



“Stewardship in the Church”

Idea: What you do today with the resources God has given you will impact others for all eternity.

Intro: Do you remember the story I shared last month about Jason who was talking with his new neighbor Shawn alongside his driveway? Shawn and his family had recently moved in next door, and this was third time Jason had gotten to speak with him. His first interaction happened when Jason and his wife took over a freshly baked apple pie and a half-gallon of vanilla ice cream just after the movers finished unpacking the moving truck. They walked next door simply to introduce themselves and welcome this new family to the neighborhood. Nothing says, “We are glad you are here” quite like apple pie. Their second interaction took place when all their kids were playing together in Jason’s backyard one evening. The two couples got a chance to get to know one another a little better that evening since the unpacking was finished and life was stabilizing for the new neighbors. It was now a Saturday morning on this third interaction, and Jason was hoping to invite Shawn and his family to church. As they stood there talking about the struggle of getting settled in a new community, Jason asked Shawn, “Would you like to join my family and I this Sunday and be our guest at church?” Shawn thanked him for the invitation and expressed how good it would be to connect with a church.

What was Jason inviting Shawn and his family to when he invited them to church? There are many ideas circulating out there about church. Some are good and biblical. Others, however, are nothing more than secular humanism with at best a veneer of Christian spirituality laid over the top. The word for church in the Greek New Testament is ἐκκλησία (ekklēsia). It is compound word, stemming from the preposition ἐκ (“out of”) and the verb καλέω (“to call”). Literally, it means “the called-out ones.” In the Greek culture, ἐκκλησία was used to speak of a body of citizens gathered as representatives to discuss the affairs of the state. In the New Testament, this term speaks of the people who had been called out of the world and gathered by God into His family. We learn that God uses the church as a vehicle for displaying His glory to His creation. These redeemed representatives gathered as the church display God’s glory and wisdom, both to unbelievers and to unseen spiritual powers (John 13:34-35; Eph 3:10-11). We also discover in the New Testament that the church has an exclusive message (the Gospel) and possesses a certain set of ordinances (baptism and the Lord’s Supper) that were established by Christ. Therefore, no one should mistakenly see the church as anything other than unique.

Today, we are concluding our sermon series entitled “In the Church.” Our objective throughout these nine messages has been the description of the structures that strengthen and enable the church to display God’s glory. We looked at mission, membership, attendance, discipline, authority, women, loving one another, and ordinances. Now, we end with stewardship.

Inquiry: When the average evangelical Christian hears the word *stewardship* coming from the pastor's lips, he or she immediately reaches to lockdown their wallet. Your reaction is probably just like that. In fact, you might have considered skipping this morning if you had known this was the subject.

Why is stewardship such a frightful and unpleasant subject? May I suggest the reason is largely because we have the wrong perspective of stewardship? I believe to the average church member stewardship is a finance campaign to raise money for the next project. Stewardship, however, is so much more than that. Another reason this subject is unpleasant to so many involves the perceived stress it adds to one's budget and calendar.

Think for a moment. What events have produced the greatest stress in your life this past week? They probably involved some feeling of being overloaded with responsibilities at home, work, church, or all the above. They involve things like paying bills, running late for an appointment, balancing your checkbook, waiting in a traffic, and facing an unexpected expense.

Each of these anxiety-producers has to do with either time or money. Think of how many day-to-day issues involves the use of one of these two. The clock and the dollar are such substantial factors in so many parts of life that their role must be considered in any serious discussion of Godly living.

Therefore, it is imperative that we learn how to better steward our lives, families, time, money, ministries, and everything that God has entrusted to us. Therefore, we need to have a working definition of stewardship. The biblical picture is that of a household or estate manager. In Genesis 39 we see that Joseph was the steward of Potiphar's house. The steward is not the owner; the steward simply manages and cares for what is owned by the master. Stewardship, then, as defined by Chris Goulard, is "foundationally understanding that we are not owners of things, but managers."

The fact that you and I are managers rather than owners implies that everything we have was a gift from the Lord. He has entrusted its care and use to us for His glory. For this reason, 15% of everything Christ said in the New Testament specifically relates to the stewardship of money, which is more than His teachings on both heaven and hell combined. Why would He put such an emphasis on this area of life?

Jesus spoke a lot about money because it says a lot about a you. It is a window to your heart. The story of our lives is told by how we live and what we do with what we have during our short time in this world. Stewardship, then, is something we must correctly understand and master in life. We have defined a steward as an estate manager. He or she is not the owner, but the one who manages the estate for the master. Therefore, a biblical understanding of stewardship recognizes that God is the master, and we are His stewards.

If that is true, then we need to take seriously the responsibility and privilege we have been given to manage what the Lord has entrusted to us like our time, talents, and treasure. You see, when Jesus gets ahold of our hearts it changes the way we live and the way we serve. I think we can all agree that those two areas are surrendered easier than this third one... our giving.

Perhaps that is why the Bible devotes twice as many verses to money (about 2,350) than to faith and prayer combined. And I am sure that is why Jesus taught so extensively on it. Your stewardship over the money and possessions entrusted to you becomes the story of your life. Will the story your life tells describe a life lived for the money in your pocket and things that will not last, or will it describe a life lived for a treasure that satisfies like gold never can? We find in Mark 12 that the later type of life gets the attention of the Lord Jesus.

Read Mark 12:41-44.

There is a fundamental connection between our spiritual lives and how we think about and handle money. We may try to divorce our faith from our finances, but God sees them as inseparable. When we, however, come face to face with the awesome glory and the amazing grace of Jesus, it changes our perspective of money. We

begin to see it not as something to live for but something to give away...to leverage for Kingdom purposes. The Bible portrays Christians giving in three ways.

1. Christians give joyfully.

This poor widow gave all she had to the Lord, and Jesus knew what she gave because He intently watched her. She put two tiny copper coins in the temple-offering box. The penny was worth 1/64 of a denarius (a day's wage). Such a small gift, but the money was all she had. As Jesus watched her put the coins in the box, He called his disciples together to teach them a lesson. He did not question the woman's gift like most would today. Instead, the Lord commended it, and He set her up as a model for His disciples to follow.

What do you think the widow's expression was when she gave at the temple that day? Do you think she had the same expression some of you have when the offering plate is passed?

Conversion and the filling of the Holy Spirit are supernatural experiences that produce supernatural responses. When you are filled with the Spirit there is joy. This widow supernaturally gave her all to God. I imagine there was a huge grin on her face as she dropped those coins in the box. She saw giving as an opportunity rather than an obligation. She delighted in the fact that she got to see God miraculously provide for her. She did not begrudgingly give. Instead, she joyfully gave. She saw her gift as a way to ascribe worth to the Lord. He was her greatest treasure. She also saw it as a way to bless others. The priests and Levites were resourced through the offerings, and the needs of the poor were met. When you view giving from that perspective, you cannot help but get excited about giving. There is great joy in generous giving.

2. Christians give faithfully.

In making much of this poor widow's gift, Jesus told His disciples that she gave everything she had to the Lord. What she did thrilled His heart because she did it in faith. That is exactly how we are supposed to live our lives. Whatever is not of faith is sin (Rom 14:23).

Mark does not tell us why the widow gave all she had to the Lord. It would seem that she gave far beyond what was required. Apparently, she must have sensed that the Lord wanted her to give that specific amount above and beyond what was required by the Law. In doing so, she gave in faith, trusting the Lord to take care of her.

This is exactly what the Lord expects from us. Do a quick examination of your giving record this year. How much of it can be described as faith giving? How much can be explained only by the supernatural work of God? How much is better explained by logic and calculated planning or the lack of planning?

Illust: Several years ago, I heard about a lady in another church who sensed the Lord leading her and her husband to give a certain amount to an offering. The problem was that the amount the Lord told her to give was an amount they did not have. She asked her husband to pray and seek the Lord's direction but did not tell him the number she had in her heart. He prayed and came back to his wife saying, "I hope the amount you are thinking is different than the one I have because we do not have that kind of money." God put in their hearts the same figure. They believed God had spoken clearly, so they pledged that amount to the offering not knowing where they would get the money. A few days later, the wife was cleaning out a closet in their company office and found a bag of money she had set aside and forgot about years earlier. It was the exact amount of money God had told them to give to the offering.

Where God guides, He always provides! Now, you may balk at that story because it sounds eccentric and unbelievable. Why do we think that? Can the God who spoke and light came into existence not provide for our needs today? This widow gave faithfully to God because she believed God would provide for her needs. It was the safest thing to do.

“People that are not willing to trust God to do the impossible will not trust God to go beyond the brink of the Jordan. They will never know the Promise Land or victorious Christian living. They will live with conventional wisdom.” – Johnny Hunt

A life of faithful stewardship is not a life lived by conventional wisdom. It is a life that believes God for the impossible. It is a life that trusts God, believing Him to make a way when there seems to be no way. It is a life that gives faithfully.

3. Christians give obediently.

The widow gave obediently even though conventional wisdom would have told her to hang onto what she had. Conventional wisdom says, “God knows your heart, that you want to give. He also knows that you need money to buy food and pay your bills. He understands why you cannot afford to give, so you should keep the money for yourself.”

The problem with conventional wisdom is that it contradicts the Word of God. It does not take into consideration that God is owed first before anyone else. The Old Testament Law commanded God’s people to give a tithe (a tenth) from the land (Lev 27:30). In that agrarian society, everything was acquired from the land. The people were to give God not just a tenth of their income but also the first tenth. They were commanded to honor God with the firstfruits of their crops (Lev 19:23-25; Prov3:9). The giving of their firstfruits recognized that all good things came from the Lord.

Appl: I have heard many Christians argue against the concept of tithing, claiming it is an old covenant requirement. What we find the Old Testament is that the Law required three different tithes. Two were perpetual tithes that supported the Levites and sacred festivals. The third tithe was for the poor and was received every third year. Therefore, the Jews were required to pay 23% of their income annually. They repaid the Owner of all things.

On top of that the Old Testament emphasized freewill offerings (Lev 22:18-23; Num 15:3; Deut 12:6, 17). These were voluntary contributions beyond the tithe requirements such as the gifts given to construct the tabernacle and rebuild the temple (Ex 36; Ezra 1:4).

We learn then that the tithe was never meant to be a ceiling for giving, only a floor. It was a beginning point for God’s people in the Old Testament, and I believe it is equally true of those in the New Testament and beyond. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told that tithing has been superseded. Instead, we see that Jesus affirmed it (Matt 23:23). Like many teachings of the Old Testament (murder and adultery), the teaching of the New Testament expanded how God’s people should view giving. We learn from church history that all the prominent early church fathers taught it as a requirement for Christian living.

Therefore, the tithe is not the finish line of giving; it is the starting blocks. It is God’s historical method to get people on the path of giving. Why did the poor widow give those two copper coins to the Lord when she could not afford to do so? The woman gave them because she could not afford not to give. Disobeying the Lord’s command would put her in a much more dangerous position than not having any money. She gave because she lived her life with palms up, and when you live that way, you give obediently.

Conclusion: Jason strategically and lovingly invested in his new neighbor Shawn. He understood the responsibility he had as a Christian steward to be a conduit of God's grace rather than a depository of it. He understood that stewarding that grace requires the giving of one's time and talent. It also requires the giving of one's treasure.

During Lyndon Johnson's presidency, a framed letter hung on the wall of his White House office. It was written by General Sam Houston to Johnson's great-grandfather, George W. Baines, more than a hundred years earlier. Baines had led Houston to Christ and the general was a changed man, no longer coarse and belligerent, but peaceful and content. After General Houston was baptized – an incredible event for those who knew him – he offered to pay half of the local minister's salary. When someone asked him why, he said, "My pocketbook was baptized too."

When you were baptized into Christ, was your pocketbook baptized too? So many people who claim Christ give nothing to the Lord. Some of you give nothing. Others only give occasionally. You may give to certain needs, but you are not tithing. The Bible teaches that the tithe is the Lord's. It is intended to train people to put God first in their lives. It is a duty but can become a delight, leading to joyful voluntary giving. Therefore, everyone who is in relationship with Christ ought to at least be giving his or her first 10% to God's local church to fund the budgetary needs. Some of you cannot tithe right now because of your financial situation. While you may not be able to give 10%, you can start somewhere and work your way up. You also might need to learn biblical principles for how to better steward the resources God has given you. We offer Financial Peace University as a Life Development Class annually. That class begins on Wednesday evening.

As I said earlier, your stewardship over the money and possessions entrusted to you becomes the story of your life. When you give to Red Lane, you are giving through Red Lane to further the gospel here and there...among our neighbors and the nations. What you do today with the resources God has given you will impact others for all eternity.

Here are three practical applications derived from the poor widow's example:

- Obey God and leave the consequences to Him.
- Trusting God means looking beyond what we can see to what God sees.
- God assumes full responsibility for our needs when we obey Him.

The way we steward our money says a lot of us and our church. What is your money saying?