Believe: What is God’s Call On My Life?
Psalm 24:1-2

Every week of our Believe series begins with a question, and this morning our question one that every human being should be asking: What is God’s call on my life? In other words, what do I believe God’s plan is for the way I live my life…including how I value my family, my possessions, my career, my time, and so on?

As Christians, our beliefs are established through God’s Word, and here is our primary verse that we are committing to memory as a church, Psalm 24:1-2: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.”

Our belief statement, then, is a simple sentence that sums up the Christian worldview in regard to God’s call upon our lives: “I believe everything I am and everything I own belongs to God.”

Now…fair warning. My message today will MOST LIKELY hurt your feelings simply because our culture really struggles with this particular part of Christian doctrine and the biblical worldview. Many of us within the church agree with this belief statement we just read, but when push comes to shove, most of us have never allowed that belief to move from our heads to our hearts. Most of us in America…most of us who live with a certain degree of ease and comfort, wrestle daily with what the Bible has to say about this concept of “stewardship.” So…before we begin, I would ask you to remember that I am first preaching to myself…I am already under intense conviction about my own life. I would also remind you that my job, according to 2 Timothy 4 is to “preach the word, to reprove, rebuke, and exhort with complete patience and teaching…”, so my message today, if nothing else, is my best effort at being obedient to what the Lord has instructed me to say.

Let me also acknowledge the elephant in the room right from the start. As many of you know, Colonial’s giving took a dramatic dip at the beginning of 2018, causing us to finish our fiscal year (which ends on June 30th) with a $200,000 deficit. We have been very transparent about that situation in a recent letter that was sent out to the whole congregation by our Stewardship Team. And, to make things more potentially awkward, today is the beginning of our annual “stewardship campaign” when we ask our members and regular attenders to make a pledge of their time, prayers, service and finances to help accomplish our mission here at Colonial. So…not only do I have the challenge of preaching on a difficult, potentially offensive subject…but I must also do so with the high probability that some will think I am using this situation to raise money for MY church and my agenda. Listen: 1) this is not MY church—this organization called Colonial belongs to Jesus, and with the exception of our guests who are present today, everyone here IS the church called Colonial, and we have agreed upon a mission: to be the Light of Christ in a hurting culture so that the lost are found, the broken are made whole, the fatherless find hope, and our city is blessed. 2) My only agenda is HIS agenda so beautifully articulated in that mission statement…and yes…to accomplish our mission will
require the faithful and generous giving and service of the church (you and me) because we don’t sell widgets…we do ministry and fund ministry all over the world based upon the faithful giving and service of the church. I will not apologize for asking you, the church, to give, serve, and pray for fulfillment of God’s mission here at Colonial. If that offends you, perhaps this message will help you understand why you are so offended; 3) God’s call upon your life to be a faithful steward is universally, always, unconditionally true regardless of this organization’s budget needs, what day of the week it is, or whatever you happen to think about me as a pastor. So…I can’t control how you choose to interpret my motivation or my ulterior motives…but I can tell you without flinching that I am genuine and sincere about every single word of this message, and I am fearfully accountable to God. May God deal with me ever so severely should my message or my intent be contrary to His will.

OK…enough of that…let’s get into it. This morning I will unpack this biblical concept of “stewardship” under four sub-headings: 1) God as the owner of everything; 2) our biblical identity as stewards…not owners; 3) why biblical “stewardship” is so offensive; and 4) the pathway to faithful stewardship.

I. First, the Bible is both clear and consistent that there is only one OWNER in all of the universe, and that is GOD. As we read earlier in Psalm 24:1-2: “The earth is the LORD’s, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it on the seas and established it on the waters.” In Psalm 50 God proclaims, “Every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine.” King David says it so well in 1 Chronicles 29:11-13: 1 Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is yours. 12 Both riches and honor come from you, and you rule over all. In your hand are power and might, and in your hand it is to make great and to give strength to all.

In Haggai 2:8 God says, “The silver is mine, and the gold is mine.” Job 41:11, “Everything under heaven is mine.” Exodus 19:5, “…for all the earth is mine.”

According to a biblical worldview, we own nothing. God owns everything. He looks upon all of creation, all of us, all of our children, all animals, all structures, all the money, all the riches, every home, every nation, every star in every distant galaxy, and he says without apology: MINE!

I want you to think about your life for a minute. Think about your home, your car, your kids, your dog, your 401K, your favorite toys, your job, your staff, your body, your intelligence, your education, even your cell phone…and I want you to tell God who all of those things belong to. Go ahead. Ask God if you get to say, “Mine” for anything on that list. Ask Him. I’ve already tried that, and I can tell you exactly what He’s going to say: “No son…no daughter…that belongs to me. Your kids belong to me. Your 401K belongs to me. You don’t get to say “mine”
for any of it. I have already declared you, your family, your belongings, your body, and every breath you take as MINE…I’m God. I’m the Owner. You…are neither.

II. So, if God is the Owner…the only Owner in the universe, what does the Bible say about who we are? My second sub-heading is this: The Bible makes clear that we are “stewards.” We are managers. We are servants of the Owner. From the very beginning of the Bible our role as managers of God’s creation is very clear. In Genesis 1:28 we read, “And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.” Human beings have been given dominion over God’s creation…we have been entrusted to manage what doesn’t belong to us.

Genesis 2:15: The LORD took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. We work in God’s garden, but we don’t own the garden.

Such is why Jesus regularly tells stories of “tenants, subjects, servants, managers, and stewards.” Never once does Jesus provide the possibility for human beings to think of themselves as owners. For example, in Matthew 25:14-19 Jesus paints us a very clear picture of reality according to God’s perspective: “For it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them.

Notice that, according to a biblical worldview, not only are we managers/stewards of God’s things, we are also those who will be held accountable by the Owner. Consider the teaching of Jesus in Luke 12: And the Lord said, “Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom his master will set over his household, to give them their portion of food at the proper time? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions. But if that servant says to himself, ‘My master is delayed in coming,’ and begins to beat the male and female servants, and to eat and drink and get drunk, the master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces and put him with the unfaithful.”

I know that teaching of Jesus sounds intimidating, but that is what Jesus said. Now, when Jesus teaches these lessons, He is always teaching His disciples. He is presenting to them not only an accurate worldview, but also an expectation for how they are to live their lives under the Lordship of Jesus. Christians are those who are saved by God’s grace in Jesus’s death on a cross, but Christians remain accountable to God for the way that we manage what has been entrusted to us as stewards of our King. It would be very poor theology for us to operate as though our assurance of salvation somehow negates our accountability. However, as we saw last week when we looked at what Jesus said about the final judgment and human compassion, our accountability regarding stewardship will not serve as the criteria for our salvation; it will serve as an indicator of our salvation.
In other words, who we ultimately serve as LORD is revealed by how we “steward” that which has been entrusted to us.

Jesus said it very succinctly in Matthew 6:19-21, “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

Where your treasure is reveals your heart…where your heart is reveals what you treasure…it reveals WHO you treasure. So…pause for just a moment, search your heart and take inventory of your treasure…those things that matter the most to you…those things you think about, invest in, enjoy, plan for, prioritize, commit significant time to…and then give that a name. What you treasure the most is where your heart is…it is that which you honor as most important. And that thing…or that person…is your functional MASTER. Let me ask you a question: if I were to take an inventory of your life…how you spend your money, how you spend your time, what you devote the most time to thinking about, what you give your best energy towards, how you prioritize everything that you have dominion over…would I come to the conclusion that Jesus is the MASTER and LORD of your life? Would it be obvious to an average observer that you understand yourself as a STEWARD of the LORD Jesus Christ?

I know…I get it. You have a lot of noble priorities in your life…so do I. I love my wife, my kids, and my own body. I love my job and my staff. It takes time, money, and intentionality to take care of these noble priorities. As you know, I love fishing and hunting, and it takes time, money, time and planning to be successful in these hobbies that I enjoy. Look, I get it…we love Jesus, but then we love a lot of other things as well, right?

So…here’s something else Jesus said about what it means to be a steward: “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other.” Notice: Jesus, as we find Him in the four gospels, did not give us the option of having “multiple Masters” in our lives, such that we act as a steward and a manager for multiple “clients.” Jesus said we can only have ONE master, and we will love that one master and, by default, hate any competing master.

So…if you are feeling uncomfortable at this point in my message, rest assured it’s fixing to get more uncomfortable! Turn in your Bibles to Luke 14, and listen to three things that Jesus said that directly speaks to his expectations of us “stewards.” In Luke 14:26 Jesus says, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.” He then says in vs. 27, “Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.” And then in vs. 33 He just comes right out and says, “Any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”
Jesus speaks as though He is God…which He is. He speaks as though He is the MASTER…which He is. And He speaks as though He is the Owner…which He is. And notice: Jesus leaves us no quarter in regards to our split loyalties. According to the Jesus that we find in the gospels, we may not prioritize our kids, our parents…even our own comfort and survival…as more important than Jesus. He makes it perfectly clear: there can only be one Master in our lives…one Owner who we serve…and that is Jesus. All other competing loyalties must be renounced, or we are simply NOT His followers. Now…I understand that “hate” is a strong word when we think about our kids and our families. But remember what Jesus said earlier: “No one can serve two masters: he will love one and hate the other.” Jesus is simply making an observation. This always happens with human beings. We will love our Master, and we will hate the competing master. So what we find in Luke 14 is a logical extension of what Jesus said in Matthew 6: if we claim Jesus as Lord, we must by default “hate” any competing MASTER. You cannot serve both Jesus as LORD and then prioritize your children as though they have MASTER/ultimate status in your life. You cannot serve as a Steward of Jesus and at the same time serve your appetites for pleasure, comfort, or self-preservation. Once you allow your family, your pleasure, or even your own survival, to serve as a MASTER in your life, you will actually HATE Jesus.

III. And that brings me to my third sub-heading: why Christian “stewardship” is so offensive. There are many reasons that we often find Christian stewardship offensive: I only have time to cover two.

1) The first reason that Christian stewardship is so offensive is that many of us HATE Jesus. Are you surprised to hear me say that? Well…consider what Jesus just said. “…he will either hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both…” So Church, the number one reason that Christian stewardship is hard for us is that, apparently, based upon the way we spend our money, prioritize our time, and serve so many functional MASTERS, it is biblically clear that many of us HATE Jesus…we despise Him. Now…I see that look in your eyes…what I say next will likely determine whether or not I have a job tomorrow, so listen… this is going to hurt, but it’s true: If we have a functional Master like money, pleasure, our jobs, our kids, our vacations, our hobbies, our bucket lists, our safety, our health, even our spotless reputation…and we think that we still love and serve Jesus, here’s what I can tell you with 100% certainty: the Jesus we love and serve is our homemade version of “jesus”—we do not love the Real Jesus that we find in the Bible. Think about it. The real Jesus of the Gospels just said that we must renounce all we have to be His disciple. The real Jesus said, “I must be your one and only LORD…more important than your children, your spouse, more important than your job, your pleasure, your retirement plans…more important than your own life or the lives of those you love the most. It’s ME or them…pick. You will LOVE me and renounce all others, or you will HATE me.” Let me ask you a question…and be honest: Is this the Jesus you call your LORD and MASTER—is this the Jesus you pray to—is this the Jesus that you see hanging on a cross—or do you serve a different “jesus”?…one who doesn’t talk like this…one who expects nothing of you…one who has conveniently blessed your particular lifestyle?
You know, the most disturbing thing that Jesus ever said is found in Matthew 27: 22 On that
day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your
name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ 23 And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew
you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’  I have spent long hours contemplating what Jesus
meant when He said these words, but while I was preparing this message it occurred to me:
many will claim to have loved and served a “jesus” that they felt comfortable with, one that
brought them a quiet assurance that they were saved and yet their version of “jesus” “blessed”
them to indulge their pleasures, their sexual preferences, their hobbies, their portfolios, their
competing priorities…because their “jesus” blessed them to do whatever they felt was best for
them. Their homespun “jesus” never drew a line in the sand…their version of “jesus” said
“YES!” to all of the above. What if these unfortunate souls that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 27
are exactly those people who used the name “jesus,” they loved and served their version of
“jesus,” they even ministered in the name of their “jesus,” but all along, they never actually met
and yielded to the REAL JESUS that we find here in the Bible. Would that not explain why
Jesus says to them, “I never knew you.” I think Jesus is simply stating: “We never met.”

Church, let me introduce you to the REAL JESUS, the One who actually died for you, purchased
your life for God, and then rose again as the KING who conquered death and declares all of us
and all we are and all that is as MINE! That Jesus is our MASTER, and rest assured, He has
every expectation that we…His Church…will act as His stewards, His managers, and His
subjects. He will give us no quarter to serve another Master. Any version of “jesus” that you
hold in your mind who “blesses” you to serve another Master is a counterfeit…plain and simple.
That “jesus” you made up will not save you…that “jesus” is not even real. So…let’s set aside
our counterfeit versions of Jesus and look squarely upon the Jesus who demands 100% of
everything that we are, every person we love, and every red cent that we’ve earned. He will
settle for nothing less. That is the Jesus of the New Testament…and from this point forward,please know that I’m talking about that Jesus, not your homemade version or my homemade
version of our preferred, “jesus.” Now…do you LOVE the REAL Jesus, or do you HATE the
REAL Jesus? If you meet and love the REAL Jesus, I suspect you will have no issues with
serving as His Steward…it will be an honor. If you hate the Real Jesus, it is because you have an
allegiance to a MASTER that you trust and value more than Jesus, which is why Christian
stewardship will continue to offend you for the rest of your life and for all eternity.

2) The second reason Christian “stewardship” is so offensive is because we have believed the lie
that this is what God wants from us…when in fact, it is what God wants FOR us! Have you ever
considered the possibility that Jesus wants full ownership of your entire life because anything
less will lead you into slavery? The REAL JESUS said in John 10:10, “The thief comes only to
kill, steal, and destroy. But I have come that they may have life and have it abundantly.” True
Christian stewardship is the pathway to the abundant life that Jesus came to provide for us.
There is no alternative pathway to that abundant life…but man are we ever determined to find
one. Look…do your homework. Read the testimonies of the rich and powerful…they are
miserable. Read the biographies of those who have chased every vocational aspiration, fortune,
popularity, athletic dominance, sexual exploit, and hedonistic pleasure…more often than not they

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will confess a lingering emptiness and dissatisfaction with their choices. Read Ecclesiastes, the personal reflections of one of the world’s wealthiest kings in all of human history, and you will find these words, “I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.” What was the outcome? “When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun.” God knows that our stuff…even our own loved ones…even our own sense of rightness…will end up enslaving us if we don’t hand them over to the Owner…and that is constantly what we learn from those who serve different Masters. But consider the testimonies, the joy, the contentment, and the sheer happiness of those who have fully surrendered their lives to serve as stewards of King Jesus. The testimony is consistent: once they surrendered everything to Jesus, they suddenly found what their hearts were always looking for. I will say it again: Letting go of our claim to “ownership” and accepting our role as God’s steward is not what God wants or needs from us…it is the life Jesus died to give us. I will explore that concept in a deeper way and tell some of those stories during our advent series that will kick off in just a few weeks when we unpack our core value of, “Love Generously.”

IV. OK, I have ONE minute for my last sub-heading: the pathway to Christian stewardship.

1) Yield to Jesus…the REAL JESUS that we find in the scriptures. Read what He said, allow Him to destroy the idols you have made that bear His name, and yield to His Lordship in your life. Once you yield to the real Jesus with your whole heart, He will send you His Spirit who will empower you to live the life of a God-honoring steward. First…we must yield.

2) Tithe. Begin by committing the first 10% of your earnings, your time, and your energy to God. Now I know this is going to prick some people the wrong way, but bear with me. We read in Leviticus 27:30, “A tithe of everything from the land, whether grain from the soil or fruit from the trees, belongs to the LORD; it is holy to the LORD.” Proverbs 3:9 states, “Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first-fruits of all your crops.” I know a tithe seems old fashioned, but is it? Listen to what God says in Malachi 3:6-10, For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. 7 From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them. Return to me, and I will return to you, says the LORD of hosts. But you say, ‘How shall we return?’ 8 Will man rob God? Yet you are robbing me. But you say, ‘How have we robbed you?’ In your tithes and contributions. 9 You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing me, the whole nation of you. 10 Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need. In the Bible, God trained His stewards to give to Him first, not last. And when His people were obedient, He poured out His blessings upon them. However, when they failed to give their tithes and offerings, He withdrew His blessing because they were “robbing God.” Randy Alcorn, in his book called The Treasure Principle, refers to tithing as the “training wheels” of Christian stewardship. Tithing is the way God chose to train His people to be stewards, and though we don’t read a lot about tithing in the New Testament, what we find is that Jesus never relaxed the demands in the OT…He took them to a new level. For example: Hate is equated with murder…lust is equated with adultery…unforgiveness is a deal breaker. In the OT God
demanded 10%, in the NT Jesus says, “I want it all.” So…for those of us who are sensing God call upon our lives to be stewards, I would suggest that you begin by tithing 10% of your income, 10% your time, and 10% of you energy as a way of training yourself to steward all that God has given you. Anything less than a tithe, according to the Bible, is robbing God.

3) Make a commitment. This morning we are providing you with an opportunity to make a commitment. Committing ourselves to faithful stewardship…to supporting and serving our Master and His agenda through His church…is a vital part of Christian stewardship. Many of us fear commitment, particularly commitments of our time and money, because we don’t know what the future holds and we’re worried that we might miss out on a better opportunity to spend that money or that time some other way. But I want you to think about that for a minute. You actually do know what the future holds…God has given us a very clear picture of what is to come. A day is soon coming when we will no longer breath air, our work on earth will be done, and everything that we have accumulated will be left behind. At that moment, as those redeemed in Jesus, we will stand before God, and our 401ks and our IRAs will not matter at all…what will matter is the treasure that we have accumulated in heaven…the investments we made in relationships, our compassion for people in need, our participation in the advancement of God’s Kingdom, and our simple obedience to Jesus the King. And here’s what I can promise you: not one person here will regret for one moment in heaven that you gave too much to Jesus. Not one person here will regret the time and resources you committed to our King’s agenda. Alcorn writes that our lives here are a dot, but eternity is a line that goes on forever. Church, look beyond the dot…commit to the line…invest in that which lasts forever…commit to the Master’s agenda…commit to giving your first and your best to serve the Owner and His purposes because that … investment lasts for all eternity.

Before I close, I want you to know that I am committed to living out what I am asking of you. I am daily trying to surrender my life to Jesus, and with the help of His Holy Spirit, He has more of me now than ever before. Christy and I are tithing, and our full tithe goes to Colonial because we believe God entrusted the Gospel to the local church…who is the Bride of Christ. We give beyond our tithe to support Colonial’s capital campaign. We give above and beyond our tithe to sponsor orphans, some missionary friends, and some noble Kingdom work through other leaders and organizations around the world. We drive vehicles with 200,000 plus miles because it allows us to give more. I buy my clothes at Savers and Goodwill so that I have more margin to give as God directs me. We seek to share everything we have with our neighbors and those in need such that we have given away thousands of dollars of clothes, food, and other items, and we are preparing to give away our van when the Lord makes clear who we are to give it to. Over our 25 years of marriage we have given several thousands of dollars to people who needed a little help, because we agree that the money that we manage does not belong to us…it belongs to our Father, and He can direct us to spend it any way He wishes to. Our commitment to be faithful stewards is costly. We are borrowing money against our house to help Levi through college so that we can honor our commitments to give as God has directed us. Now…are we there? Have we arrived? Are we totally free of materialism and the fear of “not having enough?” No. There is still some fear left in me…Christy and I still wrestle with our Southern Johnson County lifestyle as compared to our dear friends in Haiti, Kenya, Malawi, and India. We live in the tension of being in this world but not of it…and it’s hard. We fail…often…but we are not going to edit Jesus to justify our preferred lifestyle.
We are daily striving to edit our lifestyle to align with the Real Jesus who died for us and now reigns as our Master and our King. I invite you…all of you who call yourselves Christians…to do the same. Let us pray.