

Skyland Conference 1980-07 Christian Stewardship

by Stan Ford

We are stewards of the finished work of Christ, and we must trust in it as the central truth of the Christian faith.

Duration: 35:50

Scripture: Psalm 53:2, Matthew 6:33, John 19:30, Acts 15:1, Acts 16:1, Romans 14:12, Ephesians 2:8

Topics: "Christian Stewardship", "Salvation Through Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the fifty-third song, emphasizing how God looked down to see and sent his beloved Son, Jesus, to satisfy his heart and save humanity. The congregation is encouraged to sing the fourth and fifth stanzas of the song 'Just As I Am' as a prayer to come to Christ. The preacher shares a personal story of walking past a gospel meeting and being attracted to the singing. He also mentions the importance of stewardship and refers to Acts chapter 15, discussing the issue of circumcision among the early believers. The sermon concludes with a humorous note about someone taking the preacher's notes and folder.

Transcript

There it is. Hey, Pastor George, it's a pleasure to see you, and for those that have come in today and we haven't seen before, the Lord bless you. I wonder if I may just remind you that, as the Lord has been helping us during the past week, we've been looking at Christian stewardship.

We have looked at it from many angles. We have thought of the fact that we are stewards of the faith. We have looked at the fact that we are stewards of the flock.

We are stewards of the forsaken. We are stewards of the forgotten. But tonight, I want, being Lord's Day evening, to talk with you about the fact that we are stewards of the finished work of Christ.

I think it's one of the most tremendous statements that is possible for anyone to make. That those of us that love the Lord, and please, it is not just an isolated group who are stewards of the things of God. We are all stewards of the faith.

We are all stewards of the flock. We are all stewards of the finished work of Christ. To this end, I wonder if you would turn with me, please, as we read together from the Word of God.

I would like to turn into the Acts of the Apostles and the 15th chapter. And immediately you will know what is on my heart. Acts chapter 16.

Oh, by the way, by the way, by the way. As you know, I always leave my notes on the platform for anyone who wants them. But the last person who took my notes took my folder as well.

Now I can write notes, but I've got to buy folders. I've no Scotch blood in me, but please, I want it back. Ah, there we are.

It's only a two cent one, but it's worth it. Thank you. If I may please, the 15th chapter of the Acts, we'll commence reading in verse 1. And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren and said, except ye be circumcised, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about the question. We'll go down the chapter in verse 22, if we may please. Then pleased it the apostles and elders with the whole church to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely Judas, surnamed Barthabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren.

And they wrote letters by them after this manner. The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Forasmuch as we have heard that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your soul, saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the law, to whom we gave no such commandment, it seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you, with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men that have hazarded their lives for the name of Jesus Christ.

May the Lord just add His blessing to the reading of this word. I have, of course, one other text that I want to quote, if I may please. It's the tremendous words of the nineteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, the cry of the Saviour on Calvary's cross, "'It is finished!' I said that we have been called to be stewards of the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Is it not a remarkable fact that very early in the history of the church there arose men who sought to add to what Christ had done on Calvary's cross, and add that which demanded works, in this particular case circumcision?' And yet, the apostle now writes, or carries the letter which has been written by the apostles in Jerusalem, the elders that are found there, pointing out that as far as we are concerned, there is nothing that can be added to the work of Jesus Christ as far as salvation is concerned. Now, there are men and women who today tell us that the way of salvation is the way of race. There are men and women who tell us that the way of salvation is the way of religion.

There are men and women who tell us that the way of salvation is the way of reformation. There are men and women who tell us that the way of salvation is the way, well there are a hundred ways, a hundred ways of race, and reformation, and religion, and race. And yet, on Calvary's cross, the Lord Jesus summed it all up when he said that salvation is finished.

It is finished. Now, I have little doubt that there may be some men and women who dare to say that what is finished? And anyway, who cares what's finished? They gaze at one who hangs upon a cross, derided and mocked, broken and forsaken. They gaze at a blessed Savior who has on His brow a crown of thorns, and as they dare look at Him, they dare to say, what does it matter what's finished? Yet, I dare say to you

tonight that it does matter.

God the Father believes it matters. God the Holy Spirit believes it matters. Every born-again child of God believes it matters, and we dare open our voice tonight and say, yes, it does matter.

When Christ said, it is finished on Calvary's cross, remember that in that expression He is daring to say that all that was necessary for man's forgiveness of sin has been done by Him. It is finished. Please, not I am finished.

It is finished. As we look at Him, the world will say, why? He's finished. But, praise God, that's not true.

For the work God the Father gave Him to do, He finished it completely, made a way back to God from the dark paths of sin, a door that was open that all may go in. Thank God we can say tonight in the words of the Course that Calvary's cross is where we begin when we come as a sinner to Jesus. I wonder what He meant when He said, it is finished.

I suppose there's a sense in which He meant that His physical suffering was finished. Oh, how true that was. When you think indeed of what the Lord endured as men took Him and plucked the hair from His face, as men took Him and pressed on His brow a crown of thorns, as men took Him and having scourged Him, nailed Him on a cross, all the physical pain that the Christ of God endured, and He cries, it's finished.

Hallelujah, it was over, finished. I suppose there's a sense that His humility was finished. Oh, there is a sense of course in which that is not true, but there is a sense in which it is true.

When we think of the One who in heaven was worshipped by angelic beings, when we think of He who created all things by the Word and His power, and yet though He were rich, for our sakes He became poor. Oh, the wonder of it as we see the Lord Jesus move amongst men. The second chapter of Philippians, as we were reminding our hearts in the course of the Bible study in the week, is one of the most glorious chapters in the Bible as it tells us of He who took unto Himself the form of a serpent, became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

But God says, thus far and no further. Today we see Jesus who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor. There is a sense in which His humility was finished.

There is a sense in which His loneliness was finished. Whenever I think of the Lord Jesus, I cannot get away from the fact that He was the loneliest man that ever walked in this scene. Has it never struck you, brother? Of course it has.

Of course it has. It struck you again and again and again and again that while the Lord Jesus wanted to talk to someone of the real purpose of His coming into this scene and found there was not even a disciple that would talk to Him about it, He had to wait until God lifted the lid from a urn and summoned the patriarch and the prophet to speak of the deceit that He should accomplish at Jerusalem. Such was the loneliness of Christ, a loneliness of state, a loneliness that enabled Him to move amongst His own disciples and really find that they knew nothing of the purpose of His coming into this scene.

Oh, my fellow traveler to eternity, isn't it wonderful that that loneliness is finished? It is finished. Now for the company of His Father God and now for the company of those that will worship Him in glory. Now for the company of the redeemed.

His loneliness is over. They'll sing unto Him who loved them and washed them from their sin in His own blood. But, oh friend, that's only a part of it, isn't it? The great part that we're going to think about tonight, the great part is this, that when Christ cried it is finished, it wasn't just His pitiful, it wasn't just His humility, it wasn't just His loneliness, but praise God it was the all that God had planned in Jesus Christ.

He had done what God asked Him to do. As I read my Bible, I get utterly amazed. I turn to those two portions of the Word of God that are exactly the same, you know.

Of course, preachers love those, don't they? You know, whenever they preach a sermon that they preached before and someone's heard it twice and tells them about it, they look at them straight away and say, ah yes, but how about the 50th Psalm and how about the 53rd Psalm? Oh, what an answer. Isn't it wonderful that my Bible says God looked down to see, God looked down to see, and praise God He did look down to see. He looked for a man to satisfy His heart and found none.

One day He sent His blessed Son in the world and the Lord Jesus satisfied His heart. My beloved Son, He cries twice, my beloved Son in whom I find all my delight, all my delight. Now as He hangs on Calvary's cross, the one that satisfied God the Father as He moved in this scene is the one who has completely satisfied Him as He has been wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities and the chastisement of our peace was upon Him and with His stripes we are healed.

I was asked this afternoon if I would give my testimony and I told the brethren, no. I've given it about five times since I've been over here already and please, that happened 41 years ago. It isn't what Jesus Christ meant to me 41 years ago, it's what Jesus Christ means to me now that counts, now that counts.

But I did make this promise. I said, well I'll tell you what I'll do brethren, I'll weave a little bit into it, into what I say during the course of the week. The first time I ever heard the gospel in my life, I didn't hear it in a church or a chapel, I didn't hear it in a gospel hall or an open air service.

The first time I ever heard the gospel in my life, I heard it in a pub. I was having a drink with some of the boys and as I was pulling away at a glass of beer, suddenly the door opened and a little Salvation Army lassie came in. This little lassie came in with a Pope bonnet and a bundle of war cries under her.

She went from one to another and said, will you buy a war cry? And half drunk I looked at her and said, I'll buy a war cry missy, if you'll sing us a song. I never thought she would do that. Never thought she would.

But she put me on the spot. She looked at me and said, I'd be very happy to sing a hymn, will you ask the man to be quiet? Now that was different. You see I didn't mind her singing a hymn, but I didn't want to be the chairman of a religious meeting in the pub where I drank.

But she put me on the spot and I thought in for a penny, in for a pound and I grabbed hold of her and I said righto and I lifted her up and put her on the bar. She stood there in the five-way hotel in my hometown and she sang. On a hill far away stood an old ruggie's bar, the emblem of suffering and shame.

And I love that old cross where the dearest and best for a world of lost sinners was left. And you know what it's like, you learn a chorus, you learn a song and it runs in your mind and this one kept running. I'd never heard it in my life, but I couldn't get away from it.

Wherever I went it would come back for a world of lost sinners was slain, for a world of lost sinners was slain, for a world of lost sinners was slain. And the time went by, lots of things happened, but one evening I

walked down towards the pub where I was drinking or I used to drink and right opposite that pub there was a large marquee erected because the local assembly were having some gospel meeting and they had invited a great Welsh preacher Victor Cyril from Cardiff to come and preach. And as I walked down over the hill I used to hear them sing you know.

A tent you could hear them and it was attractive. But one evening I walked down over the hill and I was there a little bit before they started to sing. I started to walk up over the other hill and coming down the road was a young lady and she was divvying out something.

I didn't know what it was, it might have been five pound notes, I didn't know. I know this, I crossed the road to get one. And she stopped and gave me a try and asked me to come into the services in the tent.

And I didn't want to go, but she could keep off. Now I know what I'm talking about, there she is look I've been married to her for 40 years, 40 years. But she could keep on and she got me in the tent there.

But the whole point I'm trying to get is this, that I wasn't converted when I heard that lassie sing the old rugged chorus. But the first time I ever heard the gospel it was there. For a world of lost sinners you see.

And I looked at this wonderful portion and I say to my heart oh the wonder of it all. It is finished. And now we have become stewards of that tremendous finished work of Christ.

We would go forth and tell men and women that it is in Christ and in Christ alone that salvation is found. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away from it. For whatsoever God doeth he doeth forever.

Forever. It is all the work of Christ. It is salvation by faith and nothing else.

We are stewards of that finished work. There are many ways that our hearts are thrilled I'm sure when we read the scripture. For instance I looked at those epistles that were written.

Isn't it remarkable that almost every one of them starts with a note of joy. The apostle writes to the church in Rome and he dares to say I'm so glad. I'm so glad that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

I say he writes to the church at Corinth. He says I want to tell you I'm so glad. I'm so happy that you are enriched in all utterance and knowledge.

I see him as he writes indeed to the church at Ephesus. And he says all you Christians there in Ephesus I'm so glad. I'm so thrilled when I hear of your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and your love for all the saints.

I'm so glad for that note of joy that commences the letter that he writes to the church at Colossae when he praises them and rejoices over the fact that their faith in Christ Jesus and their love for all the saints is known there also. And yet isn't it remarkable that while he rejoices with the saints in Rome, while he rejoices with the saints at Ephesus, while he rejoices with the saints at Philippi, while he rejoices with the saints at Colossae, while he rejoices with the saints at Thessalonica, while he... Ah, but there's one church he doesn't rejoice in. You know what that one is.

He dares to say to the church at Galatia I marvel that you have so soon been removed from him, from him that hath called you in the grace of Christ. Isn't that remarkable? Why was it, why was it the church at Galatia had been removed from the grace that was found in Christ? It was simply because they had added something to the finished work of the Bible. They also were a company of Christians who had brought into

the church the suggestion that a person must be circumcised.

Something else beyond the finished work of the Bible. Now, as we look at the chapter or portion of it that we have read, I want to make one or two suggestions. I want to suggest that first of all, as we think of this 15th chapter of Acts, that the church is disturbed.

May I repeat that? The church is disturbed. Then I want to remind you that not only is the church disturbed, but the church is discerning. It's discerning.

And then I want to remind you that not only is the church disturbed and the church discerning, but the church is deciding. First of all, the church is disturbed. There was something to be considered.

Paul, Barnabas, and certain others. Paul, I say, they go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and the elders to discuss this tremendous fact that there were those that had written away in Antioch and in other places who had suggested that the work of Calvary was not sufficient for salvation. I know of nothing that will disturb the church of God like an attack on the central truth of the Christian faith.

Oh, my friend, Calvary covers it all. When I think of what Christ has done on the cross, and I realize how quickly men and women would seek to add to that, I can see how hateful, how hateful the evil one is as he seeks to attack the work of the cross continually. But the church was disturbed.

But not only was the church disturbed, but the church was discerning. When they arrive in Jerusalem, why, they gather together and they speak and they hear of men who had hazarded their lives for the sake of the gospel. Now, if your defense of the Christian faith is going to be real, it will be real in as much as you have been prepared also to so submit your life to Christ, hazard your lives for the sake of the gospel, all that you and I might be willing so to do.

And the church decided. They decided that it was only the work of Calvary, it was only the work of Christ, and that circumcision was not something that had to be demanded of men and women when they were saved, any more than other things that are so prevalent today are necessary for salvation. And they write the letter and they carry it back, you remember, to the church there in Antioch.

And they find out this wonderful truth, this wonderful truth, that it not only seemed good to the elders and to the apostles, but to the Holy Ghost, says the scripture, to the Holy Ghost and to us. I think again and again and again there, again I need to emphasize the fact that salvation is by grace and by grace alone. May I repeat? Salvation is by grace and by grace alone.

I doubt if there is an epistle that would speak of grace more than the epistle to the Ephesians. I am certain that almost all of you in your Bible classes were given an outline of the epistle to the Ephesians. I wouldn't like to try and remember when first I was taught it, and yet it stays, and I trust it always will stay.

As we were reminded when first converted that salvation is by grace, sovereign grace chapter 1 and verse 6, saving grace chapter 2 and verse 5, sharing grace chapter 3 and verse 8, stately grace chapter 4 and verse 29, satisfying grace chapter 5 and verse 27, soldiering grace in chapter 6 and verse 11. And every chapter in that epistle that deals with our position in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, it brings it all down to this, that it's grace, grace, grace, grace, grace. Isn't it wonderful that God has shown us grace? When the apostle writes to young Timothy he says, grace, mercy, and peace.

Grace, mercy, and peace. Isn't that wonderful? How all of us have been taught that grace is undeserved, unmerited faith. In other words, grace is getting what you don't deserve.

Mercy is not getting what you do deserve. The outcome of it is when we get what we don't deserve, and we don't get what we do deserve, hallelujah. And the apostle writes indeed to the church, and he writes to young Timothy, and he writes to John, and he dares to say grace, mercy, and peace.

The wonder to my heart is this, that when I think of Calvary's cross, and the Savior that died for me then, that made a way back to God, all I can say tonight is simply this, I must trust. I must. I must, as a steward of the finished work of Christ, tell men and women, that if you would be saved, it is to Christ and Christ alone you must come.

It is to Him you must bow your knees, acknowledging your sin, repenting of it, asking Him to be your Savior. You must seek to go on this faith, that you might live out before men and women the fact that salvation has been purchased by another for you, and given to you, for salvation is a gift of God. Oh, that each one of us tonight may know that salvation, and as stewards of the finished work of Christ, all that we may seek to serve.

Shall we pray? O God and Father, we bless Thee together for Thy Word, for that which is contained therein. We ask that each one of us may be found as those who are stewards of the finished work of Christ, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

I would like to sing in closing number 249 in the red book, and 198 in the green book. Just as I am without one plead, but that Thy blood was shed for me, that Thou bid me come to Thee, O Lamb of God, I come. I was just thinking tonight through the message, maybe there's one here without the Lord Jesus Christ.

In fact, I was just thinking before the service to mention to Brother Ford, to mention about the gospel. I was so thankful he did. Maybe there's somebody in the company of this number that we have here without the Savior.

Maybe tonight you'd like to come to Him. Why don't you come to Him just like you are? The way Brother Ford had it come, that's the way I had it come. Tonight you can be saved if you accept the Lord Jesus Christ into your life and heart.

Shall we stand and sing this wonderful hymn? There is somebody here that would like to trust Him and you'd like to come forward. That's fine. We'd like to take God's Word and show you how you can know you're saved.

If you want to stay there in your seat and talk to us afterwards, we'll be glad to do that. But friend, you don't have to come down. You don't have to wait for us.

You can invite the Lord into your life right where you sit or where you're standing now. And ask Him to come into your life. Why don't you do it when we sing? Come.

You know, that's the way it was the night I was saved. I was fearful. I was so bashful, so backward, I couldn't walk an aisle.

And my sister had to go to the preacher and say, my brother wants to be saved. Listen, friend, if you're without Christ tonight, He wants to save you. Just like He wanted to save me.

He can reach down right where you are and save you. Will you come to my Savior tonight? He wants to save you. Let's sing the fourth and the fifth stanzas.

Well, if you want to come to the front, feel free to do so. But come to the Savior. Shall we all sing the fourth and fifth stanzas? Just as I am, so rich and wise, my priesthood be, because of you.

If there's somebody here that needs Christ, please feel free to see us after the service. We'd be glad to speak to you. We're here to help you.

If there's a Christian with a burden on your heart, we're here to help you as well. We'll be glad to sit down with God's word and do what we can for your life. Father, we pray that thou would take this message and burn it in our hearts.

How thankful we are that we can be servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and stewards, Father, to give forth the good word of truth. We pray if there's one here without the Savior tonight, that they might be saved. Speak to the souls of each Christian.

Draw us close to thee.

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