

STEWARDSHIP 1

November 10, 2019

Job 41:1,9-11, Romans 5:6-11, St. Matthew 6:19-21:

“BECAUSE . . . ”

- I. Because Nothing of This World Is Ours.
- II. Because We Value What He Gives to Us.
- III. Because We Are to Evaluate Our Faith.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

The early church father, John Chrysostom wrote, "Men are nailed to the things of this life." Well, they are...aren't we? Isn't it true that we labor and sacrifice mostly for what we can get from this world? Not just necessities. Most of us live with way more than "give us this day our daily bread."

The early church father, Augustine said, "Tithes ought to be paid, whatever your occupation. He who has given to us the whole has thought it meet to ask a tenth. It is not for His benefit, but for ours." That's our direction: "It is not for His benefit, but for ours."

It's stewardship time. We're once again addressing our understanding of supporting what we think is our church with what we think is our money . . .

BECAUSE . . .

I. Because Nothing of This World Is Ours.

Because, in the first place, we own nothing of this world. We own nothing and nothing of this world goes with us into eternity. You probably caught the clarity of that from our Old Testament Text. In His confrontation with Job, God asked him, "Can you draw out Leviathan with a fishhook or press down his tongue with a cord?" (Job. 41:1) Leviathan refers to a great, fierce and now unknown sea creature. And then God said:

Behold, the hope of a man is false; he is laid low even at the sight of him.
No one is so fierce that he dares to stir him up. Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?
Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine. (vv. 9-11)

Everything we consider ours - everything - can be taken away from us in a moment. Even tyrants and thieves and murderers will discover what the Psalmist declares of such: "How they are destroyed in a moment, swept away utterly by terrors! Like a dream when one awakes, O Lord, when you rouse yourself, you despise them as phantoms." (Ps. 73:19,20) They will be as nothing, they will be aware of that, and they will spend eternity in death and they will be aware of that! They will scream and cry and no one will hear them or care . . . ever!

I want to add to this these words of the Lord from the Psalmist:

For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. (vv. 10-12)

Stewardship - our giving and supporting of the Lord's church is not because He needs it, or because we'll definitely get something back, for as God asked Job, "Who has first given to me, that I should repay him?" Giving and supporting are very clear indications of what having the Presence of the Lord in Word and Sacrament really and truly means to us. How we use the money He loans us, how we use the time He loans us to be in worship and study together, and how we serve Him are clear confessions of who we are and where we stand.

I would say that Chrysostom's words are correct: "Men are nailed to the things of this world." I would add, the more the nails the greater the reluctance to look forward to the world to come. The fact is . . .

II. Because We Value What He Gives to Us.

We give because we value what He gives to us; what we've heard many times from our Epistle Lesson:

For while we were weak, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person - though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die - but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Lots of words to hear, but they say everything! We were weak. We were ungodly. We were sinners. We were enemies. We had nothing with which to bargain. No way out! Doomed! And Jesus stepped in front of us. He willingly took the hit; stopped the fast train of death from condemning us to unending death and hell fire.

Our text says, "Christ died for the ungodly." And we still have our moments. Our text says, "Christ died for us (sinners)." And we still sin. Our text says, "While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Reconciled enemies. Reconciled defined is "to restore to friendship or harmony...settle, resolve (differences)." (Webster) We didn't resolve anything. Christ did. Again, "we were reconciled to God by the death of his son."

This has been given to us. "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift...". Stop right there! These words roll off our tongues, sometimes with little depth of thought. God gave a free gift to weak, ungodly, sinful, enemies! "But the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 6:23) He loves us because - well - because He loves us. So, what is that worth to us?

III. Because We Are to Evaluate Our Faith.

The Scriptures teach, "Each one must give as he has decided in his heart...for God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Cor. 9:7) While the New Testament does not command the tithe, the tenth, I have always stated that we who have been given the fulness of the Gospel in Christ are conflicted if we think we can nickel and dime God...cheerfully.

Our Gospel lesson states the obvious. Jesus says:

"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, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:19-21)

Jesus isn't saying you shouldn't have a savings account, a 401k and the like. He's saying that the goal of life on this earth isn't making this earth and what you can get out of it your big goal. As has already been implied, the goal is eternal life; "treasures in heaven."

Most of you are probably, and hopefully, familiar with Peter's words regarding what we have been given in Christ: "He has caused us to be born again to a living hope (as opposed to this world's dead "hope", which, of course is no hope at all)...to an inheritance that is imperishable (it will never go away), undefiled (it isn't messed up with sin), and unfading (it will never lose the incredible intensity of its joy and happiness), kept in heaven for you...". (1 Pet. 1:3,4)

What we do with what has been loaned to us by God says everything about who we are as God's people in Christ. Again, the object of life isn't about having the biggest and best of whatever this world offers. It's about what we do with what has been loaned to us. The Holy Spirit had the Apostle Paul write the following: "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? - unless you fail to meet the test. (2 Cor. 13:5) Did you hear that? *Examine yourselves. Test yourselves.*

This, of course, goes back to these words from our Gospel lesson, Jesus' words: "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." I love to think about it: The Eternal Treasure. We all know our sin. We know our failures. Most of us probably ache inside because of past or present mess-ups. But each day the love and forgiveness of Christ are always there. Always! And with that, as Peter writes, "if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith...may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Pet. 1:6,7)

Some years ago I stated that one of the statements the pastors have experienced from members of the congregation begins with "Your church...", or begins with a question such as "Doesn't your church...?" This isn't the pastors' church. This isn't your church. It belongs to the Lord. It has always been driven to remain faithful to Word and Sacrament. We owe it our best because...well... because God gave us His best: Jesus. Isn't that great? We don't have to sweat hell.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott