

SERMON NOTES
I Corinthians 4:1-20
“Kingdom Servants”

Intro:

- FB post: *“It's important to remember why church attendance for you and your family matters so much.*
- You can't serve from your sofa. You can't have community of faith on your sofa. You can't experience the power of a room full of believers worshipping together on your sofa.
- *Christians aren't consumers. We are contributors. We don't watch. We engage. We give. We sacrifice. We encourage. We do life together.*
- The church needs you.
- And you need the church.”

- *You can't serve from your sofa.*
- We all need the church and the church needs each one of us.
- *And not just to show up for worship in the sanctuary*
- We are called to become disciples who make disciples – indeed disciples who make disciple-makers

- In this passage Paul refers to himself and to other Christian workers and disciple-makers as Servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God
- *What is involved in being Kingdom Servants?*

I. FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF THE GOSPEL

I Corinthians 4:1-2 This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.

- What does it mean to be a steward of the mysteries of God?
- *A steward is a type of servant in a household - a steward manages the resources belonging to the owner*
- Jesus told several parables portraying himself as a King or Master leaving on a journey and entrusting authority and property to his servants who

were to manage his affairs in his absence – *and then he calls them to give an account of their stewardship or management*

Stewardship = using the Master's resources for the Master's purposes

- The first step in good stewardship is settling the ownership question:
- Your body is not your own to do with as you please
- *Your time is not your own to do with as you please*
- Your talents are not your own to do with as you please
- *Your money and your possessions are not your own to do with as you please*
- Good stewardship is managing God's resources for God's purposes with the understanding that He owns it all and has entrusted His resources to you to be put to work for His purposes

- So what does it mean to be stewards of the mysteries of God?
- *The mysteries of God are those truths revealed in the Gospel that had previously been hidden but now have been revealed in Christ and in the NT*
- We are stewards of the truth of the Gospel
- *It is required of stewards that they be found faithful – faithful in teaching the truth of the Gospel from generation to generation – faithful in sharing the Gospel with the unsaved and unreached*

- *In the Parable of the Talents, the Master expected his stewards to increase the resources that He entrusted to their management*
- King Jesus entrusts His servants with His resources in order to produce results in keeping with His purposes
--the question is: *What kind of results does God expect His servants to produce as stewards of the Gospel?*

- Put most simply: The bottom line of the mission statement Jesus gave to his church is: Make disciples of all nations
- God's resources are to be used to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ locally, cross-culturally, and globally
- *God's resources are to be used to produce fully devoted followers of Jesus who will make disciples who make disciples*
- These are the kinds of results God expects to see in His church:
--believers growing in their love of God and worship and prayer / *unbelievers coming to faith in Jesus Christ through the witness of the church and its members* / the church's outreach extending to people near and far who need

to hear the Gospel / *the church growing in new disciples and in spiritual maturity* / believers growing in love and compassionate service / the lives of vulnerable people being changed by the power of the Gospel and the love of Christ's body

- *What kind of resources has God entrusted to us to enable us to be faithful stewards of the Gospel?*
- First of all, the Gospel itself – the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation for all who believe
- *Our first calling is to preserve the truth of the Gospel of salvation in Christ*
- *If we are faithful in proclaiming the Gospel and God's saving work in Jesus Christ's death and resurrection – the Gospel itself has the power to produce results that will be pleasing to God*

- So, for example, we can anticipate that as the Gospel is faithfully taught this week in VBS – *there will be children who will be saved and whose eternal destiny will be changed*
- All who serve at VBS this week will be practicing faithful stewardship of the Gospel

- Another resource God has given us is spiritual power:
- Jesus said: *"You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be My witnesses..."*
- *The Holy Spirit gives us the power to proclaim the Gospel boldly and confidently and effectively*
- What are you doing with the spiritual power you have received from the Holy Spirit who lives within you?
- *Jesus used the power of the Holy Spirit given to Him to preach the Gospel and to heal the sick and to cast out demons and set captives free*
- And that same Holy Spirit power has been given to us – members of His body – in order to carry on His ministry in the world today
- *Are you putting that power to work to spread the Gospel and to set captives free and to accomplish God's Kingdom purposes – or are you hiding that spiritual power in a hole in the ground?*

- *Another resource God has given us is: Every believer has been given at least one spiritual gift – as mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12*
- Just as it would be wrong and displeasing to our Master to give none of our money to church or to missions – *so also it is wrong and displeasing to bury your spiritual gift in the ground – unused*

- Every believer has been given a spiritual gift to equip them to be faithful in their stewardship of the Gospel and in disciple-making and building up the church body
- And who is the Judge of whether or not we have been faithful stewards?

I Corinthians 4:2-5 Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

- It is the Lord who judges us as to our faithful stewardship
- *He knows the resources He has entrusted to you*
- He knows what you have done with those resources

Stewardship = using the Master's resources for the Master's purposes

- *It is the Master who will judge our stewardship*

II. SUBMISSIVE TO AUTHORITY OF THE SCRIPTURES

I Corinthians 4:6 I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.

- What does it mean to “go beyond what is written”?
- *The phrase “it is written” is found over 100 times in the NT and refers to a quote from the Old Testament Scriptures*

Matthew 4:4 But he answered, “It is written, “ ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’ ”

- *And now that the NT Scriptures have also been completed, “what is written” refers to both the OT and NT Scriptures – the entire Bible*
- So what does it mean to “go beyond what is written”?
- It can refer to adding human regulations and restrictions to God’s commands such as the Pharisees were doing with the Sabbath
- *When we forbid things that are not forbidden in the Bible, we are going beyond what it is written*
- For example, when some Baptist churches in the past taught that God forbids all alcohol use – they were going beyond what was written in the Bible
- *Going beyond what is written can also refer to receiving a word from the Lord – a word of revelation or instruction or direction that goes beyond anything in the Bible*
- Does it mean that God never speaks to us except through Bible verses?
- *NO*
- *God speaks to us today by the Holy Spirit through the Bible but also through prayer and through spiritual gifts and through other believers and even through dreams and visions*
- But any new word from the Lord today must align with the truth of what God has spoken in the Scriptures
- For example, there is a church in Davenport that has had this statement on its church sign: *God is still speaking today*
- That is true – but what God is speaking today will always align with what God was speaking 2000 years ago
- In the case of this particular church – the reference was to same-sex marriage and LGBTQ ideology
- *Along with many other churches today, they were claiming that God has changed His mind about homosexuality and marriage and gender and premarital sex and cohabitation and other issues dealing with sexual morality*
- What that church meant was: *God is still speaking today – and what He is saying today is radically different from what He was saying in the Bible 2000 years ago*
- *Basically – God’s thinking has evolved on these matters right along with many contemporary political activists*

- Paul warns the Corinthians NOT to go beyond what is written – that none of you may be puffed up – thinking yourself better than others who are not as enlightened as you
- *How much pride does it take for someone to assert that they know better than the Word of God when it comes to sexuality and gender and marriage issues?*
- *God is still speaking today*
- That is true – but what God is speaking today will always align with what God was speaking 2000 years ago
- If you are going to be a servant of Christ and a faithful steward of the Gospel – *you need to have it settled in your mind and heart that the Bible is the Word of God, and you need to submit yourself to its truth authority*
- Why do I believe that the Bible is the Word of God and is true in all of its teachings?
- *As with everything else, I begin with the Person of Jesus Christ – and specifically with the resurrection of Jesus Christ*
- Jesus staked the truth of everything he taught on his resurrection from the dead
- *When asked for a sign to prove that he was who he claimed to be – the Messiah, the Son of God – he gave only the sign of Jonah – referring to his resurrection from the grave on the third day*
- Basically, he was saying: If I rise from the grave on the third day – then I am God in human flesh and all my claims and teachings are true / *if I don't rise from the dead – then feel free to disregard everything I have ever said*
- Of course, Jesus did rise from the dead on the third day just as he predicted
- *Why do I believe that – because I believe the Bible is the Word of God?*
- No
- *You do NOT need to believe the Bible is the Word of God in order to believe in Christ's resurrection*
- You just need to believe that the Gospel records are as reliable a historical witness as other historical documents
- *The historical evidence for Christ's resurrection is solid – even taking into account some explainable minor differences in the Gospel accounts*
- Christianity rises or falls with the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead

- Based on solid evidence, I believe that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead
- That means that Jesus Christ is Lord
- *His resurrection proves His Lordship and His Deity*
- That means that everything that Jesus said and taught is true – *everything as in everything*
- Question: *What did Jesus believe and teach about the Scriptures?*

John 17:17 Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth.

- Jesus believed that God's Word is truth
- *Does that apply to the words of Moses or David or Isaiah in the OT?*
- What was Jesus' view of the inspiration of the OT Scriptures?
- *Words of men only – or the Word of God?*

Matthew 22:41-45 While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, "What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?"

"The son of David," they replied. He said to them, "How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him 'Lord'? For he says, " 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand until I put your enemies under your feet." ' If then David calls him 'Lord,' how can he be his son?"

- *There is so much to this passage – one where Jesus is clearly claiming to be the Messiah and divine Lord*
- But for now, note that phrase: *David – speaking by the Spirit*
- Psalm 110 is a Psalm of David – written by David – as were many others of the Psalms
- *Words of David only?*
- Not according to Jesus
- David – speaking by the Spirit == inspired by the Spirit – words of David AND Word of God
- *That indicates Jesus' view of the OT Scriptures as the Word of God and therefore – truth*
- Confessing Jesus Christ as Lord necessarily requires accepting Jesus' view of the Bible as the Word of God and absolute truth

- Why do I believe the Bible is the Word of God and supreme truth authority?
- Jesus Christ was raised from the dead
- *Therefore, Jesus Christ is Lord*
- Therefore, all of Jesus' words and teachings are true
- *Jesus believed and taught that the OT Scriptures are the Word of God*
- Since Jesus Christ is the risen Lord – His view of Scripture as the Word of God is true
- *Since I believe and confess that Jesus Christ is Lord – therefore I also believe and teach that the Bible is the Word of God – and as a servant of Christ – I submit to the authority of the Bible as the Word of God*

III. HUMBLE RECIPIENTS OF GOD'S GRACE

I Corinthians 4:7 For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?

- *Kingdom servants are marked by a humble and grateful attitude*
- There's nothing to boast about and everything to be grateful about because "what do you have that you did not receive from God's gracious hand"?
- September Fawkes in her article, "Arrogance vs. Confidence, Self-deprecation vs. Humility" writes,
- *"When I was a teenager, I had a wise ballet teacher tell my class, "The difference between confidence and arrogance is how you treat others."*
- People who are arrogant want themselves to succeed and be better than everyone else. *On the other hand, people who are confident want themselves and everyone around them to succeed.*
- Arrogance and pride are about comparing oneself to others, and evaluating oneself as having more "value." *That value may be in a skill, like playing the violin, or in a social circle, like having more friends or influence, or in ideology, like having the "correct" beliefs, or in appearance, like being more attractive.* Really, it can be about anything. Those with arrogance have goals and take actions that stem from a desire to be better than everyone else.

- On the other hand, a confident person wants themselves and others to succeed. *A confident person will cheer others on and treat them well. A confident person believes in her talents and abilities and potential, but is also teachable.*
- Confidence comes from security. When we are secure in ourselves, we don't feel threatened by others' successes.”
- *Such confidence and security come from knowing that God will supply us with everything we need in order to be able to accomplish His purposes in our lives and be faithful stewards of the Gospel*
- As Kingdom Servants, first we humbly open our hands to receive God's good gifts – and then we use and give what we have received to bless others
- *And when we succeed in blessing others – we do not boast – for what do we have of value to others that we have not received from God's gracious hand?*

IV. SUFFERING DISHONOR FOR CHRIST

I Corinthians 4:8-10 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you! For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute.

- Paul is being sarcastic here
- *He is not commending but rather criticizing and correcting these beliefs of the Corinthians*
- The error in the Corinthians' beliefs is called “over-realized eschatology”
- *They were thinking and behaving as if the age to come were already consummated – as if the saints were already reigning on the earth in a fully consummated kingdom of Christ – as if their experience of the Spirit's fullness and gifts indicated that the fullness of the Kingdom had already arrived with nothing more yet to come*
- There was a certain “triumphalism” in their theology

- *Since they had the fullness of the Spirit – they expected the Christian life to be an unbroken series of spiritual triumphs without any setbacks or suffering or any experiences of the curse or living in a fallen world*
- Some false teachers taught that a truly spiritual Christian would always live a life of health and prosperity as evidence of God’s favor and power
- *Since the Apostle Paul was not living such a triumphant life as they understood it – there must be something wrong with his faith and therefore his leadership and teaching were suspect*
- If Paul were truly Spirit-filled and faith-filled – he would be experiencing less suffering and more successes in his ministry
- The Corinthians did not understand the “already-but-not-yet” nature of the Kingdom of God – and this led to a defective view of suffering
- *The already-but-not-yet Kingdom refers to the fact that the Kingdom of God has already come in power in the first coming of Christ 2000 years ago and is operating in the world today – but the fullness of the Kingdom has not yet been consummated and will not be until the return of Christ*
- For now, Christians live in a great theological tension: we already possess every spiritual blessing in Christ, but we do not experience the fullness of these salvation blessings yet.
- In one sense, we are already adopted, redeemed, sanctified, and saved; *in another sense, these experiences are not yet fully ours.*
- We have been saved – are being saved – and one day will be saved
- Underneath this theological and practical tension are the two comings of Christ. *In his first coming, he inaugurated the last days; in his second coming, he will complete them.*

SHOW SLIDE OF OVERLAP OF AGES

- *In the meantime, we live for now in “the overlap of the ages – the overlap of the present evil age and the age to come*
- Illustration: D-Day versus VE-Day: that D-Day the troops landed in Normandy, essentially that was the blow that would ultimately defeat Germany, but the ultimate victory didn't come until VE, Victory in Europe Day.
- In terms of the Kingdom of God’s warfare against the kingdom of Satan, the death and resurrection of Jesus was D-Day / and the return of Christ will be V-E Day

- *The kingdom of God is present and active now in the age of the church but is not yet manifest in its fullness.*

Hebrews 2:8–9 "Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone."

- This shows us the "now" (Jesus is currently crowned with glory) and the "not yet" (not everything is subjected to Jesus yet).
- *We see the "not yet" and the "now" in 1 John 3:2:*

1 John 3:2 "Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."

- Dr. Craig Ott: The kingdom of God is really just a way of describing the rule of God, and particularly where Jesus is Lord.
- *So, where Jesus is Lord in his earthly life and casting out demons, healing the sick, raising the dead, the kingdom has broken into history.*
- And so we say the kingdom is present, yet Jesus taught us to pray "Thy Kingdom Come" in anticipation that the kingdom will one day come in its fullness.
- *And so, we talk about Jesus' earthly ministry as being in anticipation and inauguration of the kingdom because he's beginning to break the curse of sin, he's beginning to cancel the curse of sin by healing sickness which was the result of the Fall, or raising people from the dead which was a curse of the Fall.*
- And yet sickness and death remain in this overlap of the ages
- The ultimate victory of the coming Kingdom destroying death and evil will only come when Jesus then returns
- Some Christians today minimize the "already" nature of the Kingdom and act as though the Kingdom is all in the future without any Kingdom power at work in the church today – *they emphasize the "not-yet" to the exclusion of the "already"*
- But the Corinthians – along with some Christians today – over-emphasize the "already" to the exclusion of the "not yet"

- Already we have everything – already we are rich – already we reign as kings!
- Paul says: *would that were actually true so I could enjoy that life of continual triumph – but that’s not the Christian life I’m experiencing*

I Corinthians 4:9-13 For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men. We are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

- *It is true that we are seated with Christ in the heavenlies with all spiritual forces of evil under our authority – but we are not yet reigning on the earth – and will not until Christ returns*
- This is still a fallen world under the dominion of sin, death, evil and the curse
- The curse is not lifted until Revelation 22 in the new heaven and new earth
- *And though Jesus Christ already reigns as King of kings and Lord of lords at the right hand of God in heaven – his rule is strongly opposed by many here on earth – and his earthly reign will not be realized in full until he comes back*
- And therefore, Christ’s servants who are faithful to Jesus and the Gospel will suffer dishonor and persecution and suffering in this life – as Jesus promised

John 15:18-20 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

- Paul was experiencing the reality of that promise
- *The mark of Paul’s authentic faith was NOT a life free of suffering*

- On the contrary – his suffering was the authenticating mark of his faithfulness to Jesus Christ and the Gospel
- Far from being honored and praised and applauded by the surrounding culture of his day – Paul was treated as the scum of the earth – as garbage
- Rarely in history have fully devoted followers of Jesus been praised and applauded by the elites of society
- *Today as well, if we are to be faithful servants of Christ and faithful stewards of the Gospel – we can expect to suffer dishonor for the sake of His Name*

V. LIFE-ON-LIFE DISCIPLE-MAKING

I Corinthians 4:15-16 For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers. For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you, then, be imitators of me.

- *Kingdom servants invest in the lives of others.*
- Not only are they faithful stewards of the Gospel by sharing the Gospel with others – they also share their lives with others

I Thessalonians 2:8, 11 Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well... For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

- *Roman Citac preached an excellent sermon on this text last week*
- How about you?
- *In whose life are you investing your time and knowledge and gifts and love?*
- Are you living a life that is worth imitating?
- *Not a perfect life – but an authentic life of faith and service to others and to the church such that a spiritual son or daughter would profit spiritually by following your example*

VI. EXPERIENCING LIFE-CHANGING KINGDOM POWER

I Corinthians 4:19-20 Some are arrogant, as though I were not coming to you. But I will come to you soon, if the Lord wills, and I will find out not the talk of these arrogant people but their power. For the kingdom of God does not consist in talk but in power.

- As they say, talk is cheap
- *All kinds of people can claim to know the truth and to be speaking the truth*
- All kinds of churches with all kinds of doctrines and theologies and ministry philosophies can claim to be representing Jesus and teaching the Gospel
- *And all kinds of speakers can present compelling messages that motivate people to get involved in this or that ministry or cause*

- We can talk and we can plan and we can motivate and we can organize and we can do acts of kindness and all kinds of good works – *but there is one thing we cannot do by human effort or eloquent words: We cannot fabricate or manufacture a display of the power of God*

- God displays His Kingdom power how and when and where He pleases
- There are churches that are very busy with all kinds of good activities – but they display very little of the power of God’s kingdom
- *There are churches that are excellent Bible-teaching churches – but they display very little of the power of God’s Kingdom*

- We don’t want to be one of those powerless churches that rarely sees lives being changed and redeemed and restored and renewed and healed and delivered and saved by the power of God
- *We don’t want to be a church that talks a good game but rarely witnesses the power of God at work in healing broken lives and saving lost souls*

- We cannot control or manipulate or manufacture the power of God – but there are some things we can do to help unleash the kingdom power of God
- First and foremost, we can pray. Individually and corporately. Privately at home and together at church.
- Acts 4 tells a great story of how the power of God was unleashed through the Jerusalem church in response to their powerful prayer meeting

- *There is room for plenty more people to join us for Bible study and prayer on Wednesday nights.*
- Our usual Wednesday night prayer meeting attendance does NOT give much evidence that we are a church that is longing for a greater release of God's Kingdom power at work in our midst
- Another thing we can do to see more of God's power at work is to reach out to broken people with the love of Jesus and the truth of the Gospel – and welcome sinners and new believers into our worship services and activities
- *Where do we see the power of God displayed?*
- In changing lives – often in changing messy lives
- *The longer we are Christians and the more we have grown in maturity – the less opportunity there is for God's power to produce major life change*
- But with people with messy lives who are struggling with significant brokenness or major sin issues or various addictions – *there is the potential for God's Kingdom power to be gloriously displayed in producing major life change*
- It behooves us to reach out to hurting people and to welcome people with messy lives into our midst and point them to Jesus
- As we embark upon VBS week – may this be a week in which we see Kingdom power unleashed in saving young lives for eternity as we faithfully proclaim the Gospel and teach the Word of God – *and demonstrate the love of Jesus especially to kids who come from broken or messy homes*

Prayer