

Sermon Notes “Stewardship”

Material for this message was drawn from a series of sermons by Dr. Calvin Wittman (2009)

Focal Scripture Reference: 2 Corinthians 5:19

Article 13 of the Baptist Faith and Message addresses the topic of stewardship. When the topic of stewardship comes up, most people automatically think about money. While money is one of the primary ways the scripture speaks of stewardship, God's concept of stewardship goes far beyond just how we use money.

When you dig a bit deeper, you realize that it speaks to our theology and our understanding of discipleship as a whole. The truth is stewardship speaks about the condition of our hearts.

Article 13 of the Baptist Faith and Message says this:

“God is the source of all blessings, temporal and spiritual; all that we have and are we owe to Him. Christians have a spiritual debtorship to the whole world, a holy trusteeship in the gospel, and a binding stewardship in their possessions.

They are therefore under obligation to serve Him with their time, talents, and material possessions; and should recognize all these as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others.

According to the Scriptures, Christians should contribute of their means cheerfully, regularly, systematically, proportionately, and liberally for the advancement of the Redeemer's cause on earth.”

As I mentioned earlier, stewardship involves more than merely the use of money. Our doctrinal statement speaks to the reality of our stewardship of the gospel.

2 Corinthians 5:19 says, **“And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”**

Among all of the things God has entrusted to our care, the gospel is by far the greatest. However, when Jesus talks about stewardship, He almost always does so by using money or material wealth as an example. One reason for this is that money is something to which everyone can relate. We live in a world obsessed by money, so it is something we all understand.

Second, Jesus knows that how we use money will demonstrate where we place our priorities, whether we are living for this world or the world to come.

Finally, Jesus knows that because the love of money is the root of all kinds of evils, each of us will be tempted to misuse that which He had entrusted to us, and that this is a good measure of our true devotion to Him.

So let's begin with a practical understanding of what stewardship is, then some truths that come out of that understanding and we'll finish with some practical suggestions for applying those truths in our Christian life.

1. What is Stewardship?

Ron Blue, who wrote Master Your Money, defines stewardship as the, "Use of God-given resources for the accomplishment of God-given goals." When we talk about stewardship within the context of the Christian life, we first mean God is the owner of all things. This would include our salvation, the gospel message, our churches, our education, our time, our energy, our thought life, the words we speak, the house in which we live, the cars we drive, our children, our spouse, our finances, our job. In essence, everything we have belongs to Him and He has entrusted it to us for a specific purpose.

What is that purpose?

Jesus tells us in **Matthew 6:33**, **"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."**

In other words, the purpose for which God has entrusted to us that which He owns is so we can be busy about advancing His kingdom. Stewardship is comprehensive. It is using all of our God given resources to accomplish God's purpose and desires here on earth.

2. Truths About Stewardship

A. God Owns it All

To put it simply, if you are a Christian you don't own a thing. In the system of the world you may have legal rights to those things that God has entrusted to your care, but make no mistake about it, you don't own them, God owns them and He can demonstrate that ownership at any time.

Jesus makes this point very clear in **Luke 12:16-21** when He told the parable of the rich fool. You remember the story, **"The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. ¹⁷He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' ¹⁸Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.**

¹⁹And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." ' ²⁰"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' ²¹"This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

So, God owns it all and has entrusted what is His to you. This means that you are a trustee or a steward of that which belongs to someone else; He has left it in your care, but He has retained ownership. Now mind you, this idea that God owns all things stands in stark opposition to the secular thought of our day that tells us that we are self sufficient, self-made men and women. But we must ever be mindful that God's word is very clear that He owns it all, irrespective of what we may feel and of what the world around us may say. He owns it and has entrusted it to our care.

B. God Will Hold us Accountable

When Jesus comes back, He is going to hold us accountable for that which He has entrusted to our care. He will call us to account to see if we have been faithful or faithless stewards.

Listen to the words of Jesus in **Luke 12:42-48**.

"Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their food allowance at the proper time? ⁴³It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. ⁴⁴ I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

⁴⁵But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. ⁴⁶The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

⁴⁷"That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows. ⁴⁸But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Each of us will stand before Jesus someday and answer as to whether or not we used His resources to accomplish His purposes.

C. How We use His Resources Reveals Our Hearts

In **Matthew 6:24-34**, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches about the Christian and riches. He starts by telling us that we cannot serve God and riches. We cannot spend our lives in love with God and in pursuit of the things of this world, merely for the sake of material gain. While there are those who will tell you otherwise, Jesus says it simply is not so. Instead, we are to spend our lives in pursuit of spiritual things, pursuits with eternal value.

In **Matthew 6:19-21**, Jesus says this:

¹⁹“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

What does this mean? It means whatever is of greatest value to us, whatever captivates us so that we spend our lives pursuing it will have the affection and devotion of our entire being. It is here that how we view and use financial resources demonstrates the true nature of our hearts. This is where stewardship crosses over into the realm of discipleship. If you are truly a disciple of Jesus Christ, your belief will be evidenced in that:

- a) You acknowledge that everything you have is His;
- b) You live in light of the reality that he will hold you accountable and expects you to use it to accomplish His desires; and,
- c) You will demonstrate your devotion to Christ by the way you use that which He has entrusted to your care.

You cannot give your life to Jesus and keep any part of it back for yourself. That's not surrender. Surrendering your life to Jesus, taking up your cross and following Him means giving it all, time, talents, treasures, everything. That is the picture of stewardship the scripture paints for us.

D. Stewardship Requires Faith

Look around you and you will see people who do not know God who are prospering.

The Psalmist said this in **Psalm 73:2-3**, when he says, **“²But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. ³ For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”**

How easy it is, especially in this area of stewardship, to walk by sight and not by faith! But the psalmist comes back in **verse 17** and says, **“Till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny.”** You see, it is easy to be tempted by the prosperity of the wicked, until we come into God's presence and recognize that eternity is reality and that this life is temporal.

3. Practical Suggestions for Being a Good Steward

A. Analyze How You Use Your Time, Talents, and Treasures

The best place to start is by taking an honest look at your life. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth to examine themselves to see if they are in the faith. Do you really believe God owns everything you have? Is your belief authenticated by your actions? Can others, by watching how you spend your time, your abilities and your money, clearly see that your one overwhelming desire is to expand the kingdom of God?

B. Get Your Priorities Straight

Jesus is very clear and plain. He says that we are to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. What does it mean to seek first the kingdom of God? It means that in everything you do, your chief desire is to further the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

In **Matthew 16:26**, Jesus says, **“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?”**

Are you laying up treasure here on earth, or are you laying it up in heaven?

C. Take Action

Do any of your priorities need to be realigned with God's priorities? Is it in the area of your time? Is it in your possessions? Or, is it in the area of your finances? It's time for each of us to start serving, to start giving and to start living like Jesus owns it all and we are just stewards; stewards who, when their Master returns, want to be found faithful.