

“The Priority Test”—The Blessed Life (1 of 4)

Who’s On First: Abbott & Costello video

I love Abbott & Costello. I grew up on their Saturday morning movies...

That famous skit asks a very important question: “Who’s on first?” That’s what we want to ask today as we begin our sermon series entitled, *“The Blessed Life.”*

Today we begin this series with **“The Priority Test”** as we ask, “Who’s on first?”

Did you know that there are approximately 500 verses in the Bible on prayer. There are approximately 500 verses in the Bible on faith. But there are over 2,000 verses on money and possessions. And approximately half of Jesus’ parables were on money (16 out of 38)!

Money and possessions are actually a test that God gives us: *“If you are faithful in little things, you will be faithful in large ones. But if you are dishonest in little things, you won’t be honest with greater responsibilities. And if you are untrustworthy about worldly wealth, who will trust you with the true riches of heaven? And if you are not faithful with other people’s things, why should you be trusted with things of your own?”* Luke 16:10-12 (NLT)

Today we’re going to look at what the O.T. has to say about our money and possessions. Next week we’ll look at what the N.T. has to say about our money and possessions.

*The issue is about what is to be **Sacrificed or Redeemed...***

Let me begin to day with an Old Testament illustration:

“Dedicate to me every firstborn among the Israelites. The first offspring to be born, of both humans and animals, belongs to me.” Exodus 13:2 (NLT) (The firstborn belongs to God. It’s his.)

“You must present all firstborn sons and firstborn male animals to the LORD, for they belong to him. A firstborn donkey may be bought back (or Redeemed) from the LORD by presenting a lamb or young goat in its place (or Sacrificed). But if you do not buy it back (or Redeem it), you must break its neck. However, you must buy back (or Redeem) every firstborn son.” Exodus 13:12-13 (NLT)

This is a principle that you will find throughout the Bible—the first must be sacrificed or redeemed. Every time one of your animals had their first born you had to either sacrifice the animal or redeem it. If the animal was an unclean animal (in this case a donkey) you could redeem it by sacrificing a clean animal (such as a perfect lamb) in its place. The lamb had to be without “spot or blemish” in order for it to be an acceptable sacrifice.

The firstborn lamb had to be sacrificed. That takes faith! You didn’t know if that lamb was going to produce anymore lambs or not. You couldn’t wait until that sheep had 10 lambs and then decide offer 1 to God. God wants the first. God wants the best.

That firstborn that “sacrificed” and offered to God then “redeemed” the rest. Do you realize what this represents? Look at John the Baptist’s words: *“The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”* John 1:29 (NLT)

Jesus was the “first” and he was “sacrificed” and offered to God then “redeemed” the rest of humanity. In the Bible the “clean” had to be sacrificed for the “unclean.”

We are “unclean.” Every person is born “unclean” before God—we’ve all sinned and fallen short of God’s perfect standards. The only way for an “unclean” person to be made “clean” is for an already “clean” person be sacrificed in their place! The only “clean” person was Jesus!

Jesus was born “spotless and without blemish” so that he could make us “spotless and without blemish.” What Jesus did for you is simple: He died in your place, and he was the only one who could do so. Jesus, God’s first-born, died to make you clean!

*Let’s talk about **Putting God First...***

Let’s walk through the Bible and catch a glimpse of people who put God first, and what the result was in their life with God: *“When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. Abel also brought a gift—the best of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.”* Genesis 4:3-5 (NLT) Why did God accept Abel’s offering and reject Cain’s

offering? What did Abel offer? *“The best of the firstborn.”* What did Cain offer? *“Some of this crops.”* God doesn’t want “some,” he wants the best and the first!

Let’s jump down to Abraham: *“After Abram returned from his victory over Kedorlaomer and all his allies, the king of Sodom went out to meet him in the valley of Shaveh (that is, the King’s Valley).*

“And Melchizedek, the king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, brought Abram some bread and wine. Melchizedek blessed Abram with this blessing: ‘Blessed be Abram by God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, who has defeated your enemies for you.’

“Then Abram gave Melchizedek a tenth of all the goods he had recovered.” Genesis 14:17-20 (NLT) What did Abraham do? He gave 10% of his possessions to God. This was Abraham’s automatic response to God’s blessing in his life!

A while later God sends a difficult test to Abraham, *“Some time later, God tested Abraham’s faith. ‘Abraham!’ God called. ‘Yes,’ he replied. ‘Here I am.’*

“Take your son, your only son—yes, Isaac, whom you love so much—and go to the land of Moriah. Go and sacrifice him as a burnt offering on one of the mountains, which I will show you.” Genesis 22:1-2 (NLT) Isaac was Abraham’s firstborn and only son and God wanted him. This was the test—will you sacrifice your firstborn to me? Abraham responded in faith and God provided a sacrifice to die in Isaac’s place. Isaac was redeemed because a ram was sacrificed!

Let’s look at Jacob: *“Then Jacob made this vow: ‘If God will indeed be with me and protect me on this journey, and if he will provide me with food and clothing, and if I return safely to my father’s home, then the LORD will certainly be my God. And this memorial pillar I have set up will become a place for worshiping God, and I will present to God a tenth of everything he gives me.’* Genesis 28:20-22 (NLT) Jacob is such a schemer! He makes a deal with God! If, if, if... then, then, then!

Do you notice that this is all before God gave his people the Law through Moses? That’s right! So many people make the issue of giving 10% of your money and possession to God as an issue of Old Testament Law. Here’s the thinking of some people, *“Since this was an issue of the Law, I’m not a Jew and besides that, I’m a N.T. Christian and I’m not bound to the Law.”*

But it dates back long before God gave the Israelites the Law through Moses. Just like the Sabbath! The Sabbath was a principle that dates back long before the Law. It began at Creation!

Tithing and the Sabbath are actually principles that pre-date the Law of Moses. The Law just formalized them. And by the time Jesus came on the scene, the Jewish people had perverted their original intent and they became burdens to the people.

But let’s go back and see what God actually said to his people: *“You must set aside a tithe of your crops—one-tenth of all the crops you harvest each year. Bring this tithe to the designated place of worship—the place the LORD your God chooses for his name to be honored—and eat it there in his presence. This applies to your tithes of grain, new wine, olive oil, and the firstborn males of your flocks and herds. Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God.”* Deuteronomy 14:22-23 (NLT) What was that? “Doing this will teach you always to fear the LORD your God.” Why? *“One tenth of the produce of the land, whether grain from the fields or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD and must be set apart to him as holy.”* Leviticus 27:30 (NLT) It belongs to “whom?” And must be set apart as “what?” In fact, in Deuteronomy 26, God tells his people to *“remove the holy tithe from your house.”* Don’t keep it for yourself, or it will become cursed!

Have you ever looked at the story of the capture of Jericho through these eyes? *“Jericho and everything in it must be completely destroyed as an offering to the LORD. Only Rahab the prostitute and the others in her house will be spared, for she protected our spies.*

“Do not take any of the things set apart for destruction, or you yourselves will be completely destroyed, and you will bring trouble on the camp of Israel. Everything made from silver, gold, bronze, or iron is sacred to the LORD and must be brought into his treasury.” Joshua 6:17-19 (NLT)

It all belonged to God, he just wanted the first set aside in faith! (Achan’s sin-Defeat at Ai.)

“Honor the LORD with your wealth and with the best part of everything you produce. Then he will fill your barns with grain, and your vats will overflow with good wine.” Proverbs 3:9-10 (NLT)

Checkbook & Calendar: Are you a Reservoir or a River?

What happens when you keep it all for yourself? Look at what happened to Israel: *“Should people cheat God? Yet you have*

cheated me! 'But you ask, 'What do you mean? When did we ever cheat you?' 'You have cheated me of the tithes and offerings due to me. You are under a curse, for your whole nation has been cheating me. Bring all the tithes into the storehouse so there will be enough food in my Temple. If you do,' says the LORD of Heaven's Armies, 'I will open the windows of heaven for you. I will pour out a blessing so great you won't have enough room to take it in! Try it! Put me to the test!'" Malachi 3:8-10 (NLT) TEST ME!!! Some of you have never tithed because you think it will be too difficult. Sometimes it is difficult, but it's always possible if you put God first! Let God bless "all" of your money!

Illus: 10 dollar bills, *"How much is the Lord's?" "How much is the tithe?" "Which one is first?"*

Illus: Do you want 100% of your money blessed? Give the first 10%

Illus: Do you want all of your money cursed? Keep it all to yourself!

Illus: *"But I give it in other ways!"* That's just a "rationalization." Rational Lie.

Our nation is under a curse when it comes to money and possessions. We are the richest people on the planet and yet we hoard it all for ourselves! (Average Tithe is under 2%)!!!!

I believe that many Christians have fallen under the "curse" of money and possessions! But it doesn't have to end this way!

Illus: Hezekiah's reforms: *"The people of Israel responded immediately and generously by bringing the first of their crops and grain, new wine, olive oil, honey, and all the produce of their fields. They brought a large quantity—a tithe of all they produced. The people who had moved to Judah from Israel, and the people of Judah themselves, brought in the tithes of their cattle, sheep, and goats and a tithe of the things that had been dedicated to the LORD their God, and they piled them up in great heaps. They began piling them up in late spring, and the heaps continued to grow until early autumn. When Hezekiah and his officials came and saw these huge piles, they thanked the LORD and his people Israel!"*

"Where did all this come from?" Hezekiah asked the priests and Levites.

"And Azariah the high priest, from the family of Zadok, replied, 'Since the people began bringing their gifts to the LORD's Temple, we have had enough to eat and plenty to spare. The LORD has blessed his people, and all this is left over.'"

2 Chronicles 31:5-10 (NLT) TEST ME!!!

The Priority Test: Blessed vs. Cursed (God working for you or against you?)

"The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God first in your lives." Deuteronomy 14:23 (LB)

Christin Ingram's Email.

So, what will it be for you? Is God first? Does he receive your best? If so, then you are blessed. If not, what's stopping you? Fear of God's blessing?