

SALT CO
10/27/24
“Why Such Lack and Evil?”

“Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me;”
 Psalm 23:4a

“Since therefore the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham.”
 Hebrews 2:14-16

WELCOME TO THE SALT CO!

Anyone watching the World Series?

-talked to guy yesterday where I work out who said he fell asleep while the Yankees changed pitchers just before Freddy...

-favorite photo I don't have permission to show you from the World Series-first game, ninth inning, two outs, bases loaded, Freddy Freeman at bat, photo of a guy on his knees, face buried in his overstuffed chair. Caption: God answers prayer!

Welcome to the SALT CO!

Welcome those who are joining us online.

This is the HUB of Seasoned Adult Ministry. For anyone new...by SEASONED ADULTS we mean:

SEASONED AS IN...

Chronologically-- we've lived a lot of seasons of life

BUT more importantly-

Spiritually--- ...like when sodium and chlorine combined make SALT... by the grace of God, when we receive Christ into our lives we become like THIS [gesture: one hand—two hands—joined together]

We become something beautiful, a *new creation*...transformed and *transforming* for the rest of our lives.

JESUS CALLS US THE SALT OF THE EARTH.

And this is the SALT CO (**where we** pull off the road to **gather**, AND share stories about **how to faithfully navigate** the ever-changing terrain on Route 60+; and Route 60++...and +++...

A place where we re-tool, re-fuel and re-charge.

Our theme this fall is “*Living a Psalm 23 Kind of Life*”. We’re using as our guide the book written by Dallas Willard entitled Life Without Lack which we’re recommending but NOT requiring. There’s a copy on each table for you to have a look. Pick up a copy at the bookstore. Each chapter is like a vista viewpoint on the amazing terrain the 23rd Psalm opens up for us.

The other book wrapped in a map is a reminder that we are exploring spiritual terrain together.

That Sierra cup on top of the books is just to suggest what it’s like to live a Psalm 23 kind of life- a life with the Shepherd so full my cup runs over- like a cup full of mountain spring water on a long challenging hike.

We began at the first viewpoint- we wondered who is God really? Because only the true God can provide for us, so we can trust that we have life without lack!

Second vista- The more we come to know about God the more we come to know about ourselves -who we are- and our need to cultivate the life of the mind for good thinking and faithful living and exercise our faithful imaginations.

Last time- Why there are people on earth. Our purpose. Our calling to His paths of righteousness from which there is no retirement.

You can catch up on all these by going to seasonedadults.com.

Today we come to a vista that most of us would perhaps rather skip. But necessary. Willard's title, "Why Such Lack and Evil?" A life without lack is almost unimaginable because of what we see, hear and experience.

Several years ago Suzanne and I attended a debate between Bart Ehrman and biblical scholar, bishop and theologian N.T. Wright. Ehrman who has a PhD from Princeton on the New Testament text *used* to be a pastor. He just couldn't do it anymore. Now he is more... agnostic.

In the conversation, Ehrman said, "*There's just so much suffering in the world*". For him the Bible is just bits and pieces. He cannot see any grand theme of hope there. Today he is a professor at UNC Chapel Hill teaching undergraduates the history of the New Testament, and the history of Christianity as well as a course on the problem of suffering. (Let those with kids or grandkids at UNC who have ears hear...)

It's the BIG QUESTION:

If God is wholly good, then why is there so much lack and evil?

It seems like there's some kind of unholy "synergy" of evil in this world: $2+2=5$. So, an abominable act of violence October 7 of last year, 1,200 killed in horrific ways. Now over a year later, conservative estimates believe over 40,000 have died... *so far*... Same kind of thing happening as well now in Lebanon and Northern Israel. Russia invades Ukraine over two and half years ago. It's hard to know how many thousands of people have died... *so far*. Then there is the suffering in the Sudan- over 20,000 killed and many thousands more fleeing as refugees. And just 690 miles off the tip of Florida, there's Haiti.

What is going on? *We must acknowledge the work of Satan*. Here is Dallas Willard:

"His [Satan's] presence in the world accounts for the seemingly unlimited extent of human wrongdoing that goes far beyond what humanity (made in the image of God) would generate on its own." P.

Part of the problem is that many do not really believe in the reality of the spiritual, either as good or as evil.

C.S. Lewis in his preface to The Screwtape Letters (copies available at the bookstore) writes,

https://faithgateway.com/products/the-screwtape-letters-1?currency=USD&variant=20045061587055&stkn=b597b94c71f8&gad_source=1&gbraid=0AAAAADuZX-qPDJ7-pMSPF7H2VMfIIDNxI

“There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them. They themselves are equally pleased by both errors and hail a materialist or a magician with the same delight.” (p. 9)

How do we prepare to deal with evil and Satan? We need some “intel” from God’s word. Willard goes through this in this chapter. So does this video put together by the Bible Project. This is a little less than six minutes. Take a look.

VIDEO. [00:00-5:46]

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CamYtVpoTNk>

Willard says,

“The only way the devil can hurt God is through humans, and so he focuses upon us. His strategy is to try to frustrate God’s purpose for humanity [what we looked at last time] beginning at the beginning in the garden of Eden... his way of doing that is to persuade, to tempt and to deceive humanity.” p. 71

This is done subtly. C.S. Lewis in The Screwtape Letters imagined correspondence between a head demon named Screwtape, and one of his operatives on the planet named Wormwood. Here is an excerpt that illustrates how evil works on us. Screwtape is advising Wormwood on how to steer his “patient”, a human on the planet, away from the “Enemy” who is God.

“...you don’t realise how enslaved they [humans] are to the pressure of the ordinary. I once had a patient, a sound atheist, who used to

read in the British Museum. One day, as he sat reading, I saw a train of thought in his mind beginning to go the wrong way. The Enemy, of course, was at his elbow in a moment. Before I knew where I was I saw my twenty years' work beginning to totter. If I had lost my head and begun to attempt a defence by argument I should have been undone. But I was not such a fool. I struck instantly at the part of the man which I had best under my control and suggested that it was just about time he had some lunch. The Enemy presumably made the counter-suggestion (you know how one can never quite overhear what He says to them?) that this was more important than lunch. At least I think that must have been His line for when I said, 'Quite. In fact much too important to tackle at the end of a morning', the patient brightened up considerably; and by the time I had added 'Much better to come back after lunch and go into it with a fresh mind', he was already half way to the door. Once he was in the street the battle was won. I showed him a newsboy shouting the midday paper, and a No. 73 bus going past, and before he reached the bottom of the steps I had got into him an unalterable conviction that, whatever odd ideas might come into a man's head when he was shut up alone with his books, a healthy dose of 'real life' (by which he meant the bus and the newsboy) was enough to show him that all 'that sort of thing just couldn't be true. He knew he'd had a narrow escape and in later years was fond of talking about 'that inarticulate sense of actuality which is our ultimate safeguard against the aberrations of mere logic.' He is now safe in Our Father's house."

pp.12-14

Truth is evil can't be defeated by human means, John McCain notwithstanding. In a talk he gave while campaigning for the presidency at a large evangelical church he talked about the growing menace of Al Qaeda; he said, "*We will defeat evil...*"

No, we won't. There is only One who can accomplish that. In First John we read,

"The Son of God was revealed for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil." | John 3:8b

On our own, by ourselves we are deceived and misled. We try to follow broken signs. I took this shot last summer where my friend Rick and I encountered at a crucial junction in the Sierra:

God knows we need help! In Hebrews 2 we hear this good news,

“Since therefore the children share flesh and blood, he himself likewise shared the same things, so that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by the fear of death. For it is clear he did not come to help angels, but the descendants of Abraham.”

Hebrews 2:14-16

It helps to know how Satan works on us to rob us of the experience of God's sufficiency. He does this through deceit. Because Satan does not have direct power over our will. We must be seduced. Fooled. Won over.

I John 2:15 lays out the three key ways we can be deceived,

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world- the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of life- comes not from the Father but from the world...”

I John 2: 15-16

The desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of life, all three of these map onto how the serpent tempted the first humans in the Garden- the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil looked good for food, its fruit seemed pleasant to the eyes, it was desirable to make one wise.

Notice how Jesus' testing in the wilderness align with John's summary and Adam and Eve's failure in the Garden. Jesus overcomes the Satan's attempts to use His power and authority first to satisfy his physical hunger, to demonstrate his authority by leaping from the pinnacle of the temple (quite a demonstration THAT would be!) and become king of the world in exchange for worshipping Satan!

Willard points out,

“Satan’s way of dealing with people is to catch them up in these three patterns and then make them think they are doing what they want to do. He causes them to obsess over the immediate things they want, and he assures them all will be well.... p. 78

This makes me think about how advertising works. Social media has now been exposed. Tech makes everything easy everywhere. Instant gratification.

Willard is insightful,

“Satan hooks us by deceiving us and leading us into all these foolish ways of thinking about our desires: to dominate others, to look good, to enjoy what our body cries out for. These become preeminent in our minds, the driving force in our behavior, and the source of so much evil in the world.” p. 79

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with “desire”. It’s *why* we desire what we desire, right?

EGO stands for “Edge God Out”

The difference between RUN and RUIN is “I”.

The Satan also uses our fears that we won’t get what we desire!

Willard’s makes the point:

“Again, I remind you, human beings cannot be forced to do evil. They cannot be forced to good either. They must choose to do evil or good. How do they choose? By being persuaded that one course of action is better than another. So Satan works upon the heart through the mind, as he did with Eve, and he will with us today.” p. 82

The decisive battle against the Evil One took place in another Garden...
(where the Journey to the cross begins...)

Satan knew what was going on. What was at stake. All his power, his rule on earth, his ways and means under threat. He had to find a way to get inside Jesus’ mind, the way he found a way into Eve’s and Adam’s minds, to stop him.

Jesus, we're told, sweat "drops of blood". But let us be very clear. He was no victim. He was not afraid to suffer and die. He was not trying to avoid the cross. He was overcoming Satan.

I love how Willard puts this:

"But to Satan's chagrin, Jesus himself was in charge of the events and people involved in the story. He had 'set his face' toward his goal- like a football player who sees the whole field and anticipates every move- to achieve his end of blowing open a carefully prepared but tiny cultural enclave of redemption and stepping upon the stage of world history (Luke 9:51). As he said at a crucial turning point in his career: 'I, when I am lifted up from the earth [in crucifixion], will draw all people to myself'. (John 12:32 NRSV)." pp. 85-86

This was the strategy of Father, Son and Holy Spirit to break down the rule and power of Satan, and so make this world a safe place for anyone. No matter what is happening. Anyone, who becomes like [THIS], you and I, when we place our lives in the hands of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, never have to do what we know to be wrong, and we never have to be afraid.

We can walk through the valley of the shadow of death and fear no evil.

His rod and staff protect us and guide us. His Word and His Spirit protect us and guide us.

Because even though Satan has already been defeated, he is still at work, primarily in "ideas" that govern societies' individuals. Here are only a few examples:

-The idea that because you're in the third third of life you must be "done".

-All the ideas being thrust in front of us in these days leading up to the election!

-If so and so gets elected it will mean the end of our nation as we know it.

-The idea that your life is fulfilled when you make “happiness” your goal in life.

-The idea, in the form perhaps of a story we tell ourselves about ourselves, that we are not worthy of anyone’s love, even God’s!

-the idea that, as Bart Ehrman finally concluded, because there is so much suffering that there’s no way to make sense of this life, certainly not of what the bible has to offer us.

By the way, after he finished speaking, N.T. Wright, himself a pastor and bishop as well as a brilliant New Testament scholar who has written and spoken all over the world about our hope in Jesus, responded gently. You could hear a pin drop. We all wondered what he would say to Ehrman’s challenge?

Wright looked back at where Ehrman was sitting and said, “*Bart, I just have one question for you... what do you do about chocolate? Why do we love chocolate? Why do we love? Why is there love? Where does that come from?*” From there he went on to make the case for the love of God manifest in His Son Jesus.

There’s a battle going on for hearts and minds. Satan wants us distracted. Deceived. Where will we pay our attention?

We cannot overcome what Willard calls the “citadel of false beliefs and images and feelings”- that rob of us of living a Psalm 23 kind of life, a life without lack, *except by the power of God*.

This power comes to those who pay their attention to who God is as Jesus thought about God, and trust God as Jesus trusted him, moving from having faith in Jesus to having the faith of Jesus. “To do so is to know the life without lack.”

To be able to walk through the darkest valley and fear no evil, because you know he is with you.

Let’s talk about this.

Table Talk

1. Share your name and what you're going to be if you're dressing up for Halloween. If not, what was your favorite Halloween costume?
2. What would you say are your current understanding, beliefs, and questions about the existence of evil?
3. Read I John 2:15-16: ***“Do not love the world or the things in the world. The love of the Father is not in those who love the world; for all that is in the world- the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of life- comes not from the Father but from the world...”***

I John 2: 15-16

Talk together about the three basic forms of deception used by Satan and how they work.

4. What is the best defense against these forms of deception? How well do you practice these?
5. What do you think you could work on this week to shore up your defenses?

Share the conversation I had in the hot tub with a man this last week. How I had “saved his life”. He was filling his mind with images and thoughts from raw movies and other media and his spirit was growing dark. Thank the Lord he heeded something that said to him, “Go get help!” He reminded me of what I said to him, *“Feed your mind with a healthy diet...”* “I’d like to believe I said more, about God’s great love for him, trusting His word, prayer, watching for His goodness in his everyday life...”

By the grace of God, I could offer this man a cup of cold water...

Walk the Talk on “Cultivating the Life of the Mind”

1. I highly recommend a healthy diet: listening, reading, studying Paul’s letter to the Ephesians for understanding how the Satan operates, how he has been thwarted, and strategies for standing firm! Listen to it in one sitting (about 15 minutes...)
2. Continue to contemplate with the 23rd Psalm.
3. Read. Life Without Lack. Screwtape Letters. Read good stuff!

4. Dallas' prayer

*"Lord, minister to me by your Spirit.
Come into my heart and mind,
and release me from all inward tension and anxiety,
hold before my mind the truth that I have nothing to fear
From Satan
for you have defeated him;
all I must do is fill my life and my mind with you.*

*Remind me often, especially in the midst of difficulty,
that you, who you are in me,
are greater than he who is in the world.*

*Help me carry this truth with me
as I contemplate the awesome reality of the spiritual battle
taking place,
a battle that, perhaps in our time, is moving perceptively
closer to its climax.*

*Give me the vision of who you are:
our Father who art in heaven,
the Shepherd in whose presence there is no lack,
so I may have the confidence and power to love and to live as
Jesus lived.*

*In his name,
amen.*

Psalm 23

***The Lord is my shepherd. I shall not lack.
He makes me lie down in green pastures.
He leads me beside still waters.
He restores my soul.***

He leads me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.

For you are with me.

Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

You anoint my head with oil.

My cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.