

Anointed for Stewardship

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Stewardship is everything we do after saying “yes” to Jesus.

When you first began serving God, whether through a church or otherwise, how did it start out for you? What did you do to get going with it? Did you work really, really hard at something? Did you just try doing something and hope for the best? Or conversely, were you so confident in what you were doing that it was not a big deal?

There are a lot of traps we can fall into when we begin serving God, in whatever way we do. Now before I get into these, I want everyone to take a deep breath and relax – none of us are perfect, none of us have started out completely successful in our stewardship endeavors. I’m not trying to get on anybody’s case here – well, except maybe myself. I had a lot of pride that I had to work through. I just figured that I was this amazing guitar player who was going to wow everyone in Christendom and have them fall to their knees and cry out “We’re not worthy!” Even God was going to be impressed! I had yet to do anything very serious with music ministry at that time.

Well, the truth was first that I wasn’t as good as I thought I was. And I had this empty pride, even a competitive spirit. Anytime some other guitar player showed up, I had to compare them to me – quietly, of course. I either could brush my knuckles on my lapel and think, “I can smoke them any day!”; or I would become jealous and downcast because I knew they could play rings around me. God had some work to do with me.

I’m not saying the God gave me pain, but pain did in fact begin building up in my hands. It continued to get worse and worse, until I could barely play at all. And the Holy Spirit began to work with me through all of this. I finally cried out to God: “I don’t care if I ever play again. I just want to be with you!” And that was the beginning.

I got asked to play guitar and lead worship for the fifth grade Sunday School class at the large church I was attending at that time. The only guitar I had available was a twelve-string Ovation guitar. Ovations are largely made of plastic. I hated playing twelve string, and I detested Ovations! But I began doing this worship –

frankly a task I would have totally looked down on previously. And God did a work in my heart, and rebuilt my playing, and more importantly, my attitude about playing from the ground up. Within three years I was playing and ministering in the Royal Albert Hall in London in front of thousands. God had to change me from the inside before I could do something like that.

So pride is one trap we fall into. We could also be messed up with the opposite – how could I ever deserve to serve, or do something? I’m just a worthless worm! Or maybe we fall into a place where we think that we do service; we do work in order to get something out of God. It’s kind of like a heavenly Coke machine. Put in the right coins and out pops a blessing. (What we are going to see this morning is that it is actually the opposite that is true – we are gifted and empowered, yes, blessed by God, and in turn respond with love and service.

Under all of this is the assumption we may have that we have to do it all in our own strength, without depending on God. The truth is that the only way we can be good stewards of the gifts we have been given is to lean on God’s anointing power – the Holy Spirit inundating us. This is where stewardship of any kind comes from.

Ok, so I’ve used this word that is in the title of this sermon – “anointing.” What is anointing? Each of the scripture passages read this morning tell us a bit more about this thing. In Zechariah, we learn that it is not our personal strength or might that we do service to God and others. These things can only be done by the Spirit. The word translated “Spirit” in this passage is the Hebrew *rûah*. It is the very breath of life – the living Spirit of God. It is endowed upon us, and never reversible. Think back to the account in Genesis of Jacob and Esau. After Jacob fooled his blind father into thinking he was blessing Esau, the father’s blessing could not be taken back. When Esau begged his father for it, Isaac could not give it again. *Rûah* can never be taken back. What God gives to us – his Holy Spirit – can never be removed. It is that which animates us and gives us life!

The apostle Paul tells us more in our passage from the first letter to the Corinthians. The anointing presence of the Holy Spirit is not specific to certain giftings. Just because someone might be preaching to a huge crowd, or playing music in awesome ways, doesn't mean that they have more anointing than someone else working in their gifts – hospitality, giving, or so many more. The

Spirit is given out to all of Christ's followers. It is the same empowering for us all. Finally, Peter tells us that we serve one another as good stewards, regardless of the grace given to us by God – speaking, hospitality, all in the strength that God supplies.

Our last passage from the Gospel of Luke tells us of Jesus proclaiming Himself anointed in front of the hometown crowd. Quoting Isaiah, He said:

***The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives
and recovering of sight to the blind,
to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."***

The word "anointed" comes from the Greek *chriō*, which comes from a root word meaning to borrow or make use of a thing. Through the idea of contact with something or someone, it speaks of smearing or rubbing oil, often to consecrate one to a special office or religious service. Overall it is understood and the enduing of gifts, as in spiritual gifts. Anointing with oil had many different uses and connotations in Hebrew and Jewish life. Shepherds would pour a mixture of olive oil and spices over the heads of his sheep. It coated their wool, and if a predator such as a lion or a wolf tried to grab the sheep they could slip right out of its grasp. In religious practice, oil was used to anoint priests into their service. It also marked the anointing of a king to lead and exercise authority. Prophets were set aside and anointed for their ministry. Jesus Himself was anointed to heal the sick, deliver the oppressed and so much more. Through church history the application of oil has been used to pray for the sick and see them recover.

Today we are anointed with the Holy Spirit, the oil of life and power for practical serving or ministry, regardless of the gifts being used.

We can also review what anointing is not – it is not our innate talent or skill. It is not emotionalism or popularity. It's not a formula that we follow to get God's power. It is not forced or manipulated. It is freely gifted and freely acknowledged and appropriated by God's people.

My friend Don Francisco, early in his music ministry, wrote a song called “Jesus is Lord of the Way I Feel.” Some of you remember this song, I’m sure. There’s a line in it where Don sings “The Spirit of the Lord is here, and He has anointed me.” He was following this passage from Isaiah and Luke. Before he did the final recording of the song, he was called into the office of the president of the record company he was working with. This guy, sitting at his power desk in his power office, recounted this line – “and He has anointed me.” He looked at Don and snapped, “Who do you think you are, saying you are anointed?!” Don caved, and on the first recording of the song, the lyric was changed to, “The Spirit of the Lord is here, and He has commanded me.” Don got over that in the next few years, and from then on, he always sang the original words. We are anointed, just like Jesus!

Going back to Jesus in Nazareth, He claimed the anointing of the Spirit of the Lord upon himself, much like Don did. And his old friends and neighbors reacted in much the same way as that record company president did. “Isn’t this Joseph’s son? Who does He think He is? The nerve of this guy!” They got so worked up that they were going to throw Jesus off of a cliff! (I’m glad that didn’t happen to Don!)

What anointing did Jesus claim? To bring good news to the poor, liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind (as well as other healing gifts), freedom from oppression. To declare to good news of the favor of God! And guess what – our anointing is no different than that which Jesus received. The gifts may differ, but the Holy Spirit is the same.

I haven’t given you a report on Pakistan for some time. We were just able to set a widowed mother of two free from the brick kiln slavery they had struggled with for nearly twenty years. Her kids had been born into this oppression. Being a girl and a boy coming of age in their teenage years, they were at risk of unspeakable abuse from the brick kiln owners and overseers. This little family’s debt was paid, they were moved far away, and we were even able to buy a sewing machine for her to use to support her children and herself as a seamstress. (By the way, we are praying for approximately fifteen families also in this enslavement. A total of \$25 to \$30,000 would be needed to set them free. (I’m not asking for giving at this time, we are still praying and researching this situation.) This particular brick kiln owner, along with his assistant, are doing heinous things to them – rape not

the least among their misdeeds. He has forced these families to work in the sun making bricks totally naked and at the mercy of the heat and sunburn.

Pam and I led a session with a large group of villagers early this last week. After preaching and praying for many to come to Christ, we pray for healing for different people who come forward to the Zoom camera for us to see. Now, I've mentioned before that when we "go" to another place, even virtually, the level of what the Holy Spirit is doing is greatly increased. We prayed for a woman who had suffered from severe skin lesions and allergies for nine years. A few days later we learned that she had been completely healed!

Why do I bring this up? Not to show how cool Pam and I are (we're not really that cool)! Rather, I'd like to use this as an approach to how we can take advantage of the anointing power of the Holy Spirit. And it applies to far more than preaching and healing – it is active in any gift of the Spirit that you may be exercising. When we branch out in our stewardship, however that looks, we must learn to trust Him. It's not easy to say to someone eight thousand miles away, "You're healed!" Not comfortable at all! We trust in Him rather than our own abilities. You may face opposition as well. If you do, that's likely a good sign that you are going in the right direction.

The anointing power of the Holy Spirit – we don't give to get that anointing. God has already given it to us. It is up to us to believe that we've already got it – the power, strength and wisdom that only God can provide. I'll say it again – you've already got it!

Amen.