

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Psalm 24:1-2 and Matthew 21:33-46

Sermon Title: "The Biblical Principle of Ownership" (Making It Happen)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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{SLIDE 1} Today we start off our Stewardship Campaign as we normally do during the month of October. We are here to talk about what stewardship is. A person who is a good steward understands that he or she has been given something, and he or she needs to take care of it. A good steward manages the things handed to him or her with the best intentions, with the greatest care and efficiency. Good things happen when we are good stewards, especially if we are good stewards of God.

{SLIDE 2} Good stewards of God handle the things of God. God entrusts us to manage his creation with the greatest care and efficiency. God entrusts us to work with others in making sure the things of God move forward and accomplish the best results. Good stewards of God do not take the things of God and do with them as they please. Good stewards need to understand how to be good stewards. It takes spiritual training. It takes biblical study. We need God to coach us and encourage us along the way, so that we do not get it wrong and turn out to be bad

stewards.

{SLIDE 3} There is a website I visited and it is called the Institute of Faith, Work, and Economics. They suggest four principles of biblical stewardship that would help us become good stewards of God. For the next four Sunday we will take a look at each principle, and starting today we begin with the principle of ownership.

We know what ownership is. Some of us own a car. Even if we are still making payments on it, we do not say that the bank owns our cars. We say it is ours. We own the car. The same goes for a house: we may pay a mortgage on the house, but we usually say that we own our homes, if we have one. We may rent an apartment, but we usually tell people that we own one. We may own other property. We may own a lawnmower or trimming shears or chainsaw. We may own an upright laundry and drying machine, a refrigerator with a computer screen that talks to us, and 50 bottles of shampoo in our cabinets. We know what ownership is, because we use the word every day. When we own something, we possess it. Whether it wants to be possessed or not, it is ours and that things really cannot do anything about it. Let us shelve that idea away for a moment.

{SLIDE 4} Now, we just read in Psalm 24 that the

earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it.¹ The earth belongs to God. Everything in the world belongs to God. All the people of the earth belong to God, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not. We are God's possession.

So when we say that we own a house, we are misspeaking. We do not own it not because we have to make payments to the bank, but because the house is a possession of God given to us. Our house is God's house, because we just said that the earth is the Lord's and all that is in it. The lovely car that we drive down the street doesn't belong to us, whether we make payments on it or not. The car or cars in our driveways belong to God. They are God's possessions. The lawnmower and the chainsaw, the laundry machine and the fridge, the beds, the couches, the back deck, the front porch: they all belong to God, because all things on earth belong to the Lord.

Our families belong to God. Our spouses belong to God. Our children and grandchildren are God's possessions. Our careers belong to God. The money we earn and the bonuses we might get all belong to our Lord. The loans we get for purchasing a house or car belong to God, and the grant we receive for college

¹ Verse 1.

also belong to God. Let's get a little further: our breath belongs to God. The air that we take in and the carbon dioxide that we exhale are possessions of God. Our heartbeats, our organ functions, the blood that courses through our veins and the muscles that lift different objects: yes, they all belong to God. Our connection with God runs deep and it is absolute. Nature's connections are just as deep and absolute. Nothing is outside of God's scope of influence. Nothing and nobody can say that they are exempt from being touched by God. The first verses of Psalm 24 make it quite clear: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world and those who live in it; for God has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers." God has got us all and everything alongside.

{SLIDE 5} Now, we might not have a problem with God's ownership over us. We might even be overjoyed to know that God has got us and nobody else. Sure, we can believe that God owns our living spaces and our modes of transportation, because we prayed for such things, and God gave them to us. They are blessings from God, and we are ever thankful. We would say the same of our families: if it wasn't for God, we wouldn't have such loving people in our lives. Our families are blessings from God. Our careers may also be things that we prayed heavily about. God

answered the prayers, and now we are doing what we like to do. We will totally agree with God owning our careers, since God gave them to us.

{SLIDE 6} Okay, let us go back a bit. Remember that I made a comment and then said we should shelve it for a moment. Well, here is the moment and we are now taking the thing off the shelf. When we own something, we possess it. Whether it wants to be possessed or not, it is ours and that things really cannot do anything about it. Objects such as cars and refrigerators do not have brains in order to make decisions, so they wouldn't object to be owned by someone. Pets do not understand the concept of ownership either; they just want to be fed and petted from time to time. People, however, understand ownership, and no person likes to be owned. Nobody likes to be possessed and have nothing to say about it.

{SLIDE 7} There are discussions swirling around, especially on college campuses, about a person's right to take ownership of himself or herself. When it comes to relationships, men and women need to treat others with respect and love, not treat each other like objects. This is particularly important when it comes to how men look at women. Such discussion should continue to be had, because everyone is special in the eyes of God. But then, we just read Psalm 24, and it says that we are possessions of God. Men and women alike

are owned by God. There is no say in the matter. Some people might not like the idea and try to reject it.

{SLIDE 8} Jesus tells a parable about a vineyard.² Jesus told several stories about vineyard, and in this parable he sets up the scene with an owner planting a vineyard, putting a fence around it, constructing a watchtower for protection and a wine press for production. Last but not least, the owner hires tenants (workers, farmers) to manage the vineyard, keeping it safe, making it successful.

A season goes by and the wine is ready for market. The owner sends servants to the vineyard to collect his wine. The owner has every right to collect his wine, because he built the vineyard. It is his business. He put the money and the time into constructing fences and watchtowers and winepresses. He gave up his money to hire workers. So he should have no problem collecting what is rightfully his. But what happens? The tenants/farmers seize the servants, beat one, kill another, and stone yet another. This is shocking. This is total unacceptable. Anybody hearing this parable should be upset with how these tenants are acting. It is not their vineyard. It is not their wine. They wouldn't even be there if it weren't for the owner thinking kindly of them and offering them a job.

² Cf. Matthew 21:33-46.

The owner sends more servants to collect his wine, and the tenants beat and stone and kill them. Finally he sends his own son, thinking that the tenants will respect the owner's son more than the servants. They don't. They choose to kill the son and hold on to the false belief that the entire vineyard is finally theirs.

{SLIDE 9} There are several lessons to the story – the largest of them being about the Savior coming to the world to die for our sin and bringing us back to a perfect relationship with God. The one lesson I would like to offer is this, starting with two questions: How could the vineyard workers believe that something they did not own could eventually be theirs? What happened along the way that caused them to become so possessive, so angry and greedy about something that was never theirs to begin with? Maybe it has to do with our sin that tells us that we cannot be possessed. We cannot be owned. We are the masters of our destinies. We determine what our fate will be. Nobody can stop us, not even God. Not even God can interfere with what we have.

The vineyard workers believed that they were not the objects of their boss. He could not do anything to control their futures. They looked at their work and said to themselves, "This is our work, not the owner's. What has he done to grow the grapes and produce the

wine? Nothing. We control what goes on here, so it must be ours. It all belongs to us.” When the servants of the owner came a-calling, the workers naturally put up a defense. They fought for what they thought was rightly theirs, except for the forgotten fact that it was never rightly theirs. They were fighting for nothing. The vineyard is not a possession of the workers. It is the possession of God.

{SLIDE 10} If we associate the vineyard to be the world, the world is not ours. God built it. God owns it. If we associate the owner to be God, God constructs all the systems for growing food and doing work and getting from one place to another and being in relationship with each other. We never invented it. God gave us the tools to construct it all. It all started with God and it all belongs to God. And if we associate the workers of the vineyard to be God’s people, then we can conclude that they were never meant to be the sole owners of all that God made. They were not even sole owners of themselves, because it was God allowed them to exist and do the work in the first place.

Jesus doesn’t say this, but if we agree that the workers in the parable are God’s people, then they were created by God. God gave them the breath in their lungs and the blood in their veins. God gave them brains to process many ideas with the great hope that all those ideas would work for the kingdom of

God. So God gave them bodies to move and have being, just as God formed us and allowed us to move and have our being. God gave us a place – this earth – to move and have our being, and so we should be thankful for all that God provided and still provides. We should be joyful that we have existence, and we have things we can do, and we have people we can love and who can love us, and we can enjoy all the blessings of being God’s people on God’s green earth.

{SLIDE 11} The first biblical principle for our Stewardship Campaign is Ownership, and it is not a dirty word. It is not a bad thing, when we consider our God and who our God is. Our God is all compassion, all grace, all might, slow to anger and abounding in all mercy. We want to belong to the God who cares for us. We want to belong to the God who is slow to hold our sin before us and quick to remove it as we ask for forgiveness. We want to belong to the God who coaches us along the way, opens the path and walks with us down that path. We want to belong to the God who will never leave us or forsake us, when others might, and who will offer us healing and restoration even beyond our time here on earth.

“The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the

world, and those who live in it.”³ Ownership is a good thing, especially when it comes to God being our owner. We belong to God – we are God’s people. We do not want to reject it but revel in it. Rejoice in it. Rest in it. Give ourselves over to God and know that God will always accept us. God will always care for us.

³ Verse 1.

Assurance of Pardon

Hear the good news: God's mercy is poured out like a mighty river. God's grace flows like a never-ending stream. Whatever we have done and whatever we have failed to do are washed away. We are made clean. We are raised up. We are forgiven and set free in the love of God, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. Thanks be to God, amen.