

Skyland Conference 1980-05 Christian Stewardship

by Stan Ford

Stan Ford's sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing and addressing loneliness through Christian stewardship and the support of God's love.

Duration: 31:43

Scripture: Acts 20:27-32, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Christian Stewardship", "Eternal Loneliness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of realizing a truth, exercising trust, and memorizing a text. He acknowledges that loneliness can be a challenge, but encourages listeners not to let it hinder them. The preacher then discusses the responsibility of stewards in helping those who are lonely, highlighting the story of the prodigal son as an example of the desperation and loneliness that sinners can face. He concludes by emphasizing the need for sinners to turn to God and avoid the eternal loneliness of hell.

Transcript

Thank you. I wonder if we could turn together again into the 20th chapter of the book of Acts. Acts chapter 20, once again, we read these verses on a previous occasion but I want us to turn to them this morning.

Verse 27, For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God. Take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears. And now brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel. Yea, ye yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, to them and to them that were with me. I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he

said it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Shall we pray? O God and Father, we bless thee together for thy word. We rejoice that in all circumstances thou hast something to say to us. We pray thou wouldst say it this morning.

There will be some of us that this will be the last day that we're together, and we may never meet one another this side of eternity again. So Lord, in a special way, will thou bless us today. Give us a hallelujah day.

For Jesus' sake. Amen. As we have been looking at stewardship, Christian stewardship, so we have gazed at many different aspects of this stewardship.

We have fooled to the fact that we are stewards of the faith, that we are stewards of the flock. Today, I'm going to speak, if the Lord may help me, because I've had it much on my heart this morning. I want to speak with you, if I may, about stewards of the forsaken.

Stewards of the forsaken. The more I read my Bible, the more I begin to realize how frequently God addresses Himself to those that are lonely, and those that feel forsaken, and those who feel that life is almost burdensome. Again and again, the message of the Christian faith comes to such people.

And if my experience goes for anything over these years, it is this. That with our modern economy, and much done for those that are aged, I presume in your country as in mine, still the greatest problem I have to face, as I move from place to place visiting, is the problem of loneliness. The problem of someone saying, Mr. Ford, I haven't had a visitor for months.

I haven't had a visitor for weeks. Loneliness eats like a canker into the hearts of God's people, as well into the hearts of men and women who know not the Lord. But the tremendous thing is this.

That experience also tells us that loneliness doesn't just affect the aged. It affects young people. It affects middle-aged people.

And so I would like this morning, if I may, and the Lord may help me, I would like just to talk with you about our responsibility as stewards in seeking to help those that are lonely. I have a few questions to ask, and then one answer to give. The first question I want to ask is simply this.

Who is it that faces loneliness? Who is it that faces loneliness? Is there a particular class of people? Well, as I open my Bible, I begin to find this, you know, that sinners face loneliness. A desperate loneliness. The fifteenth chapter of Luke is one of the greatest stories ever, ever told by the Lord Jesus.

It's the story of a man who says, Give me. It's the story of a man who realized that it wasn't until he could cry, Make me, that anything of joy could come to his life. But it's the story of a man who, given that which was his portion, went into a far country, wasted his substance with liars as living, enjoyed the company of all who would help him spend his money.

Then there arose a mighty famine in the land, and no man gave unto him. No man gave unto him. All the loneliness of that man as he seated away there amidst the pigs.

And the devil came and mocked him, as ever the devil does when folk are lonely. Sinners get lonely. I suppose the greatest tragedy of loneliness is the story of Judas, who went to his own place.

Oh, never let us forget this. And if there's someone here unconverted, please, oh please, please think about it. There is no company in hell.

Judas went to his own place. His own place. There is no company in the taverns of endless remorse.

And sinners know loneliness. I say, backsliders know loneliness, don't they? The classic story of Jonah. The man, the Bible says, who went down to Tarsus.

And then he went down to the side of the ship. And then he went down into the deep. And then he went down into the belly of the well.

Down, down, down, down is the story of Jonah. Then he was lonely. Himself separated from everyone in the belly of a great pit of waves and billows.

What loneliness! The devil, methinks, came and mocked. Backsliders know loneliness. By speaking to someone here this morning, and you're on the slippery path of a backsliding existence, beginning to think, just as Peter stepped out on the water, no one else knew he was beginning to think.

All the eyes of every other disciple must have been upon him. Fancy a man stepping out of a boat. Everyone must have looked.

And not one of them shouted. Not one of them said, Peter, be careful. They didn't know he was beginning to think, although they were looking at him.

And maybe we're looking at someone this morning, and you're beginning to think, and we don't know it. But you know it. You know it.

Oh, my fellow traveler to eternity. What an awful thing it is to begin to go down. Loneliness comes to the backslider.

Loneliness comes to the sinner. But loneliness comes to the saint. There's a puzzle.

It's always been a puzzle, and I don't know if I will ever know the answer to it. There's a puzzle, a real puzzle. It's the story of Mary Magdalene, who went early while it was yet dark to the tomb.

She found that the stone had been rolled away. She found that the Lord had risen from the dead. And there she stood wondering what had happened.

The tears were in her eyes, and there was sorrow in her heart. And two disciples came running, running. They never even stopped and said, Mary, what are you doing here? I've often wondered about that.

I thought the first thing that Christ does to a person, to a Christian, is to make him a gentleman or a lady. And here were two disciples in the early morning. They didn't even say, Good morning, Mary, and duff their caps.

How lonely she was. And it wasn't until the Savior came and said, Mary, Mary, that anything about loneliness disappeared. Saints get lonely, don't they? If there's a Christian here who's never been lonely, God bless you, I'd like to meet you afterwards, really.

I'd like to know your secret. I would, really. I tell you this, I've been lonely many a time.

Or if there's one thing I'd like to say thank you to you all for, it's the fact that you've allowed Mary to come over with me. I know what loneliness means. She does, maybe more than I. I only know this.

I only know that saints know loneliness. So everyone faces it. But if I want to ask the question, Who faces loneliness? I want to ask this question, Where do we face loneliness? Where do we face it? Is there a special place where we face it? And in the early hours of the morning, as I was working on what I was going to say, for I had not prepared this at all, it seems to me that there's every place where loneliness comes to a safe.

Loneliness comes in the shade of sorrow. Is not that right? Please, if I'm opening wounds, I don't want to. It's the last thing in the world I'd want to do.

But there are some of you here this morning that have stood by the grave of a loved one. And it can sometimes sound very hollow when the preacher looks and says, We sorrow not as those that have no hope. Oh, how hollow it can sound.

There's an empty chair. There's a companion you've lived with for 50 years and she's gone or he's gone. Listen, we sorrow not as those that have no hope, but we sorrow.

I wouldn't give you much for a brother who's lived his life with his wife and doesn't sorrow when she passes away. I wonder how much Christianity there's in him. Of course we sorrow.

Why is it that a Christian should avoid sorrow in such a case as that? Of course we sorrow not as those that have no hope. Oh, bless God, we're going to meet again. You know, someone asked me down in Augusta, Stan, do you think we're going to know one another in heaven? I'm always getting asked it and so are you.

And I had one simple answer. I said, do you think I'm going to be a bigger fool in heaven than I am on earth? I only know this, that while we sorrow, we sorrow, we sorrow in the shades of sorrow. At least we know loneliness in the shades of sorrow.

I say, we can know loneliness on the fruits of suffering. And suffering does come to us as well, does it not? He was 17 years of age, wasn't he, when his father said, I want you to go out and meet your brethren. And Joseph went out.

And as soon as he met his brethren, they laid hold of him. For they said, here cometh the dreamer. And they tossed him in a pit.

And they weren't satisfied with that. They pulled him up and sold him to the Ishmaelites. And they sold him to Potiphar.

And there in the home of Potiphar, Potiphar's wife, wicked woman that she was, tempted him. And he refused to do that which was wrong. Do you remember what happened? Thirteen years they threw him in prison.

Thirteen years in prison for seeking to be righteous. Brethren, I wonder how much you and I know of what some of our brethren in Russia, behind the Iron Curtain, behind the Bamboo Curtain, I wonder how much we know of what our brethren are suffering in Angola today, in Mozambique. How easy it is for them.

There's a desperate loneliness that came indeed to Joseph, as there he was for thirteen years in prison, hoping and hoping and hoping that the man to whom he said, when it's well with thee, think of me, would think of him. And he never did. For thirteen years, loneliness.

That we can be lonely in the shades of sorrow, and we can be lonely on the slopes of suffering, and we can be lonely in the stage of service. Isn't that it? Lonely on the stage of service. The Apostle Paul finds himself in Rome, and there in his letter, his second letter to Timothy, in that fourth chapter he dares to say, At my first stand, at my first answer, no man stood with me.

Here, standing before Nero. It won't be long before they take him, poor half-blind preacher. They put his head upon an executioner's block, and sever it from his body, and throw his remains into a pauper's grave.

He says, no man stood with me. Paul, Paul, you've preached all over in Macedonia, and churches have been established, and souls have been saved, and men have called you blessed. But will I be now, on the stage of service, to be desperately lonely? To be trying to do what God wants you to do? And be misunderstood? And let it up.

I say, we can even be lonely on the shrine of supplication. I don't know if I can explain this, what was on my heart this morning. I don't know if I can, but I read the story of Esther, you see.

I read the story of Mordecai. I read the story of a man, Haman, who came in a subtle way and got the king to come into covenant with him. Got the king to give him money that every Jew would be put to death.

Then I read the story of a Mordecai who sent for his niece and said to her, Esther, Esther, you've got the ear of the king. I want you to go in, and I want you to stand for him. Oh, stand for us.

And she was worried. She knew she had no right to enter into the presence of the king unless he called her. Her life would be in jeopardy.

Do you remember the tremendous words that swelled our heart as he looked at her and said, Who's to know whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this? And then she goes to face the king. Alone. Alone.

No one with her. One word from the king and she'll be slain. One word from that death-spot and her life is finished.

One word from him and all she came to do will be of no avail because the king won't save the Jews. There are only two books in the Bible, aren't there, where God's name is not mentioned. Only two books in the Bible.

Isn't it wonderful this is one of them? But his name is not mentioned, but you see him in every chapter, don't you? You see him in every page, in every action. And in her loneliness, God was there. Or the wonder of it all.

But there was something else. It seems to me that men and women can be lonely not only in the shades of sorrow. They can be lonely not only on the slopes of suffering.

They can be lonely not only on the stage of service and in the shrine of supplication, but lonely in seasons of sincerity. There were ten of them. There were ten of them.

They were lepers. Now only those of you that have seen leprosy in its ugliest form will understand how loathsome it can be. I've seen men and women away in Africa.

I've seen them away in Malaysia who've been eaten up with leprosy. It would be impossible for me to describe it. Thank God modern medicine has done so much.

Oh, thank God. No need for anyone to die of leprosy today. Thank God for modern medicine.

But to see a man who's never had medicine, who's never been cared for, eaten up with a desperate disease of leprosy. And there were ten of them. Not one of them had received any help from anyone.

But one day Jesus came. Oh, hallelujah. He can do what no one else can do.

And the ten of them were healed. Oh, the serenity that came to ten of them. As now they can run back to their homes.

I know not whether they had wives. I know not whether they had children. I know not whether they had parents.

I mustn't read into the Bible what's not there. But I can't imagine there were ten men who had no one linked with them. Back they go.

Look at one of them. Oh, the loneliness of serenity. One of them said, I'm going to the mosque.

Jesus looked and said, And where are the nine? Where are the nine? How many of us here... Oh, I'm not going to ask you to put your hands up. But how many of you here say... How many of you here have come back to say to Jesus, thank you? Day by day, thank you. Thank you.

My dear old friend Seth Sykes wrote that little portion of Thank you, Lord, for saving us all. He wrote it on the back of an old tram ticket in the city of Glasgow. Dear old Seth was just a little gypsy boy.

I loved him with all my heart. He was going to Crabber's Close Mission in Edinburgh. Went down on the tram to get the train out of Enoch Station to go to Edinburgh.

And that morning in their reading, they'd been reading of the love of the Lord. And I know not how it really happens. It does with me just occasionally, once maybe five years.

But somehow a melody ran in his head. And he put his hand in his pocket to get his pen out. And then he couldn't find any paper.

So he took the back of an old tram ticket and wrote the Do Re Mi Fa of Thank you, Lord, for saving my soul. When I saw Betsy just recently, she said, Stan, it's been translated into 15 languages. And all over the world they're singing, Thank you, Lord.

Is that how you start the day? That's how I want to start the day? Don't always do it. Please, please. I don't want to hold myself up at some example.

I'm not. But that's how I want to start the day every day. I am continuing to.

Oh, but you can be lonely when you do that, can't you? People look at you, you know, they think you're a bit... But don't let it bother you. They never touch your head. They always touch theirs.

So there it is. I only know this, sir. I only know this.

That we, each one, need to return and say, Thank you. But I said that, Who faces loneliness? And where will we face loneliness? I say, What has a steward to say to loneliness? Feed the flock, says Peter, over whom the Holy Ghost hath made you oversee. A steward, feed, feed, feed.

What does the Word of God say that a steward has to tell to men and women who are lonely? What have I got to say to you lonely folk here today? What have I got to say? Well, I'm going to suggest three things to you. I might even suggest four. But I'm going to suggest three things.

The first thing I'm going to say is this. There is a truth to be realized. Are you lonely today? There's a truth to be realized.

Can I repeat it? There's a truth to be realized. Could I say something else? There's not only a truth to be realized, there's a trust to exercise. There's a trust.

Oh, my lonely soul, there's a trust to be exercised. Don't sink back in your loneliness and do nothing about it. But if there's a truth to be realized, and there's a trust to be exercised.

Oh, listen, before you go out of this service this morning, there's a text to be memorized. There's a text to be memorized, and I'll give you the text in a moment. Ah, yes, I will give you four things.

There's a truth to be realized. There's a trust to be exercised. There's a text to be memorized.

There's a throne to be visualized. There's a truth to be realized. I say, what is the truth that God wants every one of us to realize? It's this, that He's not here, He's risen.

That Jesus is alive. That well long ago, David could cry, Oh, leave me not and forsake me not. Jesus said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Oh, that we might realize this truth, that our Savior is not dead, that Jesus lives. Oh, Mary Magdalene, don't you realize this? It's no sense staying outside of an empty tomb, weeping. Look in there again and see that it is empty.

And expect someone to come to you and say, Rabboni, oh, how easy it is for us to forget that, Rabboni. Forget to say, Master. Oh, that we might be willing to hear Him call us by name.

Jesus is alive. And I want to live in the joy of that, Rabboni. I do.

I want to live in the joy of it. It's not easy to say. But Mary's here and she knew me before I was saved, you see.

That's the girl that stopped me in the road and gave me a tract and took me into a service where I was converted. And I think she'd tell you this, that before God saved me, I was just a big, ignorant lump of humanity. I'd fight anyone.

I'd fight you at the drop of a hat. And if you didn't drop the hat, I'd drop the hat for you. And I sometimes stand and I have to take from Christians what naturally I'd put my fist right between their eyes for.

The wonder is, the wonder is, Jesus lives. And because He lives, because He lives, hallelujah, I can claim His property. And I can enjoy His company.

He changes lives. Please, I hope that doesn't sound big-headed. It's not meant big-headed.

But I know Jesus lives. And if you don't think He lives, you have a word with Mary out there. There's a truth to realize, but there's a trust to exercise.

The Song of Solomon, isn't it? The tremendous fourth verse of the eighth chapter. And we see, this is what we read, the woman came out of the wilderness. Can you think of a lonelier place than a wilderness? She came out of the wilderness, but what does the Song of Solomon 8 and 4 say? She came out of the wilderness, leaning on her beloved.

Oh, that's it, that's it. That's it, I tell you this, there's no wilderness when someone you love is by your side. No, oh no, there's no wilderness there.

And this is the answer the steward of God has for those that are lonely. Don't you realize this truth? That Jesus is alive. Won't you trust? Won't you trust this truth? A trust to be exercised.

No good saying Jesus lives. We've got to lean on Him. Trust Him.

Trust Him. But there's not only a trust to be exercised, there's a text to be memorized. Here's the text.

Of course, you know it, don't you? If I was real, I don't think I would, but I'm a good-minded. I'm a good-minded to say, now what do you think of the text I'm going to ask you to quote? I think every one of you would say the same. You'd say it's 2 Corinthians 12 and on.

Are you lonely? Here's a text to memorize and say it over and over and over and over and over and over again. My grace is sufficient for you. Isn't that wonderful? I mustn't preach a sermon on it.

But if I was to preach a sermon on it, I'd give you the three points. Now, come on, you preachers, I'd give you the three points. My grace is sufficient for you.

What a theme. My grace. What a theme.

My grace. What a tense. Is.

Is. Not will be. Not was.

But my grace is. What a tense. I say, what a theme.

My grace. What a tense. But what a truth is sufficient.

Will you go and preach that one now? No one will know that I gave you the outline because I've given you nothing really. You've got to put all the matter into it. You go and put the matter into it.

But learn the text. My grace. The apostle knew what it was to have a thorn in the flesh.

Pray, twice, never removed. How lonely. Never removed.

My grace is sufficient. Oh, hallelujah. But if there is a truth to be realized, and if there is a trust to be exercised, and if there is a text to be memorized, hallelujah, there's a throne to be visualized.

And with patience the race that is set before you. Looking unto Jesus. Who is this Jesus? The one who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand

of the throne of God.

There's the throne to visualize. To get your eyes fixed on the fact that Jesus not only lived, but Jesus ruled. Brethren, sisters, are you lonely? God give us to know a truth.

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