

SALT CO.
11/24/24

“Trust Completed in Death to Self”

“For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them.” II Cor. 5:14-15

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.

Explain our approach to seating, mixing, meeting new people, making new connections, keeps our HUB open to someone coming for the first time.

Thanksgiving Week is here! Shout outs of something that you are thankful for this morning. INTRODUCE MIKE AND JOAN

For those maybe joining us for the first time...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 saw that living a "life without lack" requires us to first and foremost re-examine what we believe about who the Lord our God is. Because-- if our ideas (and our images and information) about God are too small and shriveled up; distorted or even outright wrong...we will never be able to trust God enough to live a 23rd Psalm kind of life believing we have everything we need; *especially when we don't have everything we want.*

At the second vista we saw that the more we come to know about God the more we come to know about ourselves -who we are, and our need to cultivate faithful minds and imaginations about who God truly is.

That led to another good question: *Why are there people on earth?* This was about our calling to His paths of righteousness from which there is *no retirement.*

Then we came to a vista that most of us would perhaps rather skip. But necessary. Willard asked another important, honest question, "*Why Such Lack and Evil?*" We had to talk about the real presence of evil in our world. But we also talked about how we can grapple with the evil we encounter by the power of Christ's life at work in and through us—and so pray, "***I fear no evil...***"

Last time we came to what Willard calls, and I doubt anyone here would disagree, is the key to living a Psalm 23 kind of life- “Faith” in God. We watched Job’s faith being transformed from a faith of “propriety” to a faith of “desperation” which brought him finally to a direct encounter with God, and a faith of “sufficiency”, which is trusting God for a life without lack.

My testimony fits where we are heading this morning. Some of you know me well and have heard this before. I was raised in the church. Somewhere around last year of high school, Vietnam War going on, birth of the environmental movement (first Earth Day when I was a junior-4/22/71). I rejected Christianity, or what I understood of it. Went to UCSB and entered their brand-new Environmental Studies program. Freshman year I did stupid stuff. Contracted mono. To my amazement, that spring my church asked if I would be willing to consider working in a rough neighborhood that summer where there were lots of kids needing something to do. I agreed if I was doing “social work” and not having to teach “bible studies”. They agreed!! To boot, they’d pay me \$600 a month! My story is also one of how my church saw something in me that I did not see in myself...

In the middle of that summer on a hot smoggy Burbank night, around 1:00 in the morning, lying awake, imagining my life, I saw myself peering over an edge into an abyss, I “heard” a voice- not in my ears, but in my mind- like a thought, only more direct, like an “address”. The voice said, *“Throw it away and follow me...”*

A week later when we took the kids to Magic Mountain, I shared what happened that night with my girlfriend who also went to the church. I asked her what she thought. With tears she said something like, *“What do YOU think?”* I remember saying, *“I think I’m going to what he said. I’m going to throw it away and follow him.”*

It’s what I’ve been doing ever since, for the last 52 years. Learning about “throwing it away”, learning about what it looks like to “follow him”.

The title of this chapter fits, “Trust Completed in Death to Self”.

Not talking about the death of self, self-negation or self-rejection, but death to self because, as Willard shows us, leads to liberation from the domination of desire. I believe every one of us, every day is invited to “throw it away”, which requires that we be able to say “no” to our desires in order to follow

him. You hear it in Paul when he speaks of “putting off” an old life, like taking off old worn-out clothes, and “putting on” new clothes.

“Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices, and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its Creator...”
Colossians 3:9-10

Jesus said, ***“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me...”*** (Matt. 16:24).

He was not saying we should deny that we exist! Nor is he saying we should consider ourselves as worthless or as doormats.

Jesus continued, ***“For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it...”***

We are all in the process of learning to trust God more and more with more and more of ourselves- of “throwing away things we thought mattered more and following him.”

As Seasoned Adults we face this, of necessity we have to practice letting go.

I think about our dad’s experience and all who denied themselves to fight for freedom in WW II. He was captured in North Africa as part of the debacle around Kasserine Pass where thousands of Americans and Brits were captured, and hundreds were killed or wounded. He described the order coming down the line, ***“Destroy your weapon and get ready to surrender...”*** When it came time, he stood up with his hands on his head and was told to get in line... They marched them to the coast, put them on aircraft that flew low over the Mediterranean to Italy, where they were loaded on boxcars and hauled up to Stalag III B south and east of Berlin...

... for 26 months to a life he did not expect, let alone want, behind barbed wire.

There he found a way to continue to serve, he fought the war with his flute he found in a YMCA crate full of band instruments they used to keep up the spirits of the 5,000 POW’s.

Dallas Willard helps us think about what it is our Lord invites *us* to “throw away”. The biblical term is “flesh”. He writes,

“The first thing to be said is that “the flesh” is not bad in itself. Simply stated, the flesh is merely the natural powers of the human being, based in the human body---our capabilities, wants, and desires as they are in themselves, unaided by divine assistance or guidance.” Page 129

To be clear he’s NOT saying that it’s wrong to want things or to have things...BUT

“What is wrong is when not getting what we want propels us into a state of bitterness, irritation, impatience, and anger, and we depend upon our own tricks and devices, our confidence in our own power, to get the things we want. The right thing would be simply releasing it all and saying, ‘All right. God knows. I’m living in his world. He can give me what he wants. I will not put those things in the place of God.’ Putting things in the place of God is the central issue.” Page 138

So...

*“To live in the flesh, to live with uncrucified affections and desires, is simply a matter of putting them in the **ultimate position** in our lives. Whatever we want becomes the most important thing.”* (p. 130)

This is hard good word for all of us. When our desires are put in the ultimate position what does that do to our capacity to seek what’s good for those around us?

Because the thing about human desire is that it is *insatiable*. As the British philosopher Mick Jagger noticed, *“I can’t get no satisfaction...”* We see this playing out everywhere. I was reading this chapter during the opening ceremonies of the summer Olympics in Paris. I was struck by the hubris of some of our athletes, and the overt displays of sexual appetite clearly intended to mock Christians. It put me in mind of something Paul wrote,

“Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and

things like these, I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Galatians 5:19-21,

James reminds us there are two kinds of “wisdom” we can follow. One kind, “wisdom from below” gives the kinds of things Paul describes. On the other hand,

“But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.”

James 3:17-18.

Wisdom that affirms:

- we are only human
- no longer needing to promote ourselves
- no longer using people for our personal need
- no longer dominating others
- ready to stand for what is right

This too is what it means to “throw it away and follow him”.

And here is the heart of the matter. Because our desires are insatiable, they must be checked. We must put all our desires on the cross.

Jesus could not have been clearer.

“If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will save it. What does it profit them to gain the whole world, but lose or forfeit themselves?”

Luke 9:23-25

To learn to limit our desires in order to follow him cannot be done by ourselves

Willard puts it like this,

“Our task is to understand what death to self is and to understand that we cannot live in the Shepherd Psalm- a life without lack in the Kingdom of God until we have accepted it, recognized it, and said, ‘Lord, give this gift to me.’” P. 143

We need the grace of God.
[We count the cost...this is not easy!]

1. The Christian life is difficult. Yes. But life without Christ is much harder!
2. We will face disbelief by others, they will think we are playing some sort of game. They will wonder what we are really up to...
3. We will face rejection by some, at times in some places even face direct persecution (Iran, India, China, Saudi Arabia, etc.)
4. We will have struggles. *Count on roots of bitterness and obstacles:*
 - a. Of what others think of us
 - b. Of what we believe we must have to be “okay”.
 - c. To release bitterness over a past relationship, of regret. We may need help here from a wise person, a counselor, a guided group...
 - d. When we are hurt by others, suffer pain, sickness, injury- need to be honest in a healthy community- could be a small group, one of our recovery groups, a DRIVE group (?)]

Dallas wants to be sure to make this point about practicing death-to-self, *“Don’t mistake me for a doormat!”* Humility is not “weakness”.

We are NOT called to just put up with wrong, abuse, evil, or to just “grin and bear it”. We are not called to cooperate with others who are willing to cause harm. It is not GOOD for others to do harm willingly and therefore resisting the harm they seek to do is the most “loving thing we can do”.

Living at Psalm 23 life sometimes means seeking the protection, wisdom and power to resist and restrict evil behavior that is part of the chaos created by those with unrestrained desire.

He shows us what it looks like to be a person with dignity. Willard offers this description,

“Dignity- real dignity, comes to a person who, by the grace of God, has embraced death to self. Such people are the only ones who can stand up to other selves, which, of course, includes serving them in ways that are good and right.” pp. 150-151

Final word. Willard concludes,

“There must be a time when, in our own words, and in our own way, we say to God, ‘Do with me what you will.’ Until we experience an abandonment of this kind, faith simply cannot come to us safely. One of the main reasons we have such little faith is that we have not lived through the process of abandonment and come to the place where God can trust us with great faith. Once we have abandoned our lives to God, we are ready to receive the gift of faith that will enable us to love others well...” (p. 155)

Let’s talk about this.

TABLE TALK

1. Share your name and a person you are thankful for and why.
2. a. Do you have a story that you are willing to share of being hurt by someone (in a work setting, family, neighbor, friend) whose life was dominated by an unchecked desire?
- b. Is there an example you would be willing to share of how you were so dominated by an unchecked desire that you realized you were hurting others?
3. What do you think your progress toward “death to self” might open up in your relationship with God and with others?

WRAP UP

-Let’s get practical. Try practicing death to self while we’re in traffic! Where else? Standing in line? How about how we handle “interruptions”. When we are feeling “thwarted” in some way...? Practice “turnarounds”. Practicing LISTENING!! How about fasting, though not THIS week!! All very small things God can use to shape us, grow us.

The closing prayer is offered by the French martyr Charles de Foucauld:

*Father, I abandon myself
 into your hands.
 Do with me what you will.
 Whatever you may do, I thank you,
 I am ready for all, I accept all.
 Let only your will be done in me
 and in all your creatures.
 I wish no more than this, O Lord.
 Into your hands I commend my soul.
 I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,
 for I love you, Lord,
 and so need to give myself,
 to surrender myself into your hands
 without reserve
 and with boundless confidence,
 for you are my Father.*

WALK THE TALK

1. Give the Gift of Serving so others may receive the Gift of Jesus!
 - a. Help with Wickham concert
 - b. Help with Messiah concert
 - c. Fill out the card, we'll follow up with you. Thanks!
2. The gift of serving someone in your circle this Thanksgiving week...

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.***