
 - the fruit of the Spirit
- and the list could go on, just read the New Testament.

One of the ways we show our thankfulness to God for all of these gifts he’s given us in Christ is through our tithes and offerings.

God says to bring a whole tithe into the storehouse. What does it mean to bring a whole tithe? In the New Testament, the word used is generous. We have to bring a generous offering.

Let me ask you a question, which is a more generous offering?

\$10 or \$10,000

First thought is the \$10,000

But on second thoughts, it all depends... doesn't it?

It all depends on the income of the person giving the gift.

If the \$10 was given by a 10 year-old earning \$20 a week pocket money.

That would be extremely generous offering, wouldn't it?

And if the \$10,000 was given by an entrepreneur worth billions and billions of dollars, that suddenly doesn't look that generous after all.

Generosity has to do with the proportion of one's income, the percentage one is giving away. Giving a significant percentage of what you have at your disposal is the true indicator of generosity.

I want to encourage you to use percentage giving as a part of your discipleship.

I want to point you to the "Sow Grow Give" brochure.

Please read the leaflet prayerfully as you work out what your financial commitment will be this coming year. Then look at the insert about percentage giving. You'll see various levels of income down the left-hand side and percentages across the top. Work out what your giving is at the moment and see if you could move a column to the right.

The OT starting point was 10%. God's people gave 10% of their crops or income. It was a way of saying Yahweh is Lord, he comes first in my life.

In the New Testament the 10% tithe is assumed, but not commanded.

If you are on a very limited income, on the pension; then a much smaller percentage might be appropriate. It's important you have enough to cover the basics – food, clothing, shelter etc.

If on the other hand you have a large income you should be looking at giving ever larger percentages away. Don't limit yourself to 10%, that's not New Testament Christianity. Challenge yourself each year to keep pushing it higher. Ask God to expand your heart for the Kingdom and let your treasure follow your heart. Or if you don't feel anything in your heart just increase the percentage anyway and let your heart follow the treasure. Remember Jesus said where your treasure is there will your heart be also.

As well, look for extra opportunities to give. If you do a big spend on something that is extra-ordinary and special. Why not add a tithe to it. When Lynda and I do something special we add a 10% tithe onto that, simply to say thank you to God that it was possible. You might be much more generous than us and add 15% 20%.

Also have you thought about a bequest. Once you know your family are catered for, what Kingdom causes are you leaving your money too, so God's people are blessed for many years to come. We currently can only afford four pastoral staff because of

bequests. We are being blessed through the generosity of those who have gone before us. Will we pass it on to future generations.

I want to let you know that currently our regular offertory income is \$28,000 behind our Budget target. However we have received a number of one off special gifts and this is keeping us financially buoyant. So we are doing ok. But we would like to make up that 28,000. If you're in a place to be able to do some heavy lifting in this financial area, your support would be greatly appreciated.

But all of your giving doesn't have to go to the church. I strongly encourage you to put aside some of your tithe to the mission agencies that God places on your heart. I know that most of you already do this through the generous giving that comes in through the mission offertory at the back of the church each week. Our mission giving at the moment is \$39,377 which is 12.6% of Offertory. Our target is 11% so that is very encouraging to see. There is a mission heart in this congregation and that warms my heart no end.

Also remember the poor in your giving. The Bible regularly speaks about God's heart for the poor and that those with plenty should share generously with those who have little. Through your church and mission giving some will make its way to the poor, but I encourage you to think about spontaneous giving when you see someone in need.

And I know that happens in this church where members of the body who are going through a tough time are given financial support by those who have the means. May that long continue.

So my friends may God bless you richly as you work out what your financial commitment to God's Kingdom work will be for the coming year.

Sow Grow Give.

Sow into the Kingdom.

Grow in Jesus.

Give generously.

Remember, "Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously.