Stewardship and the Good Samaritan

The story is told of an elderly woman named Mary. One Sunday while in church, Mary fainted and struck her head on the end of the pew. 911 was called. The EMTs strapped her to a stretcher and got ready to head out the door. Just then, Mary regained consciousness. She motioned for her daughter to come near. Everyone thought she was summoning her strength for her final words. The daughter leaned over until her ear was at her mother’s mouth. “My offering is in my purse,” Mary whispered.

That elderly woman was a remarkable person. Her last words showed what was of highest importance to her. She was a good steward of the gifts God had given her. Being a good steward means using God-given abilities to manage God-given resources, to help accomplish God’s will. That’s important. When we think of stewardship we often only think of money, the giving of our resources. But giving money to church is not stewardship. It is a part of stewardship. But – we can’t be stewards without the giving of money.

If stewardship isn’t about money, maybe it is about doing ministry, the giving of our abilities. But what you do in ministry for God is not stewardship either. It is a part of stewardship. But – we can’t be stewards without the giving of our abilities.

It seems that stewardship is not about what we can give. It’s also not about what we can do. What, then, is stewardship about? Stewardship is about having the heart of a steward. In other words, good stewardship is a matter of attitude. It is a matter of the attitude that stands behind our giving and our service. It’s not what we give or what we do for God, it’s why we do it.

The parable of the Good Samaritan is a parable about the attitude of stewardship. There are three attitudes on display here. Let us ask ourselves which is our attitude? The first attitude is this: What’s yours is mine and I’m going to take it. Such is the attitude of the thieves on the road. That’s not an attitude we’d approve of. Even the world understands this is wrong. In the Old Testament, we find this attitude being shown by God’s people against God. In Malachi God speaks to Israel. "In tithes and offerings... you are robbing me. Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. Test me in this," says the LORD Almighty. "See if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it.” In the Old Testament, the Tithe was commanded in the Law. All God’s people were commanded to give back to God 10% of whatever they took in. How does that work?
Let’s say that you’ve gone to eat in a fancy restaurant. A waitress attends to your every need. You eat a sumptuous meal and at the end, you are very satisfied. The last thing you do? You leave a tip. How much is a tip? It is usually 10-15% of the value of the bill. The tip is left in thanks, gratitude for the service of the waitress. What if a patron leaves the restaurant, and leaves no money (or something less than a tip) at the table? The waitress might think, “Did I do a poor job?” But, more likely she’s going to think, “That guy’s real skinflint. He robbed me!” Now, did you owe her that tip? No! But, the waitress did her job and did it well. Your “gratuity” showed appreciation for her service.

For the Christian, the tithe might not be “required of us” as it was of God’s Old Testament people. But if God is important to us, if we really love Him, if He’s really the God we tell our neighbors He is, then the Tithe is a powerful way of showing appreciation. But the first attitude that some Christians exhibit is *what’s yours is mine and I’m going to keep it*.

The second attitude is *what’s mine is mine and I’m going to keep it*. This is the attitude of the Levite and Pharisee in our story. These were religious leaders. They were trained to serve God. Yet, here, they’re not going to do anything for the beaten man. In order for them to help this man, they’d have to give up something important to them. They would have to give up their time, their resources, and their personal comfort. They’ve been trained to do just this. But when the time comes actually to do it, they turn their heads away. Their attitude is “What’s mine is mine – I’m going to keep it.” Such is not the attitude of good stewardship.

Then there is the third attitude. *What’s mine is yours and I’ll share it with you.* This Samaritan was not a trained man of religion. The Samaritan was probably not any more wealthy than the Levite or Pharisee. This Samaritan probably had other things to do in his life. Yet, he stopped where the others walked on by.

What made the difference? It was his *attitude*. The Samaritan’s attitude helped him first to overcome his prejudice. His attitude helped him ignore the inconvenience. And his attitude helped him give up his possessions to take care of this man. Such is the attitude of the good steward.

Do you know what a “*steward*” is? A steward is someone who takes care of something for someone else. If you’re a steward, you don’t own what you have. So, if we are going to be “stewards for God” we need the attitude that says we don’t own our time, our money, our possessions, or our relationships. They all belong to God.
They are all His. They belong to Him. We just manage them. If we can master that attitude, we’ll be good stewards.

Back to the Old Testament prophet Micah to close. “Test me in this,” said the LORD Almighty to Micah. “Test Me in the matter of giving the tithe. Give me back the full ten percent of what is already mine, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven. I will pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it. I will prevent pests from devouring your crops, and the vines in your fields will not cast their fruit,” says the LORD Almighty. "Then all the nations will call you blessed, for yours will be a delightful land," says the LORD Almighty.

That’s the promise to those who would be good stewards. And God keeps his promises.