

God's Stewards: In the World but Not of the World

PWAP #1 – 02/02/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Texts: Genesis 12:1-9, Romans 12:1-5, John 17:13-21

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Introduction

- ✘ Today we begin this year's annual *People with A Purpose* stewardship journey with a deeper look into one of the important principles from Scripture that many of us may not, at first, think of as having a connection to the role God has for us as His stewards.
 - ➔ Now, I know what happens for many of you when you hear the word "steward" or "stewardship" in church. It's either one of two different reactions. The first is that you instinctively look for your purse or your wallet and grab ahold just a little bit tighter, thinking, "Here they go again, trying to get more of my money, or more of my time and my commitment." Or second, your eyes just kind of gloss over at the same time that they roll back into your head and you think, "Blah, blah, blah, Pastor. Why do we need to hear all of this again? I've already heard it more times than I can count."
- ✘ Well, let me first respond to those concerns in pastorally love with two reactions of my own. #1) I have been called by you, and charged by our Lord to proclaim and teach all of God's Word to you as His beloved sheep. And since Biblical stewardship is a part of His Holy and inspired Word, if I did not include His teaching for all of us regarding the way that He desires us to live and serve Him as stewards of the gifts He has given to us, then I would a) not be faithful to God as His representative to you, His sheep, and b) I would not be faithful to what you as Christ's Church have called me to be about as your pastor, and therefore c) I would be actively sinning both against God and against you as my fellow believers in Christ.
 - ➔ And #2) if any of these thoughts might be seeking to find their way into your heart or mind, I would urge you to understand that those are coming at you from two very evil and dangerous places: from the devil, who wants you and me instead to be his stewards so that he can pull you and others with you away from Your God and Savior; and also they are coming from this sin-soaked world, which also has only one goal – that is using and abusing you and me for its own interests and agendas.
- ✘ So, let's just put those thoughts and distractions aside this morning; this year and with the Holy Spirit's help, let's open our hearts and minds to what God has to teach, or remind us of this morning from His perfect Word of truth.
 - ➔ The principle that all three of our Scripture Readings this morning place before us is this: God's Stewards are In the world but not Of the world. In other words, "As God's stewards, we recognize that the Lord sets us apart from the world. And by the transforming power of His saving Gospel, He sends us into the world to live out and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

I. Called Out of this World

- ✘ One of the unique things the Bible teaches us Christians about ourselves, is that, as long as we remain here on earth, we are a kind of Jekyll and Hyde. Before our conversion, from the moment of birth we were all 100% sinner. Ecclesiastes 7:20 is very clear, "Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins." That's it.
 - ➔ But, since our conversion at baptism, or through the Gospel, Christ has cleansed us of all sin and wrapped the robe of His righteousness around us, so that when God looks at us now He sees us as 100% saint. Yet, until we leave this earth to be in Paradise, we still struggle with sin and that part of our flesh that naturally operates in opposition to God.

✘ That means that God's stewards are, at the same time, 100% sinner and 100% saint. So, part of us loves God, has faith in Him, loves and hears His Word, and desires to follow His ways, right? And that saint in us, empowered by the Holy Spirit, through God's gift of faith, is the new spiritual you that defines this principle we are talking about today.

➔ You see, only someone who is a Christian, who has the new life of God's Spirit working within him/her is able to recognize, acknowledge, and confess that God has actually called you out from within this world; that He has set you apart from the desires of your sinful flesh; from the ways of Satan and this fallen and corrupt world in which you live. But those pulls of our sinful flesh; of Satan; and of the world are strong. So it is only through God's far more powerful Spirit, working through His Word and Sacraments, that you and I can live and respond to the world around us in a godly way; having the same compassion that God has for our fellow believers in Christ as well as the unbelievers of this world around us.

✘ My dear friends, it's crucial that you understand what a blessing it is that you are an integral member of Christ's Church. The English word "church" comes from the New Testament Greek word *ekklesiā* (ἐκκλησία), which means "that which is called out," or "called forth." It's an important part of our identity in Christ. It means that, as a reborn child of God, you are still in this world but no longer are you part of this world. You've been called-out of this world.

➔ We heard Jesus make that point in the Gospel Reading this morning. When He was praying to the Father about His disciples He said, "They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world" (Jn. 17:16). That's what Jesus Himself says about you ... and me! It's something that all of us should spend some time pondering; even praying about with God.

➔ Paul then applies this truth to our daily activities and lives in Romans 12:2, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect."

II. In this World to be a Steward/Witness to Others

✘ So, that begs the question. Why? Why has God, in His grace and mercy, saved you and called you out of this world and condemnation, but still left you in this earthly life? He keeps you here, my dear Christian, so that you might be a light in this dark world; so, as Jesus says in Matthew 5:13, you might be "the salt of the earth."

➔ Of course, "as called-out ones," there is danger for us because the prince of this world is none other than the devil himself. And he has countless human and demonic allies working against the Church; against you and your faith! Plus, Satan has an ally; a secret agent on the inside; our own sinful flesh and its in-born proclivity toward evil.

✘ This is why, in Romans 12, Paul encourages us to conform no longer to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing power of God. Never forget, my dear friends that the Lord may have left us in this world, but He has not left us alone! When He baptized us into this new life, He also filled us with His Holy Spirit, who is there to strengthen us against that evil trinity of Satan, the sinful world, and our own flesh.

➔ On top of that, He has fully equipped us with His sin-and-Satan-crushing tools, and He has placed us here, in the called-out-place that He gives free access to those tools. They are His Word and Sacraments. And they convey and clothe us with His armor: the helmet of salvation, the shield of faith with which we can extinguish the flaming darts of Satan, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Eph. 6). And never forget that it is the Lord Himself who is always working within us. Paul says in Philippians 2:13, "It is God who works in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."

- So, for example, as a called-out steward of God, who has yourself already received His gracious love, now you carry-out His love into this world through the things that you do for others both within the church and outside the church.
- ✘ God has given us so many wonderful things: life, our bodies, minds, and regenerated spirits to start. He's also given us time with hours, days, and years. And now as stewards, we gladly give a portion of that precious time to others, just as we use and give a portion of the talents and treasure the Lord has entrusted to us for the various needs of the church and the needs of those in the world when we love others as God has first loved us.
 - You see, Christian stewardship involves every aspect of our lives, not just what we do when we come to church or what we do at, or for, a church event. It's often been said, "Stewardship is everything I do after I say, 'I believe.'"
- ✘ Whether you realize it or not, all believers are witnesses to others, at all times. So, whether you're conscious of it or not, everyone who knows that you are a believer has his or her eye on you. That includes your husband, your wife, your children, your relatives, your neighbors, friends, coworkers, and fellow Christians.
 - That means that even Christians you don't know, are watching you. This came up in our Men's Bible Study discussion yesterday. Have you ever wondered about the sincerity of a person's faith, that you heard identify themselves as Christian, but then you saw him/her act or speak in a way that was clearly not pleasing to God? Well, now turn the mirror back upon yourself. Are there times that you'd rather not have people know that you are a believer because of your own words or actions?

III. Living Differently from the World

- ✘ God has called you and me out of this world for that purpose, friends; to be His witnesses; to be His light and salt to this dark and contaminated world. That's Christian stewardship; seeking to do the right things, however imperfectly, for the right reasons.
 - Being "transformed by [God's] renewal of our minds", as Paul calls us to be (Rom. 12:2) necessarily means that we are going to live differently than the rest of the world around us. It means our motives; our reasons for doing what we do are not the same as others. We don't speak a certain way or do certain things because of guilt or embarrassment or the pressure to fit in or get along. No, all of those come from the Law. And they don't develop true Christian stewards.
 - Instead our motivation is based in love. We do the right things; the things God wants us to be doing, because of God's forgiveness that covers our sin with the blood of Christ. You see, as His redeemed child, God has credited to you Jesus' perfect obedience under the Law, His suffering, and His death to sin. And He has given you His new life. You and I are now inheritors of heaven and all of its blessing and glory.
 - This unsurpassed love ... this is what motivates us now to want to give so freely of ourselves; of the time and treasure and talents that God has given us to help and benefit others.
 - ✘ And this life of stewardship is lived out not only here within the church, but out in the world as well; wherever we are actively living and functioning in this world.
 - There are so many worthwhile projects both within the church and even outside the church where the time, talents, and treasure God has given to us can be shared as a tremendous blessing to others as well as a faithful witness of God and His love for all people.
 - ✘ Many times the most effective witness we can make is simply in the different way that we respond to and face the various struggles and tensions we face in this fallen, sin-infected world.

As we deal with the busy schedules and commitments of this life; facing financial concerns, work concerns, school concerns, neighborhood concerns, health issues, family concerns, and on and on – instead of reacting with despair, anger, defensiveness, vulgarity, pointing the blame, etc. as the world does to such things, we respond as people who trust in God’s protection and provision; as those who are always thankful and blessed by His presence and guidance and strength; as stewards of Christ rather than children of the world.

→ You see, we have the true source of strength; the powerful words of promise, hope, and encouragement from our God that is secured by Jesus in His death and resurrection.

→ That’s right, we have what those of the world do not have. God has given us His Word that guides us in our faith. He leads us and sustains us by His Spirit. And He gives us one another; the fellowship and support of like-minded stewards. These resources friends, they are the exact opposite of what the world has to offer us. These come to us from God Himself, which means they come with His almighty power too!

Conclusion

✘ You see, this stewardship stuff is nothing to be afraid of, and it’s anything but boring. My dear brothers and sisters, it is an out-of-this-world privilege to know that God loves you so much that He would call you to steward His things; to be His witness to an entire world.

→ What a gift; what a blessing to be God’s *People With A Purpose*; and to share that Gospel purpose to the glory of our gracious God. Amen.