

Save Your Best for God!

A sermon based on John 2:1-11

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

It's probably something you've been indoctrinated with, even from early on – in school, in sports, in life – give it your best shot. Try your hardest. For the big game, don't leave anything on the field; give it your all, a 110%. Heard any of those encouragements before?

It doesn't change as you get older, does it? We expect the best. If the meat's not perfect at the restaurant, I'll send it back. For my children, I want the best school, the best doctor, the best babysitter. I'm going to try to get the best job I can, find the perfect house for me and my family. Not too often that we're content with anything less than the best, right?

What about God? God, who says, "Be holy (or as Jesus says in the New Testament, be perfect), because I, the Lord your God, am holy"? What does he want from you? What are you content with giving him? Those are going to be a couple of the important questions we'll try to answer this morning, so let's hear them again, "What does our perfect God want from you?" "What are you content with giving him?"

Spoiler alert... "Save Your Best for God!"

Friends, today, and the next couple of Sundays, we're going to focus on Christian stewardship. Now, before you go running out of here, because you might be thinking, "Oh man, here we go again. A sermon on the church needing more money," or, for the same reason, just mentally check out for the next 15-20 minutes, take a moment and consider this.

Christian stewardship is not "the church wants my money." Never has been. No, as I've been teasing with the advertisement over the past couple of weeks, Christian stewardship is a way of life. It's YOUR way of life.

You know wanting to have a healthy lifestyle affects so many different areas of your life, like the food you eat, the priority you'll put on health checks, the consistent exercise regimen you'll undergo, the conversations you'll have, the healthy choices you'll make when you'll go out to eat or when you choose some other fun activity. It becomes a way of life.

In the same way, Christian stewardship affects every area of your life because everything you have is a gift from God. So, for instance, there's stewardship of worship, how can I praise God, how will I make regular attendance a priority in my life? There's stewardship of God's Word, understanding its eternal importance, and therefore, craving it, reading it, learning it, living it, sharing it. There's stewardship of your body, the decisions you make concerning this "temple of the Holy Spirit, how are you going to use your body in a way that gives honor and glory to God.

I can go on, but everything, EVERYTHING about our lives is a matter of stewardship. And the more specific, the more familiar areas of stewardship are no different. I'm sure you're familiar with them: your time, your talents, your treasures. Or, let's just call them what they really are: stewardship of your money, stewardship of your schedule, stewardship of your interests, strengths, and abilities. Those are the areas of focus for our stewardship sermon series.

And you know, as believers, we are not ashamed to talk about any of it. In fact, it's good for us to talk about this, yearly, regularly. Someone put together some biblical stats, and they're pretty eye-opening: 1) Jesus talked about money more than he did heaven and hell combined; 2) 11 of his 39 parables talk about money; 3) 1 out of every 7 verses in Luke's gospel deal with money. Needless to say, that was one topic Jesus must have felt to be important enough to spend quite a bit of breath on. He didn't shy away from it.

And yet, it's the one topic many churches purposely stay away from. Why is that? Maybe it's because the sinful nature is especially sensitive to this area of our lives of faith, "You're talking about taking away what's mine, something I've worked hard for, something I treasure (my free time, my abilities, my money)? I won't have that. I'll fight it!"

It's something many of us believers have to struggle against. And one way we can is by hearing again what God has to say about our Christian stewardship. That's the awesome part. We're not going to have Dave Ramsey, Clark Howard, Stephen Covey telling us what to do with our money, with our talents, with our schedules. You don't even have to listen to me. But I do hope you're ready and eager to hear what God, the owner of all things, the giver of all things, has to say to you, his steward. And we can summarize what God has to say to you today in our theme for this morning, "Save your best for God!"

Now, looking at our account of Jesus' first miracle today, maybe you can't see an obvious stewardship application here. I mean, there's no talk of money here, no talk of time and talents here. But remember stewardship is a way of life.

And for Jesus, that's what was happening...life. As a human, doing things the normal person would do, like go to a wedding. But we know what happened there was anything but normal. The wine ran out, his mom, knowing who he was, begged him to do something about it, he told her in his good time he would, he told the servants to fill six huge jars with water, and when the master of the banquet tasted the water, it was the best wine he had ever had.

Now, I will never claim to be a wine connoisseur. I probably couldn't tell the difference between a \$100 bottle of wine and the cheap \$8 bottle you could get at Fred's. But this guy, the master of the banquet, his job was to know, to taste and make sure everything was better than par, to know it was the best. And the conclusion he came to is where we see God's lesson of Christian stewardship for us, "You have saved the best till now."

"You have saved the best till now." And that, brothers and sisters in Christ, is where we find our stewardship application for this morning. Do you remember those two questions I asked earlier? In case you don't, they were: "What does our perfect God want from you?" "What are you content with giving him?" Or, in other words, have you saved, have you given your best to God?

"God has blessed me with the abilities I need for my job, the abilities to excel at my job. But I've found that just an ok job – not trying my hardest – is fine to the company, so I don't have to give my best." Or, in regards to the use of your talents here, "My interests are organizing, photography, construction, interacting with people, whatever they are for you, but I'd rather not use them to help out the church." Is that your best?

Or, for time, "Work has slowed down quite a bit; I've been able to get off at a more decent time. But I'd rather go hang out with the guys or go shopping rather than spend some needed time with my family or

to help out my neighbor like I've been promising I would." Or, in regards to the use of your time here, "I could help out at the church clean-up day, or I could volunteer to help out with this photography thing that's coming up, but oh, bummer, something's going to come up, or no one personally asked me, so I'm guessing they don't want my help." Is that your best?

Or, for money, "I could pay down my credit card debt or pay a little extra on my mortgage each month, but clothes! Or that new car is screaming my name! We could survive on a beans and rice diet a little longer, right?" Or, in regards to the use of your money here, "Why should I give this amount of my hard-earned money, or any money at all, to the church? I don't see any returns or I don't like what they're doing with it or the church seems to be doing fine without it!" Is that your best?

You know, the thing is, God, in Scripture, never dictates exactly how we use our money, our abilities, our time. And so, sometimes, that allows for our sinful nature to create an unbalanced view of what our "best" is.

"I'll put my name down for treats or do my turn of cleaning church without complaining...hopefully I can fly under the radar and no one will bother me about doing anything else here for the next few months." Or, "I could just give any amount of money as an offering, no one is going to notice if it's my best because it's none of their business how much I make."

But God does. Imagine you were the one throwing a wedding banquet, and God was the master of the banquet, or ever just your guest of honor. He knows what the best is. He created it. Every gift he gives is perfect. So, as he tastes your offerings of time, talents, treasures, does he leap up and say, "My, this is the best I've ever tasted!"?

We can't pull the wool over God's eyes. Even for Cain, who brought a gift of the bounty of his fresh produce as a sacrifice to God, God saw in his heart, and he saw it wasn't the best. And the truth is, often, we're content to give God our "less than best," both in here and outside of here. And I can't tell you how ashamed it makes me feel, that the person is me. Maybe I don't have to. Maybe you're feeling the same shame as well.

So friends, what can we do? What can we do to counteract our sometimes selfish, greedy, sinful hearts?

Well, what did Jesus do? Take a look at our gospel again. It was towards the end of the wedding celebration, and the good wine was gone. I'm sure the guests would have been content with the cheaper wine that was usually provided because, after all, their tastes buds had probably been blunted by any amount of wine they had drunk thus far. Jesus could easily have gotten away with making "good enough" wine, and no one would have cared. But he cared. Even in what seemed to be so trivial of a miracle, Jesus gave his best.

So what does that tell you about what he was going to do for his greatest miracle? The apostle Paul reminds us, "[God] did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all." When it came to us, God gave his best. He spared no expense. Peter writes, "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect."

God took one look at you and me, sinners, and said, "You're worth the best," and sent Jesus to live, die, and rise for us. And by the perfect sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, now you have the best, Christ's forgiveness, Christ's perfection. You're covered in the best!

And not only that, but, I've saved the best till now, the motivation for your Christian stewardship, for your way of life. "Christ's love compels us," the Bible simply says. We are moved to change, our hearts moved by the unconditional, "best" love of Jesus, our hearts moved to show love by supporting the work of Jesus, supporting those who do the work of Jesus, and finally, doing the work of Jesus yourself with your schedule, your abilities, and your money. And not just to do it, but to become content in always giving God your best.

Now, what does your best look like? The blessing is all of our "bests" are going to be different, based differently on what God has given us. But best doesn't always mean the most – Jesus had his disciples learn that lesson from the widow who gave her best offering to God, everything she had, in two mites, anywhere from a couple pennies to a couple dollars.

Best doesn't mean what you have lying around or sitting in your purse or billfold. Cain learned that from "leftovers" offering. Your best is what you give, in love, to the God who has spared nothing from you, including his only Son.

Your best is what God wants. Again, Paul says, "But just as you excel in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness and in your love for us – see that you also excel in this grace of giving."

Are you currently giving your best? If you are or if you are, the blessing is you get to take a look at your life, your gifts from God and see how you can do better!

When's the last time you evaluated your stewardship? Your company evaluates you, probably on at the very least a yearly basis. You evaluate your personal budget, probably in the same way. There's nothing wrong with evaluating and adjusting your Christian stewardship, either.

Maybe you paid off your car, which was making money tight in the past. Maybe you got an unexpected raise at work. Maybe the PFD, usually extra money, is quite a bit more than you anticipated for this year. Maybe the kids are growing up and you have more free time to help out at church. Maybe you're learning a new skill and want to put it to good use. Maybe it's a talent that's just been gathering dust in the corner.

Don't save your best till later. Christian stewardship is your way of life. It's your way of life right now! We often give 110% in life. Why should giving to God be any different? Friends, it won't be. It can't be. God spared nothing for you. That's how much he loves you. You're worth it. And now, spare nothing from him. Save your best for God. That's what he wants from you. So, be content, be overjoyed to give you best, give better than your best to God. He's worth it! Amen.