

THIS IS MY FATHER'S WORLD

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Scripture: Psalm 24:1-2

Psalm 24:1-2

*The earth is the Lord's, and all it contains,
The world, and those who dwell in it.
For He has founded it upon the seas
And established it upon the rivers.*

Will you pray with me?

O Lord, let Your Spirit come upon each one of us in such a way that our hearts are touched, our minds are open and our hearts receptive to the leading of Your Spirit, and that as we listen to You, our lives will be changed and that our will and Your will would be beautifully in sync. We pray this Lord Jesus, in Your name. Amen.

Church, I want you to look around you. Cast your mind's eye on all that belongs to you: the house, furniture, maybe a bicycle or a scooter, a motorbike or a car, or children, land, property, gold, silver, money, your pets. Now here's a flash for you. They don't belong to you. Surprised? Don't believe it? Listen once again to what the Psalmist says: "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it; the world and all who live in it.

Hear it from Psalm 50:9-12

*I have no need of a bull from your stall
Or of goats from your pens,
For every animal of the forest is mine,
And the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know every bird in the mountains,
And the creatures in the fields are mine.
If I were hungry, I would not tell you,
For the world is mine, and all that is in it.*

Minor prophet Haggai: *The Lord declares, "The silver is mine and the gold is mine."*

And then, if we can move it even further into our worlds:

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *You are not your own; you were bought at a price.*

All the things that we have, that we hold on to, don't belong to us. They belong to God. And even beyond that, you and I belong to Him as well, because He is the One who has redeemed us with the price of His wonderful Son.

Where does that place you and me in God's scheme of things? What does that mean for us? Well, for that we need to go all the way back to Genesis, and find that God actually appointed humans as stewards of His planet.

Genesis 2:15 *The Lord God placed man (i.e. Adam standing for all of humanity) in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

In fact, He makes man's position in relation to the rest of creation clear in Gen 1:28 when He says, *"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

Man is given a special role of authority and power over all creation, and it's important to note that the "dominion" that God gives man is not a selfish mentality but an authoritative one. It's a responsible one – one that we use authoritatively but with great responsibility. In fact, He has given us an honorable position in all of creation.

Psalm 8: 3-8

*When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;
What is man that You think of him,
And the son of man that you are concerned about him?
Yet, You have made him a little lower than God (or angels as some translations say)
And You crown him with glory and majesty.
You have him rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put everything under his feet.
All sheep and oxen and also the animals of the field,
The birds of the sky and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.*

Our call is to steward or manage everything that is around us and what is given to us. To manage those things that are around us from a macro level would be like caring for the environment, the ecosystem, checking out pollution or erosion. But when we look at it at a micro level as one that pertains very specifically to me – I'm not saying that the above is not specific to us. They are and we need to be mindful about that as well.

But I want to bring it a little closer to home, to ourselves, and ask the question:

Are we being good stewards of our talents? Are we being good stewards of our spiritual gifts, the resources that we have, contacts, finances, jobs, possessions? Are we being good stewards and managers of ourselves? because we belong to God and He has asked us to steward even ourselves. so everything we have, beloved, needs to be well used and managed. How do we do that? it involves the way we think and the principles we must accept.

Bill Peel in his essay entitled "Leadership is Stewardship" says that there are four important principles of biblical stewardship that we must understand.

1. The Principle of Ownership.

We saw that in Psalm 24:1 *"The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it."*

Everything belongs to God. God is the owner of everything. That's the first principle that we need to understand – we are not owners. God is the owner.

I remember hearing this little song that we sang after offering every Sunday when I was in the Emmanuel Methodist Church choir. One of the verses goes like this:

We give Thee but Thine own,
Whate'er the gift may be;
All that we have is thine alone,
A trust O Lord from Thee.

May we Thy bounties thus
As stewards true receive,
And gladly, as Thou blesses us,

To Thee our first fruits give.

To comfort and to bless,
To find a balm for woe.
To tend the lone and fatherless
Is angels' work below.

All that we have is Thine alone, as a trust that is given to you and to me. We dare not look at the things that we have and say, "Aww, this is what I've done with it. This is my strength; I have produced it. As God warned the children of Israel in Deuteronomy – He said, "You might be tempted to say 'my power and the strength of my hands have produced this wealth for me,' but v.18 reminds us to think otherwise.

Deuteronomy 8:18 *Remember the Lord, Your God, for it is He who gives you the ability to produce wealth.*

2. The Principle of Responsibility.

Peel goes on to say: Although God gives us all things richly to enjoy, nothing is ours. Nothing really belongs to us. God owns everything. We are responsible for how we treat it and what we do with it. While we complain about our rights here on earth, the Bible constantly asks: What about your responsibilities? Owners have rights; stewards have responsibilities.

We see that even as Jesus walked on the earth, He was a steward for the resources that He came with. In Matthew ch.24, as they're walking along, the whole issue of whether your Master pays the temple tax. And Jesus finally ends it by saying, "Go and pay the tax lest they get offended." The principle that He was portraying here is: "I have rights; but right now it's time to be responsible for the way in which the Father has sent Me and made Me at this point in My journey." We have to be responsible.

Paul fleshes it out for us again in Philippians, when he says, "I'm really done. I'm tired and worn out. I've been thrown in prison. I've been thrown out of boats. I've been thrown from windows. I've received lashes on my back. And the most appealing thing right now for me would be to go and be with God. For me to live is Christ, but to die is gain." Then, as he seemingly wrestles with these two things in his mind – going away would be better for him; staying will be better for the people. He says, "But I will stay," once again emphasizing the responsibility of being a good steward.

1 Corinthians 8:9-12 says, *"Be careful however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak."* Here, Paul is talking about food that has been offered to idols. *"If someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ."*

"Be careful," he says, "that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block. Responsibilities. We are responsible for who we are, the mind that God has given us, the knowledge that He has given us that enables us to understand and be responsible for the life that we live as well.

3. The Principle of Accountability.

A steward is one who manages the possessions of another. We are all stewards of the resources, abilities and opportunities that God has entrusted to our care. And one day, each one of us will be called to give an account for how we have managed what the Master has given us.

Remember the servants in the parable of the talents? We too will be called to give an account and to answer as to how we have administered everything that we have been given. That includes our time, our money, our abilities, our information, wisdom, relationship and authority. We will be held accountable for all that God has given us to steward.

4. The Principle of Reward.

We see in the parable of the talents how the servants who had done well were rewarded.

Paul writes in Colossians 3:23-24, *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. Remember, it is the Lord you are serving.”*

Matthew 25:21 *We all should long to hear the master say what he exclaims, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!”*

So there will be rewards for the way in which we steward the resources that God has placed at our disposal – within us and without us and around us. Keeping in mind these four principles – ownership, responsibility, accountability, and rewards – how then must we proceed and what must we be mindful of?

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

- 1) We cannot become proud in the things that we have or God has entrusted us with, whether it’s money, or talents, or gifts, or possessions, status, position. God’s grace alone – it is because of His grace that we have all these things, and we cannot take pride in it. How often we use the phrase “God’s grace”. How are you doing? Doing well by God’s grace. Do we showcase God’s grace in our circles where God is not present – among our colleagues, workspaces, schools, colleges? When people ask us how we are doing, can we answer ‘Doing well, by God’s grace’? Or do we keep that out and just take the glory for ourselves.

Twice in the book of Isaiah, God reminds us: “My glory, I will not give or share with another.” So we need to be very mindful that we don’t become proud and begin to think that we are the ones who have done everything with the things that God has given us.

- 2) We ought to be thankful for whatever we have been given or entrusted with. As the song goes, “Little is much when God is in it.” Whatever it is, we ought not to look around at others and think of the things that they have. We need to just look at what we have and know that God has trusted you and me with this, and in this we will be faithful.

The song goes on to say:

God has given it to you and we steward it the best we can.
Does the place you’re called to labor
Seem too small and little known;
It is great if God is in it.
He’ll not forget His own.

3) We must be faithful stewards.

1 Corinthians 3:2 says, "Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful." That's the quality that must be integral to being a good steward.

1 Peter 4:10 "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms." Talking of the spiritual gifts, that we have to be able to steward it well and faithfully. We will never be faithful if our beliefs are or remain mere preferences. We need to be careful that we believe strongly in what the Word tells us, that we take it and then allow it to inform the way we act. For if we keep it as preferences or options, or just choices that we may or may not, we will never be able to be faithful.

Why? Go back to Psalm 24:2 where it says, "For He has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers." We need to know that we are doing all this to a God who owns everything. Why does He own everything? Because He is Creator God. He made everything and He established it. Therefore, it belongs to Him. We need to know Him as Creator, and that we are His creation. What He expects of us, His creation, is to be faithful.

4) We must hold loosely to what we have.

Remember the rich young ruler came to Jesus. "What must I do to get eternal life?" and Jesus says, "Keep the commandments, and all of that." He says, "All that I've done since my childhood." Jesus says, "Go, sell all your possessions and give to the poor. Then come, follow Me." He was unwilling to let go of all those possessions that God had given to him, and follow the One who had given it to him. Follow Jesus.

Ken Hughes talks about this as he cites Cotton Mather, a puritan writer. He said: The Puritan, Cotton Mather, alarmed by the trend toward materialism in New England's society, made this statement in his famous book, *Magnalia Christi Americana*. "Religion begat prosperity, and the daughter devoured the mother."

Profound thought-provoking statement! What was he saying? Mather was noting a common, though not inevitable, effect of Christianity. Authentic conversion to Christ so changes people's lives; bad habits fall away and they become better workers and managers as they live out the scriptures, resulting in economic prosperity. But tragically, in many cases, the new prosperity and material wealth devoured the same Christianity that gave them birth, especially in the second or third generations.

Hold loosely to the things that God has given to you, and when He requires of it, as He did of Abraham with Isaac, be prepared to lay it on the altar.

5) We must truly or accurately represent the one whose steward we are.

Most companies develop a particular culture that is unique to them, and they are proud of that culture. They want all their employees to reflect that culture. So they have seminars for new employees where they are taught these things. They have a cultural officer who makes sure that the company doesn't move away from this culture.

Beloved, the same is true of God. We need to reflect His attributes in our dealings with the world. The world needs to see the things of our creator God – justice, mercy, kindness, love, wisdom, productivity – all things of the culture of the kingdom. We are called to be stewards.

I want to end with this. Just as the steward takes care of the owner's possessions, the owner too cares for the stewards. Beloved, God is the owner; we are His stewards. He will take care of you and me. That is His responsibility. The bible tells us that we are His children, and you also were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession to the praise of His glory.

Peter seconds this when he says in 1 Peter 2:9, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession." In fact, we are God's masterpiece. That's the way God views us – as His masterpiece. And while we take care of His things, He will take care of you.

Maybe the responsibility of being a faithful steward is weighing heavily on you? Or you're tired of always being the ethical one? Or how to be productive in your situation? How do I utilize my gifts? How do I hold loosely to my possessions, or stay humble? Whatever beloved, take it to God and ask Him. He cares for you. He will listen to you. He will help you to do what is right, give you wisdom to make the right choice, strength to carry it out. He will restore joy and peace, help you to finally hear Him say to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share in your Master's happiness."

We're called to be stewards of God with the possessions that He had entrusted to us. Beloved, this is our Father's world; let's take good care of it.

Join me as we sing our closing hymn together.

This is our Father's world
And to my listening ears
All nature sings, around me rings
The music of the spheres.

This is my Father's world
I rest me in the thought
Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas
His hands the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world
The birds their carols raise
The morning light, the lily white
Declare their Maker's praise.

This is my Father's world
He shines in all that's fair
In the rustling grass, I hear him pass
He speaks to me everywhere.

This is my Father's world
Oh, let me never forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong
God is the ruler yet.

This is my Father's world
The battle is not done

Jesus who died shall be satisfied
And earth and heaven be one.

Dearly beloved, would you stand for the benediction?

And now, may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the continuing, enabling, inspiring presence and fellowship of His Holy Spirit, rest and abide with each one of you until the very end of the age. God bless each one of you. Have a wonderful Sunday and a great week ahead.