

Faith Walk! - Sermon Discussion

Date : 21 July 2024

Sermon Title : Understanding Stewardship

Speaker : Rev John Foo

Text : 1 Corinthians 4:1-2

INTRODUCTION

Today is Stewardship Sunday, one week before Pledge Sunday and these two Sundays are related because in church, we often use the word stewardship regarding time, talent, and treasure. We are called to be good stewards of our time, talent and treasures so every year the church sets aside a couple of Sundays to remind ourselves over the pulpit what we are supposed to be doing in these three areas. On Stewardship Sundays we usually focus on time and talent while on Pledge Sundays we talk about treasures. This sermon will not be about how we are to spend our time wisely or exercise our talents and gifts diligently but to understand 'stewardship' as a whole.

STEWARDSHIP – WHAT IT IS NOT!

Our passage today tells us about being stewards of the mysteries of God and the context is that Paul is reminding the Corinthian believers to view him and the rest of the apostles as faithful stewards dispensing the doctrines of the Gospel. Today, we will not focus on that but on what being a steward means as there are principles governing the stewardship of everything in our lives.

As far as God is concerned stewardship is not how efficiently and effectively we handle our time, talent and treasure. Someone with good time management does not automatically make him a good steward of time although the world may look at it that way.

3 THE PRINCIPLES OF GOOD STEWARDSHIP

Paul's instructions to Timothy in 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 is regarding stewardship: "*This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful*". These instructions provide three principles to help us understand stewardship – what kind of stewards we are to be, and our attitude to what is entrusted.

1. God expects us to be stewards, not owners

This makes a whole lot of difference to the way we view things in our lives. We often forget that nothing belongs to us and we do not own anything at all in our lives. Many people tend to live and behave as if they own everything and everything belongs to them.

For we walk by faith, not by sight. 2 Corinthians 5:7

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Psalm 24:1 says,

*“The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it.
The world and all its people belong to Him”.*

Everything belongs to God including us because we are God’s creation. Everything that God has created belongs to Him. Paul told Timothy that:

“...we brought nothing with us when we came into the world,
and we can’t take anything with us when we leave it.” (1 Timothy 6:7)

This is true because we are not the owners. We do not own anything and we have to return it; we are just stewards, not just stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4:1) but everything else that God has placed in our lives. This includes the time that we have on earth, the talents and gifts that God has bestowed on us here; we do not own all these. We are just stewards of them.

Some of us may think that the time is our own and we will decide what to do with it, but we have time only because we have life. We have life because God gave us the breath of life. If God were to take away the breath of life, we would be dead and dead people will not need time. Our lives are measured by time for as long as we have life. Therefore, we do not own our time and the word ‘steward’ tells us that we are not the owners.

There are several meanings attached to the word ‘steward’ in the dictionary but the one closest to what we are looking at in the Bible today defines ‘steward’ as somebody/someone who is entrusted with the task of looking after or managing another person’s property or asset. This means the stuff in our lives do not belong to us. We are just managing somebody else’s stuff and in this case God’s stuff. Our mistake is to think that we own the stuff that we are managing. Just because we have the stuff in our lives does not mean they automatically belong to us, but we keep thinking we are managing our own time, we are managing our own talents/gifts, we are managing our own treasures. We are only managing them for God as He has given them on trust to us so that we can do something or make something out of it. That is why Jesus shares the ‘Parable of the Talents’ in Matthew 25:14-30. He was talking about the use of talent to emphasize this point that we are not owners but merely stewards called to manage the talents to make something out of it.

2. God calls us to value the things entrusted to our care

Unfortunately, we tend to only cherish those things that we consider important, and we neglect or push aside things that we think are trivial. This happens only when we think that we own everything and that we get to decide what we want to do with it, either to keep it if it is important or dispose it if it is not. However, if something is handed over by someone to us for safekeeping and that person is going to come back for it, we will not have the right to do what we want with it but, keep it safely until the person returns to retrieve it.

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Everything that we have in our lives is not trivial because they have been given by God and so there is a reason why He has given us all these things. We are therefore to value and take care of all these things.

One of the things we are to take care of is the mysteries of God (v.1); to be stewards of the mysteries of God pertaining to the glorious truth as contained in the Gospel of Jesus Christ of salvation. When God has entrusted this to us, we are to share this Gospel truth meant for the whole world to know and receive. If you have received it, now you are entrusted to take care of it and share it with others. If God can entrust this thing which is so precious and wonderful to us, that will impact our eternity, surely we want to manage it well and handle it with all diligence. This is how we are to manage everything that has been given to us; to manage with due care and with utmost respect – not just time and talent but His Word imparted to us, His Truth revealed to us, His work in the Kingdom that He has laid upon us, the relationship with Him that He has established with us, our relationships with people in our lives, our loved ones, our family members.

Some things are given to us for a lifetime but some for a season and for that season that we have been given, we have to be good stewards of it and then after that it is taken away or is replaced by something else.

3. God wants us to be faithful, not successful

We want to be found faithful but what does this mean? In verse 2, Paul gives a very single straightforward requirement for stewards to be found faithful, but the idea of success crept into our understanding of stewardship as Christians, maybe because we are driven by the world's view that the worth of a thing is measured by its success.

If we use success as a benchmark, we are going to think that to be a good steward means that we must be successful, and our stewardship will become our performance. We have to perform very well to succeed in order to be counted as a good steward. However, being able to complete 10 tasks in a given time does not make me a better steward even though I am more productive. The Lord wants us to be found faithful in managing what He has entrusted to us. In the Parable of the Talents (Mathew 25:14-30), the master said exactly the same thing to the first two servants with the 5 and 2 talents, "Well done good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little..." He commended them for their faithfulness. He did not say "You have been successful." Even the third servant who buried the talent in the ground was told that the master would have accepted him if he had deposited the talent with the bankers to earn a little interest, though earning a little interest is not considered successful investment. God is looking for faithfulness in the way we use our talent. Jesus is telling us that He is not looking for us to be successful but faithful in putting to work the things that we have been given in our lives. Let us not judge one another on how successful (good or bad)

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we have been in putting our talents and gifts to work but how faithful we have been doing so.

CONCLUSION

We are just stewards and not owners and so we are not the ones to decide what to do with the things that we have been given. God is the owner, so He gets to decide what to do. All we need to do is just to listen to Him, to what He tells us to do and we just simply obey and do it. The things entrusted to us matter and we are to value and care for them as good stewards. It is our faithfulness that matters when we steward what God has entrusted to us as God does not look at how successful we are but how faithful we are in stewarding the mysteries of God, the time given to us on earth, talents and treasures. May we be found faithful by our Master.

A. Review Sermon Application

Purpose: Reflect on how you have been embodying God's truth.

- 1a. How successful have you been in fulfilling what you/your group had committed to do for the last FaithWalk!?
- 1b. What were some challenges you faced and what would you like to celebrate?

2. A good steward of God faithfully manages everything that God has entrusted to him/her including time, talents/gifts and treasures.
 - a. How has knowing the three principles of good stewardship impacted you?
 - b. Which of these principles do you find difficult to apply?
 - c. How can your Life Group members pray and assist you in overcoming 2b. above?

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B. Relate Sermon Content

Purpose: Relate with the Truth and Resolve for Transformation.

- 3a. Read 1 Corinthians 4:1-2 as a group. Why do you think Paul says that “It is required of stewards that they be found faithful.”?
- 3b. (i) Reflect on how you spend the 24 hours in a day. How have you been using the time God has given to you on earth?
- (ii) What is one thing you can do to be faithful in stewarding God’s time in your life?
4. Consider the gifts/talents God has bestowed you with in your life now.
- a. How are you putting them to work?
- b. Are there any that you have buried away because they are not important to you?
- c. What do you think Jesus, our Master would say when He returns to retrieve the gift in 4b. above?
- d. What are some ways you can faithfully put them to work like the faithful servant in the ‘Parable of the Talents’?

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C. Testimonies, Prayers and Action

Purpose: Give glory to God, seek Him and embody His Word.

5. Share if you have been faithful in stewarding something God has entrusted to you despite the challenges you faced. (e.g. as a short term or long term caregiver, managing your own or an organization's assets in a corrupt world, resisting the pressure to be successful in the marketplace/school/life etc) What has helped you to overcome the challenges?

OR

Give thanks to God for entrusting you with His mysteries pertaining to the glorious truth contained in the Gospel of Jesus Christ of salvation. Pray that the Holy Spirit will enable you to share and bring this Gospel truth to others.

6. As a group, take turns to spend some time to give thanks to God for everything He has given you including the mysteries of God, His Word, Truth and Kingdom work He has laid upon you, your relationship with Him, your relationships with people, loved ones, family members and the time, talent and treasures in your life.

Also, seek your group members' view on what could be some gifts/talents God has given you that you may not have been aware of. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you how you can put them to use faithfully, so you can be a good steward of these from now on.

Optional items:

Suggested worship songs:

1. You Hold It All Together – Maverick City & UPPERROOM
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4t_ROjYg48&ab_channel=musicmeetsheaven
2. Tabernacle – Awaken Generation
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6hvJiLXNqUQ&ab_channel=CindyNgo
3. Take My Life and Let It Be – Reawakened Hymns
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3qWwGDGqVA&ab_channel=ReawakenHymns

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