

3/22/26 Salt Co

“The Way of the Burning Heart”

“Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” John 20:29

“Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road while he was opening the scriptures to us?” Luke 24:32

Table Talk I

Share your name and your favorite breakfast.

Salt Talk

We have been exploring what it means to grow in a conversational relationship with God- in which we speak with God, but also listen to Him speaking with us, most commonly in what can be described as a “still small voice”. We have been tapping the insights gleaned by Dallas Willard in his now classic Hearing God,

Willard summarizes this way,

“I have tried to clarify what hearing God amounts to and to make a life in which one hears God’s voice in the Way of Jesus accessible to anyone who would enter it. I have aimed to give a biblical and experiential understanding of the theory and practice of that life.”

Hearing God, p. 282

But there remains one great barrier that might hinder some people’s effort to make such a life their own. It’s this,

“The seeming unreality of the spiritual life”

or, as Willard puts it, the “overwhelming presence of the visible world.”

He observes that few people arise in the morning as hungry for God as they are for cornflakes or toast and eggs.

The spiritual life does not shout or shove, it whispers around the edges, sometimes it gently calls to us from the middle of what is happening.

God works in gentle power, in what Willard calls “spiritual invasions” into our everyday lives, that by their very gentleness almost seem to invite us to explain these invasions away!

Right here I want you to be aware of another now classic by Dallas Willard entitled The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God. “Conspiracy” because of how Jesus’ kingdom works, under cover, subtly, gently, in hidden, and therefore *dismissible* ways!

Divine Conspiracy

Willard warns

“We are hindered in our progress toward becoming spiritually competent people by how easily we can explain away the movements of God toward us.”

Hearing God, p. 283

A conversational relationship with God begins with this: *God wants to be wanted*. To be wanted enough that we are open and ready, predisposed to find Him, to notice His presence with us. However, if we are preset to find ways of *explaining away* God’s gentle overtures, He will rarely respond with fire from heaven. “More likely, he will leave us alone; and we shall have the satisfaction of thinking ourselves not to be gullible.”

Willard explains,

“For centuries now our culture has cultivated the idea that the skeptical person is always smarter than the one who believes. You can be almost as stupid as a cabbage, as long as you doubt.”

Hearing God, p. 283

I think of the first Soviet astronaut who while in outer space saw no sign of God, or medical science searching inside the human body cannot find a “soul”.

“Mental sharpness” is not about genuine intellectual character, but about a posture that conforms to the cultural view that places skepticism in the highest place, that says science tells us the truth, knows what’s real, and therefore what matters.

Thing is, we are now growing to understand how science is equipped only to search and observe the observable with our five very limited senses. That, in fact, science does its research *on faith* that there is reality that *can* be known. To find out what matters and what is real and what is true requires a different kind of knowledge science cannot provide. Many scientists understand this.

Think about the impact the cultural force toward skepticism plays on prayer...

“Their respectable uncertainty prepares them to explain away as coincidences the answers that come to the prayers that they do make”.

The result is that pride closes off a way into a life of increasingly confident and powerful prayer, let alone a conversational relationship with God of heaven and earth!

There are some fundamental questions every human being sooner or later faces:

- +What sort of world do we really live in?
- +Is the spiritual really real?
- +Is the spiritual life, and to be a spiritual person, possible?

Answering these questions requires you and me to make a choice. To de-cide (= to “cut away” to say yes is to say no).

Willard puts this decision like this:

“Nearly all areas of life in which we could become spiritually competent (hearing God and receiving divine guidance among them) confront us with the same type of challenge. They all require of us a choice to be a spiritual person, to live a spiritual life. We are required to bet our life 'that the visible world, while real, is not reality itself.'”

Hearing God, p. 284

This means we cannot make “spirituality” work without having a significant degree of confidence in and commitment to the truth that

“the visible world is always under the hand of the unseen God”

Hearing God, p. 284

Or as the apostle Paul puts it in the beginning of his letter to the Romans,

“the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith...” Romans 1:17

Here I suspect we as Seasoned Adults, having navigated through many seasons, and miles along Route 60+, and how we anticipate the seasons and miles ahead, find ourselves increasingly open, even curious, in each day to noticing His “unseen” and yet detectable, discernible hand. We help each other, we help the generations coming behind us to notice too. We are learning to see not just what time it is, but, more importantly, what kind of time it is. It has taken many of us here a long time to come to see the reality of the spiritual life, but here we are, more open than ever, more ready than ever.

It’s why our conversations at times are so rich, joyful, hopeful, wonderful.

Willard writes,

“The greatest divide between human beings and human cultures is between those who regard the visible world as being of primary importance and those who do not- between those who view what is visible as all that’s real or at least the touchstone of reality and those who do not.”

He wrote these words about 42 years ago. Today there are signs of a shift in this divide, of deepening hunger and searching for meaning that the material world cannot supply, especially among young people.

-My story at Taizé 20 years ago, in a time when I was dry, needing renewal. A village in south central France where an ecumenical community

gathers led by an order of Christians who practice hospitality. We were toured around by a young German woman, explaining there were about 40 language groups of mainly YA age young people who had come to “give Christianity one last chance”. Many had experienced devastation in their countries, their churches, in their own lives. What she said next went in deep with me- looking back I can say today that I was hearing the Lord’s “voice when she explained, *“We pray that our worship will be an invitation to an encounter with the Risen Christ.”*

Amen.

Our YA ministry on Thursday nights sees around 300 souls coming to meet perhaps for the first time, perhaps to reconnect with the Lord of heaven and earth.

It’s what this church is all about. This is what it means to “make much of Jesus”.

Maybe that’s what brings you to SALT CO...

The longer we live the more we suspect that it’s true: The most important realities cannot be seen. You can’t see gravity. You can’t see the wind.

It is so with all truly personal reality. Neither God nor the human heart are visible.

Jesus reminds us that “***no one has seen the Father...***”

In Exodus 20:4 (“***You shall not make for yourself an idol...***”) the second of the Ten Commandments is helping us find God by forbidding us to think of Him in visual terms.

Willard writes,

“The entire weight of the history of Israel- and its extension through Jesus and his people- presses toward the understanding of God as personal, invisible reality.”

Hearing God, p. 285

“This God invades history to call human beings individually to choose whether they will live in covenant relation with Him or whether they will put something else- something *visible*- in the place of ultimate importance.”

Hearing God, p. 285

He writes,

“Will I listen for God and then obey? For me this tension is what it means to live as one who is learning from Christ how to live in the kingdom of God, right where I am, moment to moment, I sweat it out with my brother Paul: ***‘My visible self may be perishing, but inwardly I am renewed day to day,... producing something far greater than my troubles, and eternal in its glory, while we disregard the seen and focus on the unseen’*** (2 Cor 4:16-18, paraphrase).”

Hearing God, p. 285

These visible bodies of ours do not define who we really are. As they decline we can grow as persons. There is even neuroscience to back this up. The part of our brain that makes us human, the PFC, continues to grow our whole lives! (What Jimmy and I are exploring). We grow old, but we also *age*!

God’s word demonstrates how God has helped get us ready for this relationship the unseen God:

+the rituals and equipment for the sacrifices, the furnishings of the tabernacle all served as a provision of a point of interaction in the visible world between the invisible God and the people he had chosen to reconcile the world to himself.

+God’s voice is audibly heard as thunder and trumpet so that the people would live in deep awe of God’s invisible presence as long as they lived.

+In the New Testament God’s audible voice comes from heaven in the presence of Jesus. But as Jesus himself explained on one occasion, ***“This voice has come for your sake, not for mine”*** (John 12:30). Jesus repeatedly emphasized a life with our Father ***“who is in secret”*** (Matthew

6:6), and an everlasting kind of life in the invisible and incorruptible realm of God.

I'm looking forward to SALT CO after Easter when we will continue with VIA LUCIS= THE WAY OF LIGHT meditating together on some of the scenes of Jesus' post resurrection appearances over 40 days in 14 "stations of the Resurrection". What was Jesus doing in all these appearances? *He was helping His followers, including you and I, to grow accustomed to hearing Him without seeing Him!*

To know, as He promised, ***"I am with you always, even to the end of the age..."*** Matthew 28:20.

To prepare them and us too, for their ongoing conversational relationship with Him.

For example, we have what happened on the road from Jerusalem down to Emmaus.

Cleopas and his companion were heart broken. They had hoped that Jesus was the one. But then he met an awful end. A "Stranger" comes alongside and asks them questions. He responds by taking them through the scriptures to show them what had happened to their friend Jesus was exactly what was to happen to the Messiah Israel hoped for.

Then at table, during supper with him as he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and offered it, suddenly their eyes were opened (Luke 24:31).

The point is there was more than visual recognition happening. They were re-mem-bering, putting together the way Jesus' words always affected their heart, their inner life, in a peculiar way that had been going on for about three years.

The two say to each other,

"Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking with us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?" Luke 24:32

This was not the only time the followers of Jesus talked about their experiences with “heart burn”.

Think about what people were saying at the conclusion of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount,

“...the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.” Matthew 7:28

Soon after this Jesus would meet with them one final time as a visible presence. One last Via Lucis moment. Willard describes the scene:

“There, in the beauty and silence of the Galilean mountains, he would explain to them that he had been given authority over everything in heaven and on the earth. Because of that, they were now to go to every kind of people on earth and make them his students, to surround them with the reality of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to teach them how to do all the things he had commanded.”

Hearing God, p. 288

Imagine you were there. How would you feel? The One you trusted was giving you marching orders, the implication clear, “*Now it’s your turn*”.

Then He spoke these words,

“Look, I’m with you every minute, until the job is done.” (Matt. 28:20 paraphrase)

He speaks these same words to you and me here and now.

“I am with you... every minute...until the job is done...”

He speaks with us in our hearts, which sometimes will “burn” because of the character of His word.

Over time, with experience this communication we have between Him and us turns into companionship, friendship.

Let’s talk about this.

Table Talk II

1. "The visible world daily bludgeons us with its things and events. They pinch and pull and hammer away at our bodies." What's bludgeoning you today?
2. Can you think of an example of a way you sometimes explain away God's gentle presence?
3. "We are required to 'bet our life' that the visible world, while real, is not reality itself." Do you agree? What's your bet?
4. Why does Jesus say to the woman at the well, "**God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in Spirit and truth.**" (John 4:24).
5. Do you have a "burning heart" experience you could share at your table?
6. Where are Jesus' marching orders leading you?

Wrap Up

two on Emmaus Road with the Companion

You and I live on the Emmaus Road. From time to time, we will feel our hearts burning. And as we go along, over time, seasons and miles, our visible surroundings are less and less a barrier between us and God.

Instead, what we see with our eyes become more and more God's gifts to you and me where we get to see the rule of heaven realized through our friendship with Jesus.

We begin to see that, in fact, we are participating in the dawning of new creation.

Last word in a poem:

The Opening

Now is the shining fabric of our day

Torn open, flung apart, rent wide by love;

Never again the tight, enclosing sky,

The blue bowl or the star-illuminated tent.

*We are laid open to infinity,
For Easter love has burst His tomb and ours.
Now nothing shelters us from God's desire-
Not flesh, not sky, not stars, not even sin.
Now glory waits so He can enter in.
Now does the dance begin."*

Elizabeth Rooney

It's a waltz. One-two-three, one-two-three. One-two-three.
One next right step at a time.

Doxology

Blessing