

## God's Stewards: Living in the Present, Looking to the Future

Consecration Sun. – 02/16/25 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: 1 Tim. 6:17-21; Matt. 6:19-21 Pastor Keith Besel

Matt. 6:20-21 – [Jesus calls His believers to] **“Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ This final Sunday of our *People With A Purpose* journey is what we, at Mt. Calvary Lutheran Church, have traditionally called *Consecration Sunday*. But most of us don't walk around using that term, “consecration” on a daily basis, and it's been a while since we here have clarified what we mean when we say this is *Consecration Sunday*.

➔ So let's make sure we're all on the same page with what we're talking about. To “consecrate” something is to take something that is common or ordinary and set it apart for a special or sacred purpose or place. Usually this involves some kind of a brief ceremony to help us highlight and remember the item or person that has been consecrated.

✘ Here at Mt. Calvary, on *Consecration Sunday*, after learning what God teaches us in His Word over the last couple of weeks about how He, through Jesus' saving blood has consecrated us to be His holy *People With A Purpose* in baptism, and how He calls us to be His stewards in using the riches of our time, treasure, talents and more that He has given us in this life for the advancement of His Gospel and in service to others, we then, on this day, intentionally spend some dedicated time “consecrating” these lives and treasures God has given to us. We do it by putting our commitment on paper, sealing it up, and placing it near the altar for this next year. This ceremony and those pledges there serve as a sign of our sincere intent to support God's ministry in which He has placed us here in His Church for the coming year.

✘ But before we do that in a few minutes, we have one more stewardship principle that God teaches us in Holy Scripture to consider. It is this: God's stewards live in the present and look to the future.

➔ By this, we mean that as God's stewards we live knowing that God is planning a place in heaven for us, but we are also firmly committed to living in the role He has for us here and now under His rule in our lives.

### **I. Christians are Dual Citizens – Here & Hereafter**

✘ Okay, I know that most of you were pretty close to perfect children, but perhaps a few of you remember a time when your Moms were screaming at you because they caught you doing something you shouldn't have been doing. And maybe you heard one of your parents or grandparents ask, “What on earth are you doing ... for heaven's sake?”

➔ Now, depending on where you put the accent, that can be a very good question. “What on earth are you doing, for heaven's sake?” Or to put it another way, “What are you doing here on earth that'll make a difference for all eternity?” Of course, that last question assumes, as I do today, that all of you are in fact living now with the confident assurance that you will, indeed, live in heaven beyond this present life.

✘ But course, none of us wants to be so heavenly-minded that we aren't any good here on earth. And yet on the flip side, as we learned two Sunday's ago, it's not God's plan or intent that we become so earthly-minded that we are no heavenly good either. So today we're going to explore God's stewardship principle and the necessary tension that comes with it in this Christian life.

- You and I are citizens of this world. We are citizens of this country and this state. And yet, in Philippians 3:20 Paul reminds us that as Christians we are also citizens of heaven. He says, “Our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.”
- ✘ Here on earth, it’s usually the place of your birth that determines your citizenship. And that can be changed, if you apply for citizenship in a new country. Or if you add a second citizenship, sometimes people hold what’s called a dual citizenship.
  - That provides a picture of our status as Christians. We were all born here on earth, but then in Baptism we were also all reborn into the Triune God’s name which means that we are also citizens of heaven; citizens of God’s kingdom.
- ✘ That much higher; much greater eternal citizenship that we have though is only possible because the One who created this earth, actually loves you and me enough that He physically became one of us. It’s mind boggling really, that He who is outside of time submitted His existence to this earthly time that He created. And not only did He become a citizen of this world, He became the lowliest citizen – despised and rejected by men; so poor in fact that Luke 9:58 says that He, the Son of Man, had no place “to lay His head.”
  - But that’s not the worst of it. This God-man, who perfectly kept every law of this world was killed as the worst of criminals; denied every right of citizenship and nailed to a cross because of our guilt in breaking every point of God’s law. Yes, Jesus died so that we earthbound sinners could now be consecrated by Him in baptism to be set apart as citizens of His heavenly kingdom. And that, my dear Christians, is what we are!

## II. We too easily get focused on here; on stuff

- ✘ But even as we have that eternal citizenship in heaven, it doesn’t erase the reality that we are still living here and now, today on earth. And that means our lives still come with conflicts and challenges. So you and I, as Christians, we live and move and have our being in two kingdoms which means we live, as God’s stewards, aware of the unmistakable tension between the two.
- ✘ In our Gospel Reading Jesus commands, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven.... For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Mt. 6:19–21). Because of our sinful flesh and the influence of this earthly culture around us, it is way too easy to get caught up in living and working for status and stuff.
  - Even Christians can get caught up in believing that our worth is measured by the things of this world. When that happens, we strive to get more stuff; to have bigger and better stuff; to have the latest or newest stuff. Come on, we all know the excitement we feel when we get that “thing”, you know which one I’m talking about, that is the latest and greatest; the newest – at least to us. And, we know how much of the time, treasure, and energy God gave to us, we spend each day; each week; each year, just to build, supply, and maintain all of the stuff we’ve accumulated in our own earthly kingdoms, right?
  - In fact, it’s sad to consider how many of our relationships between family or friends are negatively affected because of the stuff that our sinful hearts cling to as if that stuff defines our happiness in life. Having been in the business world before I became a pastor, I have seen and experienced how the pursuit of possessing earthly stuff so easily leads us all into sin, and how hard we can work to justify and try to explain why we think and do things the way we do.
- ✘ That’s why Paul wrote to Timothy in verse 10, just before our First Reading, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (1 Tim. 6:10). Just try to imagine how

many wars and conflicts in this world would have stopped or never even started if we didn't covet money, property and possessions like we do.

- ✘ And still, in spite of all of that, God, in His undeserved kindness and love, through Jesus' death and resurrection, makes you and me citizens of His heavenly Kingdom. That's why, as we live in tension between this earthly life and our heavenly citizenship, it is so important that God's love for us be the foundation of every one of our decisions, plans, and actions in life.

→ That means that all of the things you and I have in this world, they are not what gives us security in this life. If we think they do, then they have become our god instead of the true Triune God. In fact, none of those "things" will last beyond our short life here on earth.

→ In Luke 12:20, Jesus told of a man so focused on the "things of this world" that he built bigger barns to store up more of his grain and possessions. But God called that man a fool for thinking that way and then said to him, "This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?"

### III. Living not only for Here/Now, but also for Hereafter

- ✘ My friends, you and I, by the grace of God in our Savior Jesus, have the hope of living forever in a kingdom that is literally out of this world – and "forever" is so much more than just a long time. Paul wrote to Timothy in verses 17-19 of our First Reading today, "As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life." (1 Tim. 6:17–19)

→ The biggest mistake any of us can make here today is to hear Paul say he is speaking of "the rich in this present age," and then think, "well, he's clearly not talking about me, because I'm not 'rich'." But the truth is, folks, compared to the majority of people living on this earth, you and I are among the richest in the things of this world. And God knows that.

- ✘ Then in our Second Reading, Peter tells us that the Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night and that the material things upon which we depend so much will all go up in smoke. Because of that truth, he cuts right to point. Since none of this earthly stuff will last, then what type of people ought we to be in holiness and godliness? In other words, as we make decisions and plans about all the "things" the Lord has given to us, it should be obvious that He blessed us with those things, not just to use them in this present world but first and foremost to use them in His service of gaining more and more citizens for His heavenly kingdom; that is our ultimate home.

→ Living with that frame of mind, according to both 1 Timothy and 2 Peter; that is what Paul says is "truly life" (1 Tim. 6:19). We "live" to give and share God's riches and treasures with others.

→ Again, Jesus' words, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, ... but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." (Mt 6:19–20).

### IV. God equips us to live for Him

- ✘ "Ok Jesus," you are undoubtedly saying. "So, how do I store up treasures in heaven?" The answer comes from Paul in our First Reading from 1 Timothy 6:18-19 where he gives us four important parts to this Christian life. He says, "They are ❶ to do good, ❷ to be rich in good works, ❸ to be generous and ❹ ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future."

- You see, as a Christian matures in the Bible's teaching on stewardship, he/she moves from the idea of just "giving to a need" to the joy of "needing to give." And that's not only the giving of money or goods, but it equally includes needing to give of ourselves; of our time; of our talents; of our entire life to Jesus.
- ✘ There are even a few among us here , who have taken Paul's words of storing up treasure beyond this earthly existence to the point that they have chosen to remember the church and its mission and ministry in their wills or estate planning. If someone feels moved by God to satisfy their need to give and share in this way, then they are privileged indeed to positively support God's mission and ministry long after they have completed their service here on earth and entered into their new and everlasting home.
- Here's the thing: you and I are so immensely blessed by Jesus! He willingly gave His life, paying for all of our sin when we deserved none of it. On top of that, He daily – weekly invites and gathers us here to feed us spiritually with His Word and Sacraments where He creates and sustains us in our saving faith. Even more, He graciously supplies us with all we have in this life; with far more than we need for this life. And then, thanks to Jesus, He gives us all of eternity to live and bask in His love with no sin, no tears, no death – only perfection in His glorious eternal kingdom!
- And as if all of that doesn't boggle our minds, the icing on the cake is this: He gives us the ability to be truly happy right here; right now; each and every day as He affords us the joy of giving and sharing with others in His eternal-life giving ministry while we reside here on earth. All of this contributes to us laying up God's treasure in heaven. How great is that?
- ✘ In Revelation 14:13, John writes, "I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.' 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them.'" This is the one exception to that old axiom, "You can't take it with you when you go." It's true that none of our stuff, as well as none of our good deeds, have any bearing on getting us into heaven. That is always and only about Jesus and His saving work in our place!
- But this passage in Revelation shows us that those who are true stewards of God; whose works done here in response to Jesus' gift of salvation; whose love and deeds bring honor to Christ and glorify God – these works will go with you as you are welcomed into God's everlasting Paradise.

## Conclusion

- ✘ So, today Christ blesses us with even more of His undeserved love and grace as He consecrates us and our gifts here in this world for His eternal ministry of *Sharing God's Word* and *Serving All* with His love; with His saving Gospel and with the hope with which He has already blessed us, that is the certainty of our citizenship in His heavenly kingdom!
- What a joy to be God's stewards; to serve and worship Him today and forever as His *People With A Purpose!* Amen.