

Acts Series #15 - "Operation: Faithfulness" - Acts 14:19-20 (1 Cor. 4:1-2)

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Segue to Last Week

1. Want to take a short break in our excursion through the book of Acts this morning to take a closer look at the person of the Apostle Paul
2. In ch. 14, Luke makes a transition in his writing to focus almost exclusively on Paul for the rest of the book
3. And in this chapter, we see something about Paul that is very arresting, very interesting
4. We mentioned it in passing last Sunday, but want to take a look at it again today and dig a bit deeper into what it reveals to us about the great apostle

B. Acts 14:19-20

{19} Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead.

{20} However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

1. B & P have come to Lystra
 - a. Paul preached in the marketplace
 - b. and as he did, he saw a man lame from birth who he healed
 - c. the crowds were so impressed with this demonstration of the power of God that they began to worship B & P as Greek gods come in the likeness of men
2. But it wasn't long before some Jews who had opposed B & P arrived in Lystra and began spread vicious gossip and rumors about them
3. The crowds which had been ready to worship them, turned in rage and stoned Paul to death
4. Then they dragged his lifeless body outside the city walls to be left for the wild dogs
5. But while Paul had been preaching, several people had been born again
 - a. one of them was surely the lame man
 - b. and now that Paul's body has been dragged out of the city, these brand new believers gather round it
 - c. trying to decide what to do
6. While they stood there, discussing it among themselves, Paul began to stir and then stood up
7. He brushed himself off, looked around at the astonished disciples, and said, "follow me," and walked right back into the city
 - a. no doubt the disciples thought he'd gotten a pretty nasty bump on the head and wasn't thinking too clearly
 - b. the smart thing to do appeared to be to move on to the next town

- c. or maybe give up this missionary thing altogether
- 8. The logical question, both for those disciples, and for us as we read this story is this: “Why did Paul go back into the city, seeing that the people there had just murdered him?”
- 9. The answer to that question is the heart of what I want us to look at today
- 10. The Short Answer is this: When Paul came back to life and stood up, he looked around and saw a circle of brand new Christians -
 - a. men and women who had just an hour or so before had come to faith
 - b. and he felt a solemn responsibility to make sure they got grounded in the faith
 - c. he had an obligation as their spiritual father to start them on the right path of spiritual growth
 - d. he might only have a few hours with them, but he would use every minute to make sure that when he left the next day, they would be able to go on and continue to grow in the faith
 - e. Paul was not one of these “evangelists” who ride into town, put on a big show, whip up the crowds, and then blast out of town without any follow up
- 11. That’s the short answer, but there is a deeper reason behind it
- 12. And that’s what I want us to focus on today

II. BODY

A. *Turn to 1 Cor. 4:1-2*

- 1. Here is the deeper reason behind Paul’s reason for returning to Lystra
- 2. These verses reveal what it was that moved him to stay the rest of that day and night, even though it was at the risk of great personal harm
- 3. What Paul says in these verses is one of the most important and fundamental truths of the Christian life

{1} Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

{2} Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

- 4. The context of these vs. is that a question had risen among the Corinthians about Paul’s authority
- 5. He wrote to them and spoke of the role of ministers
- 6. And in this section, he is saying that ministers are accountable to God for how they live
 - a. he says, “Let others think of us like this – we are servants of Christ. We are stewards of the mysteries of God” meaning the gospel of grace
 - b. you see, the Corinthians were extremely spiritually immature
 - c. and one of the marks of their immaturity was their willingness to be attracted to celebrities
 - d. the whole church was divided into different groups
 - 1) each of which claimed top be better than the others
 - 2) because each followed their own star, their own Christian celebrity
 - 3) there were those who said they followed Peter

- 4) others who said they followed Paul, or Apollos
- 5) and then there were those who said, proudly, that they followed Jesus!
- 6) and each of these groups struggled with the others for popularity and prominence
7. Paul writes to correct this error of making celebrities of leaders in the church
8. He tells them that ministers should be thought of,
 - a. not as celebrities,
 - b. but as servants
 - c. as stewards
9. Then in v. 2 he explains what that means

{2} Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

B. The Job Description Of A Steward

1. When I was in the restaurant business, I was a trainer
2. It was my job to train both management and hourly employees how to do their jobs.
3. The company I worked for had produced an entire manual of job descriptions for every position in the store
4. They were complete
 - a. some jobs only had a couple pages of instructions
 - b. others were thick packets
 - c. but each clearly detailed the job duties for their role
5. V. 2 gives us the job duties of a steward - and it is very simple!
6. It's one line in fact: **STEWARDS MUST BE FAITHFUL!**
7. This is their job requirement
8. This is what framed Paul's thinking when he got up off the ground in Lystra
9. Even more—it's what framed his thinking when he first came to Lystra after being kicked out of Iconium and Antioch
10. Paul did what he did because he saw himself as a servant who was under orders to take the gospel to the lost
11. He saw himself as a steward whose job it was to be faithful with what he had been given - the message of God's love and grace for a sick and hurting world

C. What A Steward Is

1. A steward is a servant who has been given the wealth of their master to take care of for the master's profit
2. In the ancient world, every wealthy landowner would appoint one of his servants who had demonstrated good judgment to be the steward of the entire estate
3. This servant would then oversee all of the resources of the household
4. At regular times, he would bring a report to the master on how things were going
5. The master would review the steward's work and they would talk over the

- affairs of the house and decide if any changes were needed
6. And through it all, the steward had one over-all guiding principle governing his actions and choices =
 - a. **FAITHFULNESS!!!!**
 - b. faithfulness to his master
 - c. his goal was to please the master
 - d. to do the best with what he had been given so that the master would reap the benefit
 - e. always in sight in the stewards mind was the desire to sit with the master at review time and after going over what he had done with the affairs of the estate, have the master say,
 - f. “Good job!”

D. We Are Stewards!

1. Just as Paul said that the Corinthians were to consider he and the other apostles as servants and stewards, we need to realize that **all** Christians are stewards
2. Jesus often told the disciples that they were to see themselves as servants [\[1\]](#)
3. Several of His parables about the Christian life are stories about stewardship [\[2\]](#)
4. In Philippians 2, Paul says that we are to have the mind of Christ, who though he was God, became a faithful servant [\[3\]](#)
5. Stewardship is one of the most important and foundational truths of the Christian life
6. And because we have so many new believers that have recently come to the Lord, it's important that we take a look at this subject this morning
7. The reason I say that stewardship is so important is because it figures so prominently in Jesus' teaching
8. Some of His strongest teachings and most startling parables deal with the issue of faithfulness in our relationship with God
9. If we want to walk well, we need to take seriously our call to stewardship

E. Three Basic Principles

1. There are three basic principles that govern stewardship
2. Successful stewardship is built on these three things

1) God Owns Everything

1. Every bible believing Christian accepts this as a given so I hope there isn't a debate about this
2. Psalm 24 says . . .

{1} The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein.

{2} For He has founded it upon the seas, And established it upon the waters.

3. God owns everything by virtue of the fact that He created and sustains

- everything
4. What we *possess*, we don't really ***own***
 5. You see, while we may hold it - it really belongs to God
 6. He has just given us possession of it for a time to see what we will do with it

2) We Are His Servant-Stewards

1. In Luke 12:40-43, Jesus said this to the disciples . . .
{40} "Be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect."
{41} Then Peter said to Him, "Lord, do You speak this parable only to us, or to all people?"
{42} And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season?"
{43} "Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes."
2. Just as stewards in the ancient world would have to give regular reports to their masters, our Master will one day return, and when He does, we will each give an account for what we have done with what He has given us
3. What Jesus is saying in this passage is that the best way to be ready for His return, is not by donning white robes and ascending some hillside in Ojai and looking up into the heavens
4. The way to be ready for His return is to be faithfully using and investing our lives and our resources for His glory
5. You see friend, if you're a believer, **YOU ARE A STEWARD** whether you like it or not!
6. You can't duck the job
7. It isn't a question of being or not being a steward –
 - a. it's just a question of what kind of a steward you are,
 - b. good or bad
8. And leads us to the third principle of stewardship

3) We Are Called To Faithfulness

1. 1 Cor. 4:2
It is required in stewards that one be found faithful.
2. 1 Peter 4:10-11
{10} As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.
{11} If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever.
3. One of Jesus' most startling parables is found in Matthew 25; Parable of the Talents
 - a. a master leaves for a far country

- b. before he does, distributes his estate, not to one steward but to 3
- c. to one he gives a lifetime's worth of wages
- d. to another he gives ½ a life time's wages
- e. to the 3rd he gives 16 years worth of wages
- f. tells them to steward what they have been given, then leaves
- g. he returns years later and calls them to give an accounting
- h. the first man invested the lifetime's worth of wages and doubled it
- i. the same man did the same
- j. but the third man didn't do anything with what the master had given him
 - 1) he just took it and sat on it
 - 2) he never invested it
 - 3) he never used it
 - 4) really, he never did anything with it
- k. the first two stewards received this word of praise from their master

{21} "Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord."

1. but the 3rd steward heard these words . . .

{26} "You wicked and lazy servant."

- 4. It's all the more startling when you realize that this is in Matthew 25, the Olivet Discourse, that sermon Jesus gave the disciples about His second coming

F. What Stewardship Is

- 1. Stewardship is the management of my God-given resources for His glory
- 2. "What are these resources?" I'm glad you asked
- 3. Those resources include everything our lives entail, including . . .

1) Our Bodies

- 1. 1 Cor 6:19-20

{19} Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?

{20} For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

- 2. The faithful stewardship of our bodies means that we must use wisdom in the management of our *health*
 - a. we need to consider our diet
 - b. we need to watch what we consume, inhale, and otherwise take into our bodies
 - c. we must make sure we are getting enough rest and exercise
- 3. The specific context of 1 Cor. 6 is that Christians must abstain from sexual immorality
- 4. And the reason Paul gives is because our bodies belong to God - how then can we give them to sin?

2) Time

1. This is something we often overlook when we consider stewardship
2. But even time is a resource given to us by God to use for His glory
3. he gives us 24 hours per day, and 7 days per week
4. How we use it is a good indicator of our attitude toward stewardship
5. Are we merely spending time - or are we investing it for God's glory?

3) Relationships

1. Another resource we often overlook is the relationship we have with others
2. And yet it is one of the most important resources God gives us because of all of them, it is the only one that will last into eternity - all the rest will pass away
 - a. our bodies
 - b. time
 - c. property
 - d. money
 - e. but people last forever
3. We need to look at each person we encounter as a divine appointment to invest for His glory
4. And no where is this more true than in the home between husbands and wives and parents and children
5. The NT is filled with exhortations on how we are to treat one another
6. each of them is a vital part of our faithful stewardship of our relationships

4) Property

1. This is the material "stuff" that God has given to us
 - a. houses, furniture, appliances
 - b. cars
 - c. clothes
2. Being a good steward means to exercise care in the treatment and use of our property

5) Money

1. Probably no where is our attitude toward stewardship made more clear than in our handling of and attitude toward money
2. When we get paid, do we really see every dollar, nay, every penny, as belonging to God
3. Or do we say, "No -I earned this. It's mine!"
4. Well, wait a minute friend
 - a. who gave you the job?
 - b. who made the job in the first place?
 - c. who gave you the strength and knowledge to work?
5. Your paycheck is God's provision and God's possession
6. He just puts it in your hand and watches to see what you'll do with it
7. The reason why money is such a clear reflection of our stewardship is because it is the simplest expression of what we put value in

8. If we value God above all things, then our money will be invested in glorifying Him
9. If there is something else that is the governing principle of our lives, our cash will be spent on that
10. Being a faithful steward of our finances means asking each time we spend if what we are doing is honoring and glorifying to God
11. What is our attitude toward giving?
 - a. do we give -
 - b. or are we tight fisted with our finances?

III. CONCLUSION

A. *The Discipline of Giving*

1. God has established the giving of our resources as a mark and measure of our stewardship
 2. Giving is *expected* of Christians
 3. (Mat 25:31-46)
- {31} "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.**
- {32} "All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.**
- {33} "And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left.**
- {34} "Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:**
- {35} 'for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in;**
- {36} 'I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'**
- {37} "Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink?**
- {38} 'When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You?**
- {39} 'Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?'**
- {40} "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'**
- {41} "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:**
- {42} 'for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; {43} 'I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.'**
- {44} "Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?'**
- {45} "Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'**
- {46} "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into**

eternal life."

4. In this passage we see people giving their time, their property, their money, themselves
5. And it is what separates the sheep from the goats
6. An essential part of faithful stewardship is giving
 - a. our bodies,
 - b. time
 - c. property
 - d. money
7. Giving is important because it reminds us that everything belongs to God, to be disposed of at His bidding and direction
8. When we fail to practice the discipline of giving, we get confused as to who it belongs to
9. And if we begin to think that it really belongs to us after all, then we will find that eventually, we belong to it
10. Our possessions or our money, or our time, will begin to control us
11. We will lose our freedom purchased at the cross
12. God wants us to live free – that's why He calls us to give

B. *The Jordan River Versus the Dead Sea*

1. In Israel - the Jordan flows from the north up by Mt. Hermon into the Sea of Galilee
 - a. lush garden-like area around the lake
 - b. breadbasket of the nation
 - c. supplies water for most of Israel
2. All because there is a constant inflow and outflow
3. But to the south, Jordan empties into the Dead Sea
4. No outlet - salts and chemicals have built up over the centuries to produce the saltiest lake on the planet
5. Nothing grows there - nothing - it is poisonous - and it smells bad
6. You are wither like the Sea of Galilee or the Dead Sea
7. If you are an open, allowing God's provision to come into your life, and then faithfully letting it out, you are a source of life to all around you
8. But if you just take in His provision and never let it out, but just use it on yourself - then you're like the Dead Sea where nothing lovely can grow

[1] Matthew 20:26-28

[2] Matthew 25:14-29, Matthew 20:1-16, Luke 12:42-26, Luke 16:1-13

[3] Phil. 2:5-7