

The Gathering Church

Sonia's message:

4/26/26

Seek God's Peace
He Keeps Promises

Recap

Last week, Dan spoke about city building, biblical Cain the example where energy is spent ruthlessly eliminating emotions or experiences he viewed as threatening to his self-love. Author Kent Denlinger noted that we all have addictive personalities lined up to help us banish anything that overwhelms our soul. And as Dan observed that living thirsty is hard and city building affects us all, I found myself agreeing with him. It acts like a harmless numbing agent. The problem with it, is that God is hostile to obstructive wall erected between us and him.

This week, we will look at two more metaphors in Kent's analogy, this time about **fire lighting, and whitewashing.**

Fire Lighting

We'll start by thinking about Isaiah's timeline. God was judging his people because of their sin and wayward behavior. They would not listen to God through the prophets he sent to them. They had a series of events that precipitated God's judgment.

- Sin.
- Exile, punishment for their sin.
- Homesickness for their land.
- Uncertain Future.

Uncertainty ruled their day. This was the moment when their fire lighting began. Listening to what is happening in our world, this is when *our* fire lighting could begin: to **eliminate mystery and uncertainty.**

This is human visceral response to untenable circumstances.

Here, however, is where Kent makes this fascinating point: **To live thirsty is to accept mystery.**

Now that's counter-intuitive. Who wants to live thirsty? We are *not* taught, even in our churches, a live out a belief system that acknowledges lack may be a **God-approved circumstance.** Absolutely not! We have a gospel of abundance woven deeply into our psyche. **A theology of poverty is seen as blasphemy to our soul.**

Sarah and Abraham couldn't wait, so they lit the fire of parent-hood through surrogacy, and Hagar's womb became representative of their fire lighting efforts, until it almost consumed and burned down their family's future, peace, and covenantal promises from God.

Jeremiah delivered a word to the people from God: "**Stay put.**" (Jeremiah 42:3) It was kind of in the order of "*Don't eat* from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." On both occasions the divine advice was tragically ignored.

Fires were lit with unmatched disbelief and disobedience. And chaos marched in like thick smoke that suffocated peace.

Job could tell some stories about the process, and the outcome, “I had heard about You, but now I know that my Redeemer lives.” (Job 19:22)

Remember. Why we light our own fires is to eliminate mystery and uncertainty.

Purpose: God wants to reignite a living thirst that accepts space for being thirsty. His purpose is to sanctify his for His glory and the good of others.

Self-analysis: How do we get to the place where we can read the signs of where we are fire lighting? Why would we even want to read the signs?

- It is so that we can become people of deeper faith.
- People who recognize and are honest about our personal heart aches.
- People who long for wholeness before God.

1) Admit the embers of faith are low, uncertainty is a constant shadow

Paul tells Timothy to “fan into flame” (2 Timothy 1:6) the faith that is already there, which implies the flame of faith can occasionally flicker and dim. Carrying grief, fatigue, disappointment, distraction, or hidden sin is exhausting if left ignored for too long.

- *life* is not great (stress, loss, burnout).
- We have spiritual *drift*, small compromises, neglected prayer life, **spiritual autopilot**.
- Our *deception* about our dark nights of the soul grow too big to be buried.

Don’t pretend. We must carry our fears and anxieties to Jesus. **Stop chasing smoke.** That’s where he gives us water that satisfies, wells up, and overflows. That is a process of ebb and flow.

In our small group discussion last Sunday we spoke about being okay to wait with a partially filled glass of water. Not rushing for the filled up and overflowing event. Rather, waiting in that desert place, **waiting to hear God.** Being willing to say, “*Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting.*”

2) Remember - The fire starts with God.

- God gives **power**, not paralysis. We can have answers that bring order out of our chaos.
- God gives **love**, not cold religion. He keeps his promises. He is faithful.
- God gives **self-control**, not chaotic impulses. “Stay put.”

If we treat spiritual fire like human hype, we are guaranteed to burn out. If we treat it as Spirit-giving life, we will endure.

3) Make room for God

1. Practice presence—sing, listen, and let your heart catch up.
2. Stay close to believers to help you recognize the tell-tale signs of fire-lighting, the evidence that you’re chasing smoke.

When God ignites our fire again, we feel better—and we become transformed.

This brings us to:

White-Washing

Where the outside looks right but the heart isn't well.

Whitewashing can often follow fire lighting. **Whitewashing is our ruthless attempt to eliminate uncomfortable truth about ourselves, and our world.** Part of its uniform is a mask.

It is strangely the land of "woe." Denlinger references [Ezekiel 13:1-15](#) to expand on this idea. I have added a lengthy chunk of Scripture, but I think it's important to read together:

¹ *The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, prophesy against the prophets of Israel who are now prophesying. Say to those who prophesy out of their own imagination: 'Hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the foolish prophets who follow their own spirit and have seen nothing! Your prophets, Israel, are like jackals among ruins. You have not gone up to the breaches in the wall to repair it for the people of Israel so that it will **stand firm** in the battle on the day of the Lord. **Their visions are false and their divinations a lie.** Even though the Lord has not sent them, they say, "The Lord declares," and **expect him to fulfill their words.** Have you not seen false visions and uttered lying divinations when you say, "The Lord declares," though I have not spoken?*

*"Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says: **Because of your false words and lying visions, I am against you,** declares the Sovereign Lord. **My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations.** They will not belong to the council of my people or be listed in the records of Israel, nor will they enter the land of Israel. Then you will know that I am the Sovereign Lord.*

*"**Because they lead my people astray, saying, "Peace," when there is no peace,** and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, therefore **tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall.** Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, **"Where is the whitewash you covered it with?"***

Do you sense God's anger? *His people* are listening to lying prophets, *instead of him.* And Jesus, the Son of God, expresses his rage at this continued crying of '**Peace**' when there is no peace.

In Matthew's Gospel, Jesus reminds the Pharisees of that ancient Ezekiel prophecy of woe. This time, the religious people were building a place that made death look appealing., and Jesus uttered the seven woes. We will read the introduction in [Matthew 23:1-7](#), followed by Jesus's shocking tomb analogy:

*Then Jesus said to the crowds and to his disciples: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must be careful to do everything they tell you. **But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach.** They tie up heavy, cumbersome loads and put them on other people's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.*

*"**Everything they do is done for people to see:** They make their phylacteries (box containing Hebrew texts) wide and the tassels on their garments long; they love the place of honor at banquets and the most important seats in the synagogues; they love to be greeted with respect in the marketplaces and to be called 'Rabbi' by others.*

That's the background to why Jesus spoke so harshly. Verse 27 is the indictment:

²⁷ **“Woe to you,** teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like **whitewashed tombs**, which look *beautiful on the outside but on the inside are full of the bones of the dead* and everything unclean.

The Pharisees sold hope and life rather than the deadly truth of their destructive faithlessness before God. They sold a message of **“Peace, peace, when there was no peace.”**

- They were whitewashing flimsy walls.
- They were hiding truths about structurally *deficient walls*.

God is not impressed by spiritual performance; He desires inward truth—and he offers true cleansing that transforms **from the inside out**.

Reading through Ezekiel reminded me of other ancient walls that came crashing down under the deafening silence of God's people who did not speak but marched at his call. The Jericho walls (see Joshua 6) crumbled at this divine onslaught, precipitating the siege of a people who had thought that they were safe when the marching and dissembling began.

To the naked eye, our walls can look sturdy enough. But when closely examined, we discover cracks in the wall that whitewash could not ultimately camouflage.

Jesus' Purpose is always to call his church from image management to heart renewal, and from public religion to private surrender.

1) Jesus confronts the temptation of appearance

Jesus calls out “whitewashed tombs”—beautiful outwardly, but full of internal decay. **Whitewashing is the practice of covering what is broken instead of healing it.**

- Whitewashing *sounds* like: “I’m good,” “I’m blessed,” “No worries,” while the soul is exhausted and joyless.
- Whitewashing *looks* like: serving, giving, posting, smiling—without prayer, confession, or tenderness toward God.
- Whitewashing *grows* from: fear of being known, desire to be approved, and shame we never brought to Jesus.

It is hiding who we really are while trying to look spiritually acceptable.

2) God the heart reader sees past the paint

“People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7).

Psalm 51 shows the way back: David does not defend himself—he confesses; He does not negotiate—he surrenders; He does not ask for better optics—he **asks for a clean heart**.

3) Whitewashing never satisfies thirst; it only deepens it

A painted-over soul stays thirsty when we chase smoke. **Performance cannot hydrate the heart.**

- Whitewashing produces **distance** from God (prayer becomes awkward).
- Whitewashing produces **division** inside (two selves: public and private).
- Whitewashing produces **dryness** (no living joy, no quiet confidence).

The good news is that Jesus does not only expose; He invites.

4) Jesus offers inside-out renewal

Isaiah 1:16–18 is about God’s mercy:

“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.” God’s whitening is not paint—it is purification. His righteousness clothes us in white robes.

This happens through:

1. **Confession:** agreeing with God about what is true—no excuses, no comparison.
2. **Repentance:** turning from sin and from the systems that keep us hiding.
3. **Renewal:** asking for a “steadfast spirit” (Ps. 51:10) and practicing obedience in small, repeatable steps.
4. **Integrity:** bring the private life into alignment with the public life.

Denlinger's (on page 18) caught my attention with this comment: *“And if we are not careful, we tend to use Scripture in ways it was never intended to be used. We use God's Word to whitewash the uncomfortable truth of living in a fallen world as fallen people... we are uncomfortable living thirsty.”*

This isn't healthy, and God calls it out. He gave us the spirit of truth to move us to live honestly. We don't always love His voice when He tells us where we're living. He called out to Adam “Where are you?” as he calls out to us, because He invites us into the light and truth of His presence. He does this because truth sets us free.

He knows that we long for peace. But we can never grasp peace at the expense of truth. That grasp becomes smoke, not water.

Denlinger Concludes that denying the reality of our lives leads to missed opportunity to seek God's peace for our parched and troubled souls.

Jesus invites us:

“Come to me, all who are weary and heavy burdened. I will give you rest.” Matt 11:28

Application

1. **Get honest with God:** Where am I hiding behind religious language or activity?
2. **Get safe with people:** Who is one mature believer I can confess to and ask for prayer/accountability?
3. **Get serious about healing:** What boundary, habit, or support do I need so I don't return to covering over the same wound?

Jesus is not calling us to shame us—He is calling us in to cleanse us. We don't have to be polished to accept his invitation to come; we just have to be willing.

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus, show us our present level of deception, where we are building walls to ruthlessly eliminate uncertainty and mystery. Help us to be okay with poverty of spirit, where we wait on you to light of provide lamplight for our path, and light for our way. Burn away what is false, warm what is wounded, and light us to shine for Your glory. Father, we repent for whitewashing—covering what You want to cleanse. Give us truth in the inward parts. You have said that the Father is looking for those who would worship him in spirit and in truth. Create in us a clean heart and restore us to the joy of your salvation. Make our lives whole—inside and out—in Jesus' name. Amen.