

THE DASH

“Glorifying God in the Brevity of Life”

Part 1

ENGAGING the Audience

One of the undeniable truths the Bible confronts us with is that this life we live is brief. In the scheme of God’s sovereign economy, our life is but a mere vapor and then it evaporates into eternity.

The Psalmist proclaims...

“O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath! Surely a man goes about as a shadow!” (Psalm 39:4-6)

Toward the end of the Psalms, the Psalmist prays...

“O Lord, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.” (Psalm 144:3-4)

In the New Testament, James, the half-brother of Jesus Christ, reiterates this truth when he says...

“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit’ – yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” (James 4:13-14)

In the Bible, God doesn’t simply remind us that our days are short. God reminds us that our days are fleeting. He reminds us that our days are like passing shadows. He reminds us that our lives are like a single inhaled and exhaled breath.

Making the CONNECTION

As a pastor, whenever I perform a funeral or attend a graveside burial service, I always take time to walk thru the cemetery and contemplate the different headstones that mark gravesites. This may seem strange to you, but it’s something I do with great intentionality.

You see, these headstones remind me of the brevity of life – something I, as well as you, am prone to forget in the busyness of life.

Each headstone is unique and different in many ways. Each headstone has a unique name, a unique design, and a unique set of dates. On many headstones, there is a unique description of the person's life – a scripture, a motto, or maybe a famous quote. Yet, there's one thing every headstone has in common – the dash. Between the date-of-birth and the date-of-death is a short dash that represents a life lived.

Have you ever thought about how ironical that dash really is?

Something so short and insignificant marks something so profound and significant - a person's life. I've seen dashes that represented ninety-four years. I've seen dashes that represented fifty-two years. I've seen dashes that represented twenty-one years. And, I've seen dashes that represented seven years.

Yet...

More than the dates. More than the inscriptions. More than the name. It's the dash that always captivates me and forces me to ponder my life. The dash reminds me of the fleeting nature of my life. But, the dash reminds me of something else just as profound. The dash reminds me that I have been called by God to steward the life He has given me for His glory, not my own.

Thus, every time I stop and ponder someone's dash, I find myself asking the question – **"I wonder how that person stewarded the life God gave him or her?"**

Then, suddenly, I find myself asking a far more personal question...

"If I died today, would my dash represent a life that brought glory and honor to God by the way I stewarded what He entrusted to my care?"

A steward is a manager – someone who takes care of and invests what has been given to him or her. You see, more than anything else, a person's dash tells a story about the kind of steward he or she was. Did they steward their life in such a way that they glorified God in the brevity of life?

I've been thinking a lot about this idea lately. In just a few weeks from now, I will turn forty years old. You can see my dates on the screen above – 1969 – 2009. Forty years of living.

What kind of steward does my dash reveal? Have I stewarded my life in such way that I've brought glory and honor to God and my Savior Jesus Christ? Or, has my stewardship squandered what God has entrusted to my management and investment?

How about you?

What are your dates? Go ahead! Write your dates down as if the shadow of your fleeting life was to disappear today. What kind of steward does your dash reveal? I encourage you to ask the same two questions I've been asking myself recently:

1. Has your stewardship of life brought glory and honor to God and His Son Jesus Christ?
2. Or, has your stewardship squandered what God has entrusted to your management and investment?

Exploring the SCRIPTURE

When most Christians here the word stewardship, their minds become immediately fixated on money, tithing, and 10%. If you've spent any time in church, then this is what you've more than likely been taught.

However, the premise of this series is going to challenge that way of thinking. You see, if the truth were known, we've short-sheeted the biblical idea of stewardship. If we are going to become God-glorifying stewards, then we must grasp a very important stewardship principle. Here it is...

Stewardship isn't about a percentage. Stewardship is about PERSPECTIVE!

Stewardship is entirely about having a biblical, God-centered, eternity-focused perspective on this life we live. Everything we are and everything we have belongs to God. God doesn't demand 10% of your money. God demands 100% of your life.

Don't miss this...

Stewardship isn't about 10% - it's about 100%!

Stewardship encompasses far more than money. Stewardship encompasses every facet of life – our time, our relationships, our talents, our spiritual gifts, our possessions, and our bodies to name just a few.

For the next five weeks, we are going to explore how we, as redeemed disciples of Jesus Christ, can bring glory to God through the brevity of life. We are going to explore how we can manage and invest our lives in such a way that we make them count for eternity. We're going to catch a vision for our how we can better prepare ourselves to one-day hear those wonderful words of Christ – **“Well done good and faithful servant.”**

For the next five weeks, we're going to explore five significant gifts that God has called us to steward and invest for His glory and the furtherance of His Kingdom

during this brief life He has given us. With each divine gift He has given, God is expecting a return on His investment.

THE GOSPEL

I want us to begin with what I believe is the single greatest possession God has called us as Christians to manage and invest for His glory.

If you have your Bible, turn to Romans 1:16-17. In this passage, we find the foundation (the thesis) of Paul's theological masterpiece - his letter to the Romans. Paul says...

*"I am not ashamed of **the Gospel**, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith."*

To magnify the importance of this passage, let's take a quick look at how Paul described his apostolic ministry in Acts 20:24.

*"I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify to **the Gospel** of the grace of God."*

Paul's ministry and his theology hinge on the Gospel. Paul considered his life to have no value if he was not faithfully testifying to and proclaiming the life-changing Gospel of Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected. Paul's life, his writings, his missionary journey's, his preaching, his church planting, and his mentoring were squarely focused on the Gospel.

We should be so passionate for the Gospel!

Did you know that we, just like the first disciples, have been called by Jesus Christ to steward the Gospel? That's right! We have been saved by grace thru faith in Christ and He has entrusted to our care His Gospel.

Our "dash" represents how we, as disciples of Christ, managed and invested the gift of the Gospel.

What exactly is the Gospel? Simply put, the word "gospel" means GOOD NEWS!

It is the Good News that **"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life."** (John 3:16)

It is the Good News that ***“If we confess our sin He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”*** (1 John 1:9) We have been cleansed of all our unrighteousness – past, present, and future.

It is the Good News that ***“In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us...”*** (Ephesians 1:7-8) The blood of Jesus Christ has saved us and forgiven us of our sins. God has lavished upon us the riches of his grace.

It is the Good News that ***“when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons....So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, an heir through God.”*** (Galatians 4:4-7) We who were once slaves to the law and sin have been redeemed through faith in Christ. We who were once spiritual orphans with no hope have been adopted into God’s family and are now heirs to His glorious Kingdom. We who were orphans now have a spiritual Father who loves us unconditionally and promises one day that we will share in the riches of His Kingdom and it’s unmatched power and wealth.

It is the Good News that God ***“being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved – and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.”*** (Ephesians 2:4-7) We who were once dead in our sin have been made alive by God’s rich mercy, His great love, and His amazing grace.

It is the Good News that ***“there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”*** (Romans 8:1-4) We who were once condemned to eternal death because of sin and unrighteousness have now been set free through Christ Jesus. We have been justified and put in right standing before God.

It is the Good News that Jesus ***“is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of His glory with great joy...”*** (Jude 24)

This is the Gospel! This is the GOOD NEWS! This is the gift that God, thru your faith in Jesus Christ, has called you to manage and invest for His glory and the furtherance of His kingdom.

How are you managing the glorious Gospel – the Good News – of Jesus Christ?

Now that we know what the Gospel is, let's return to Paul's words in Romans 1:16-17.

Within these two verses, Paul reveals the purpose, the scope, and the power of the Gospel.

The PURPOSE of the Gospel

First, let's consider the purpose of the Gospel. Paul says...

*"I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God **for salvation...**"*

The purpose of the Gospel is to produce conviction, brokenness, repentance, surrender, and faith which lead to salvation in Jesus Christ.

The Greek work used for salvation literally means to "save and deliver from."

Think about it for a minute. How many people do we know who need to be saved and delivered from the slavery of sin, the shackles of guilt, and the bondage of addiction? How many people has God placed in and around our lives who need to be saved and delivered from unrighteousness and spiritual death?

The solution is the Gospel – a gift that Jesus Christ has entrusted to your stewardship. Living within you is the Gospel, which, under the ministry of the Holy Spirit, contains the power to save people from sin, unrighteousness, and eternal death.

In his book *The Hole In Our Gospel*, Richard Stearns, President of World Vision writes...

"we are carriers of the gospel – the good news that was meant to change the world. Belief is not enough. Worship is not enough. Personal morality is not enough. And Christian community is not enough. God has always demanded more. When we committed our lives to following Christ, we also committed to living our lives in such a way that a watching world would catch a glimpse of God's character....Living out our faith in private was never meant to be an option....Embracing the gospel, or good news, proclaimed by Jesus is so much more than a private transaction between God and us." (p.3)

Have we forgotten that we are "carriers" of the Gospel? Have we resorted to living out our faith in private, thus concealing the very Good News that radically redeemed our depraved souls? Has our silence as Christians exposed a shame we have of the Gospel?

How are you stewarding the Gospel? When is the last time you shared the Good News of Jesus Christ – His love, His grace, His victory, and His rule in your life – with someone living without Christ as their Lord and Savior?

The SCOPE of the Gospel

Paul goes on to say...

*“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation **for everyone who believes**, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”*

Paul reminds us that the scope of the Good News is universal. This does NOT mean that everyone will come to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. What it does mean is that when it comes to the Gospel, God does not discriminate based on race, ethnicity, or socio-economic status. The Gospel is freely offered to black and white, rich and poor, and every sinner – no matter how heinous the sin may be.

How are you stewarding the Gospel? Is there any chance that we, the Church of Christ, have discriminated when it comes to sharing the Good News? The Gospel does not discriminate, nor should God’s children.

The POWER of the Gospel

Finally, Paul says...

*“I am not ashamed of the Gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation for everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. **For in it the righteousness of God is revealed** from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’”*

According to Paul, the power of the Gospel is that it reveals the righteousness of God.

Listen carefully!

When we live out and proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, our lives reveal the holiness and glory of God. God is altogether righteous; sinners without Christ are altogether unrighteous. God is holy; sinners without Christ are unholy. God is sinless and perfect; people without Christ are sinful and totally depraved.

The power of the Gospel is that it reveals the holiness, the glory, the sinlessness, and the perfection of God. This revelation contained within the Gospel is what the Holy Spirit uses to bring the unregenerate sinner to conviction, brokenness, and repentance over their “sin, unrighteousness, and judgment.” (John 16:7-11)

The power of the Gospel is that also imputes God's righteousness to those sinners who surrender to Christ as Lord and Savior. The Gospel alone has the power to justify the sinner and place him or her in right standing before the holy God. The imputation (infusion) of God's righteousness to sinners is accomplished through the atoning blood of Jesus Christ.

Why was Paul not ashamed of the Gospel? Why was Paul so confident in the Good News of Jesus Christ? Because the Gospel has the power to produce salvation and life in wicked and spiritually dead people. Because the Gospel has the power to reveal the holiness and glory of God in the midst of our dark and unholy culture. Because the Gospel has the power to make unrighteous sinners righteous saints.

Closing Thoughts

In closing, let's go back to your dates for a minute. If your brief life ended today, or by the end of this year, what kind of steward would your dash reveal?

Would dash reveal a person who managed the gift of the Gospel well? Would your dash echo the words of Paul in Acts 20:24...

*"I do not count my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus Christ, to testify to **the Gospel** of the grace of God."*

Each of us are stewarding a very brief life. Our days are numbered by God and the countdown is on. One day, we will stand before the Righteous Judge – Jesus Christ – and offer an account for how we managed and invested what He entrusted to our care.

Jesus Christ has entrusted us with His Gospel. He has called us to live it and proclaim it for His glory.

Richard Stearns writes...

"Our charge is to both proclaim and embody the Gospel so that others can see, hear, and feel God's love in tangible ways." (p.18)

Then, he asks this question...

"What if each of us decided with renewed commitment to truly embrace the good news, the whole Gospel, and demonstrate it through our lives? What if we each said to God, 'Use me; I want to change the world?'" (p.4)

May we all renew our commitment to stewarding the Gospel of Jesus Christ with passion, conviction, and great boldness.