

The Gathering Church

Dan's message 5/17/26

Chasing Smoke, Finding Water - Week 5

(Learning to live thirst in a world full of things that promise to satiate our thirst but never quite satisfy.)

Always Have Hope
Hypocrisy is Pretending
Honest With God
Virtues are Worship
Walk By Faith
Heaven is Home

Part One of my Sermon

How would you finish this sentence? "The great, great granddaddy of all sins is ... _____."

The great, great granddaddy of all sins is the denial of sin, the refusal to admit sin.

(Eugene Peterson)

"A recovery of the old sense of sin is essential to Christianity. Christ takes it for granted that men are bad. Until we really feel this assumption of His to be true, though we are part of the world He came to save, we are not part of the audience to whom His words are addressed." C.S. Lewis (p.67)

"I have not come to call the righteous to repentance, but sinners." — Luke 5:32 NASB

"It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick. ... For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners." — Matthew 9:12–13 NASB

Jesus came for the lost; not for those who have it all together. The lost are the ones that find the living water. They are hungry and thirsty for something they can't find in the world.

It's Upside Down (Counter-Intuitive). When we think we have it all together, we don't feel like we need Jesus. Why would we thirst for living water when earthly things seem to satisfy us?

When life feels full, we stop hungering for God. But, underneath the outward appearance of what looks like wholeness, there is still restlessness and emptiness.

"We chase smoke and can't find water."

That is why Jesus often reached people who knew they were needy: tax collectors, sinners, the sick, the poor in spirit.

It is the poor in spirit—those who realize nothing in this world can truly satisfy them—who are able to see their lostness and recognize that **without Jesus, there is no hope.**

Lostness can look like rebellion and immoral living. But it can also look like a respectable person trying to live independently from God while quietly carrying emptiness and restlessness underneath.

(Kent Denlinger) **"Sin is the commitment to oneself at the expense of God and others."**

Do we really sense our lostness?

Do we recognize the thirst underneath our sin patterns?

And could it be that those very thirsts; are there to drive us toward a hunger for Him?

Today, I want to share a story from the book of Acts that illustrates a sin that does not look especially immoral at first glance; but God takes it very seriously and wants to root it out of His church.

This sin quietly kills the church; and if left unnoticed, it keeps us from living authentically before God and honestly with one another.

The context of the story today comes from the Book of Acts: the Day of Pentecost had happened and the holy Spirit was poured out in power on those in the upper room. Peter preached and revival broke out and 1000's became followers of Christ. Things moved so quickly that many were in need, and Scripture says that a spirit of generosity rose up and people started giving to meet the need.

At the end of chapter 4, we have a story about a man named Joseph/Barnabas. He sells some **property and brings the money to the disciples to help with the need.**

³⁴ For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, ³⁵ and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need. ³⁶ Now Joseph, a Levite of Cyprian birth, who was also called Barnabas by the apostles (which translated means Son of Encouragement), ³⁷ and who owned a tract of land, sold it and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. ([Acts 4:34–37](#), NASB95)

Immediately afterward (Acts 5:1-11), we are introduced to Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, who likewise sold property, bringing a part of it to the disciples.

¹ But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, ² and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. ³ But Peter said, "Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back some of the price of the land? ⁴ "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God." ⁵ And as he heard these words, Ananias fell down and breathed his last; and great fear came over all who heard of it. ⁶ The young men got up and covered him up, and after carrying him out, they buried him. ⁷ Now there elapsed an interval of about three hours, and his wife came in, not knowing what had happened. ⁸ And Peter responded to her, "Tell me whether you sold the land for such and such a price?" And she said, "Yes, that was the price." ⁹ Then Peter said to her, "Why is it that you have agreed together to put the Spirit of the Lord to the test? Behold, the feet of those who have buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out as well." ¹⁰ And immediately she fell at his feet and breathed her last, and the young men came in and found her dead, and they carried her out and buried her beside her husband. ¹¹ And great fear came over the whole church, and over all who heard of these things. ([Acts 5:1–11](#), NASB95)

Ananias and Sapphira looked the part of just another generous person in this movement in the church. They wanted the credit for sacrifice without the paying the full cost of surrender. But God exposed the hidden places of their heart.

I don't think any of us purposely start out trying to act or look Godly before others but if we are not careful, we can talk the talk, walk the walk, pray the prayers and do the right things to garner the respect of others while heading down a deadly road.

Let's look a little deeper at what is really happening here.

Was the problem simply that Ananias and Sapphira did not give all the money from the sale of their land?

Peter makes something very important clear in verse 4: *"While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal?"*

In other words, they were never required to sell the land. And even after selling it, they were never required to give away all the money.

The issue was not partial giving. Partial giving would have been completely acceptable; if they had been honest about it.

The real sin was **hypocrisy**. It was deception. It was spiritual pretense. They wanted to appear as sacrificial and generous as Barnabas while secretly holding something back. They presented the gift as though it was the full amount, when it was not.

They wanted the reputation of complete surrender without the reality of complete surrender. They were living in denial. And God wanted the early church to know this is sin.

Pretenders avoid dealing with their own brokenness and try to cover it with performance, image, or religious activity.

We can be like A & S; we are going to church, doing the things religious people do, but underneath, we are just chasing smoke, we are pretending.

In our church purpose statement:

"We believe following Jesus starts with being honest about our own brokenness."

What would a church look like where we stopped pretending to be something we are not; Where we let go of trying to be like the church down the street or someone else spiritually who we looked up to, where we learn to live out of our true selves, not the false self?

If we learn to move together in our lostness, brokenness, vulnerability and transparency; choosing to invite each other to really get to know me at my best and worst, I think the Spirit of Truth would be honored and would sweep like a rushing wind. Don't you think that is what happened at Pentecost?

The spirit moved in power and the pretenders could not continue in their pretending. In fact pretending would get in the way of the flow of the Spirit's power.

And God was making a statement about what he wanted his church to be founded on: Spirit and Truth; He said to the woman at the well that He is seeking those who **"worship Him in spirit and in truth, these are whom the Father seeks."** (John 4:23)

Living in Denial is sin; its trying to fill our cup, it's not living thirsty. Its chasing smoke.

(Kent p.66 paraphrased) The Spirit is Committed to lifting this living in denial. The denial that we are lost and sinners in need of a Savior. And when God does his work of showing us the level of our brokenness, we are invited into a life of faith which means we receive sometimes daily the gift offered to us through the Cross of Jesus Christ and the waiting for the eager expectation of His return where we will one day no longer live thirsty but will live in fullness.

(Larry Crabb, Kent p.66) Says "Be where you are! Live in your darkness, your confusion, your struggle, your failure. It's your best chance for meeting God. He tends to meet us where we are, not where we pretend to be. The degree to which you come clean and pretend about nothing, is the degree to which you may discover your deepest thirst for God, who alone is guaranteed to still want you. You long to be wanted - at your worst." - Larry Crabb

Take Communion: Time of Confession and Repentance

The blood of Christ came to overcome three (3) kinds of enmity and bring reconciliation through the cross.

First, the hostility between us and God. Sin separated us from the Father, but through the blood of Jesus we are brought near again. *"What can wash away my sin? Nothing but the blood of Jesus." "For if while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son..." (Romans 5:10)*

Second, the hostility between one another. We see division everywhere: anger, hatred, political and cultural hostility. But Jesus shed His blood to create one new people united in Him. *"For He Himself is our peace... and has destroyed the dividing wall of hostility." (Ephesians 2:14)*

Third, the hostility within ourselves—the battle between flesh and spirit, guilt and grace, shame and identity. The enemy uses condemnation to divide us within, but the blood of Jesus speaks peace over our hearts and reminds us of who we are in Christ. *"There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." (Romans 8:1)*

Part two of my Sermon

CS. Lewis *Mere Christianity* p120, Kent p1) - "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that **I was made for another world**. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing."

Near the end of King David's reign, before the temple was built, during Solomon's reign, David and the people were giving offerings and preparing materials for the future temple. David through prayer makes a statement about all that was given and getting ready to be built.

(Chronicles 29:14-15) ¹⁴ "But who am I and who are my people that we should be able to offer as generously as this? For all things come from You, and from Your hand we have given You.

¹⁵ For we are ***sojourners before You, and tenants***, as all our fathers were; our days on the earth are like a shadow, and there is no hope.

Kent asks this question in the book. “Why at the culmination of the people’s generosity to give gifts to bring about the building of the Temple in Jerusalem for God does David speak of the people being ***sojourners, foreigners, strangers*** here on earth?”

Seems at first glance, David is releasing all the air out of the momentous event in the life of the nation of Israel?

Why is it important for David to remind them that they are just passing through no matter how great this day is?

Kent (p74) says, that if we are not reminded of this truth that this earth is not our home “*our vision becomes shortsighted. We live for the here and now and we become less effective for the kingdom.... We keep trying to use our resources to make this place home. (And) it (will) keeps leaving us empty.*”

David is saying “No matter how awesome it is that God has provided all the resources of the building of the temple for God, don’t live like this is going to bring us life and fill up our souls.”

In Acts 5, Ananias and Sapphira sin was not that they kept some money back, but that they wanted the appearance of radical devotion; of living lives of faith. **They were after the reputation more than obedience to God. They were more focused on protecting how others perceived them than being honest with God.**

Much like in the Book of Acts, things are happening during the reign of King David, and the people are overflowing with generosity. But David is reminding them not to think like what they are building is going to make them feel full.

No matter how great this is, we are still a people of faith that will never feel like we have arrived. Don’t put on any airs, let’s remember the humble beginnings we came from and that if it wasn’t for God we would still be wandering as nomads in the desert.

By contrast to these stories there is one more story I want to take us to this morning, and it comes for the book of Jeremiah. In Chapter 32, God told Jeremiah the prophet not to sell a field, but instead to buy a field from his hometown in Anathoth.

9 “I bought the field which was at Anathoth from Hanameel my uncle’s son, and I weighed out the silver for him, seventeen shekels of silver.

What is strange about this story, and unlike the previous stories, things are not going well. The collapse of the united kingdoms of Israel and Judah had happened after much warning by the prophets. In 722 Israel was sacked by the Assyrians and then in 586 BCE the Babylonians and King Nebuchadnezzar invaded and conquered Judah.

Jeremiah was imprisoned by the Babylonians and from a worldly perspective, buying property at that moment was quite ridiculous. It would be like someone asking us to buy an acre plot of land on Mars right now. An absolute waste of money.... Right?

Yet, Jeremiah by faith obeys God and buys the land the invading armies are camping out on, because God told him to do it. God would use it as a prophetic sign that one day, as bad as it is right now, restoration would come again to the people of Israel.

15 'For thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, "Houses and fields and vineyards will again be bought in this land. ' "

17 'Ah Lord God! Behold, You have made the heavens and the earth by Your great power and by Your outstretched arm! Nothing is too difficult for You,

Jeremiah's purchase was not about looking good or doing something people would think would be amazing. Quite the opposite. It was quite dumb and looked like a waste of money, but it was an act of costly faith. Kind of like Mary pouring the alabaster Jar of perfume out on Jesus' feet. (John 12:3) So crazy that the disciples are in disbelief.

Ananias and Sapphira used their money to create what they had hoped would be seen as an act of great faith; it was only a mirage. Jeremiah used money to demonstrate actual faith and was obedient to God. King David reminded the people to live by faith and not think too highly of what is being done.

Ananias and Sapphira wanted to be seen as trusting God; while Jeremiah trusted God when it made no sense at all from any earthly perspective.

It's so easy to be like A & S and hold on to control while pretending to live by faith. But it won't work.

When things are falling apart, our hope is tested and our faith either becomes resilient or we fall back to our own devices and plans to make things work on our own. Jeremiah, the prophet lived in faith and hope of better days.

GK. Chesterton in his book *Heretics*: **"Hope means hoping when things are hopeless, or it is no virtue at all . . . As long as matters are really hopeful, hope is mere flattery or platitude; it is only when everything is hopeless that hope begins to be a strength."**

Another way to say it with the metaphor of thirst in mind... **Hope is not tested when the wells of life still seem full. Hope begins when the soul is thirsty, every earthly well has run dry, and yet we still believe Christ is living water and we will drink of it one day.**

We can act religious all day long hiding behind acts of generosity that cost us nothing and we feel pretty good about ourselves; but it's in the places where things are hard, when life is not what I had hoped for, that faith, hope and love have an opportunity to get rooted in the life of the person who is fully surrendered to God. I believe it is in those times that these **virtues are worship unto God** and we find water.

(A Story of God's provision)

This last year I took a job (I believe He called me to it!) while I continued to give myself to starting this church. In no way did either of these jobs fill my buckets. Yet we were hopeful that God would continue to prove Himself faithful to provide for us when we needed Him to be. Over and over again we seen Him give us that living water when we needed it and sometimes even before we were aware we needed it. Last week I shared about a hot water heater breaking at our house two weeks ago but I

didn't share the back story. I was given a bonus by my part time job on the morning of the afternoon when my son came into my room and told me that we had a problem in the house. I diagnosed the problem and through much frustration I ripped up some flooring and found the problem. The water heater. Guess how much it costs to get the heater fixed? The amount of the bonus check. **God was filling the thirst before we knew we had a need of it.**

We walk by faith and not by sight. We live thirsty, ready and expectant and hopeful for God to meet the thirst in His way and in His time.

This experience and this testimony was an appetizer for the main course which is coming someday.

It's something to remember and give thanks to God for. So instead of living for everything to work out right, I put life's pleasures and hardships in order. I stop demanding the things in this life to fill my cup. The next vacation becomes an opportunity to enjoy the fruit of my labor, but I go into it knowing it won't fill me up.

I can enjoy the journey knowing that God has giving me pleasures along the way as well as hardships. Both are leading me toward home. And home, which is heaven, is the place where all my hopes will be fulfilled. All my thirsts for this life will be quenched. David hoped for the day we would be full in the presence of God, Jeremiah was hopeful for the day when God's people will be restored and all will be made right, and we too stand in a great line of witnesses who lived by faith never seeing all that God is going to do. Jeremiah purchased land occupied by a foreign army knowing His God would redeem.

When we learn to do this, we can more easily appreciate the great times and endure the rough patches of life.

We can love when people love us in return, and we can love those who never reciprocate our love.

We can give of our time, talent and treasure when we get no gratitude or nothing in return, and we can give when those that receive are incredibly grateful.

We can worship God when we don't feel blessed and loved as His child, and we can worship Him when we feel totally loved and accepted and blessed by Him.

Augustine of Hippo famously said in his writing *Confessions*, **"Our hearts are restless until they rest in You."**

When are we going to Rest in Christ? (Momentarily we will have a "foretaste of glory divine")

"In Glory we will fully taste His Glory" and it will fill us; Until then we savor the appetizers He sets before us in our lives and rest in His provision for our future. We live by faith, hope and love as strangers and foreigners in this land, awaiting a better day which is guaranteed to come!