

“Decluttering our Hearts”

Scripture: Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 6:31-34; Psalm 51:10-12

Graphics: clutter, piles, heart, soul, mind, body

Big Truth: In order to be disciples in the ways that God calls us, we are commanded to love God with our all our hearts, souls, minds, and strength and to love our neighbors as ourselves. Sometimes our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies get cluttered and it blocks our ability to see and hear God and to serve God in our areas of giftedness. When we spend time decluttering our lives, at the beginning of the new year, we open the way for us to love God and our neighbors more, as Jesus said.

Focus Phrase: Removing the emotional clutter from my heart allows me to restore the joy of my salvation.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. Are you a hoarder? Now, I don't really want you to answer that question here in worship. But it's a valid question.
- C. If you've ever watched the TV show Hoarders, you know how much of a problem hoarding can be in people's lives. As someone who may just border on the very edge of OCD, I can't watch that show. There's just too much clutter in the lives of the people who hoard things to meet some underlying need for security or to address a scarcity mentality or something along those lines, according to psychologists.
- D. Now, we're all human and we all have clutter in our lives, in some areas.
- E. This morning, I've done myself a favor as we begin this New Year and brought all of MY clutter to the stage so that it's no longer in my office or house. Your'e welcome! (describe the things in the pile)
- F. As you can see, it's a very random and extremely messy pile of stuff that has accumulated in my life over many years. I suspect that each one of us, if given some time and motivation, could bring a similar pile to church and place it here on the stage for all to see. Now, PLEASE don't DO that, but maybe you can begin to think about your own clutter right now.
- G. I searched for a good definition of clutter and here's one I found: ***A collection of things lying about in an untidy mess.***
- H. Then I searched a little more and found one that I like even better: ***An excess of unnecessary or unloved belongings that accumulate into an overwhelming mess.***
- I. Now, you might say that everything you have is super important and you can't get rid of any of it because someday you might need it and when you do you'll have it, even though you haven't used it in many years. Later on, I'll provide

the phone number for the producer of Hoarders and maybe you have a future in show biz!

- J. Seriously, though, we have a LOT of stuff in our lives. Much of it is physical stuff. Lots of it is useful and it's cherished things. Yet, we tend to keep accumulating stuff in our houses or apartments or offices that really is just clutter.
- K. This New Years sermon series is NOT a self-help series about making our houses more Zen by following some Feng Shue Marie Cando process of talking to our clothes and asking if they bring joy or not. There's nothing wrong with that, but we're going to get some **solid theological guidance** on addressing the clutter in four areas: our hearts, souls, minds, and bodies.
- L. This four-week series is called Decluttering our Lives. At the beginning of 2024, it may be helpful for you to declutter your house and office. But, there are eternal, spiritual impacts when we spend time:
 - i. decluttering our hearts from emotional clutter
 - ii. our souls from devotional clutter
 - iii. our minds from informational clutter
 - iv. and our bodies from nutritional clutter.
- M. And just like it's important to declutter our lives of physical stuff in order for our house and offices to be more focused and efficient, there are plenty of commands and evidence in the Bible that invites us to clear our lives of spiritual clutter.
- N. The impact of decluttering our spiritual lives is that we can and will be able to offer our full selves to loving God and loving our neighbors for God's glory.
- O. To get some foundation for this series, turn with me to the gospel of Mark, chapter 12, starting in verse 28. This may be a familiar passage of scripture to you, but let's review this and if this is the first time you've heard this, be ready to have it blow your mind.

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 12:28-34

- i. Throughout church history, this teaching from Jesus is called the Greatest Commandment. This Commandment covers over every other commandment ever given.
 - a. If we truly love God, then it's impossible to break the other commandments that say we should never have idols or take the Lord's name in vain.

- b. If we truly love our neighbors, we would never speak harshly of or to them, or murder them, if we're going back to the 10 Commandments. We would always help, always forgive, and always give mercy.
- ii. Yet, the clutter in our spiritual lives prevents us from loving God with our whole heart, whole soul, whole mind, and whole strength...or loving our neighbors as we love ourselves.
- iii. Why? Because when there's stuff cluttering our lives, it becomes a barrier for you and me to open a pathways to God and others. We trip over the stuff in our lives...it blocks our path...and we get distracted. Spiritual clutter turns us inward as we hold onto damaged emotions, have all kinds of distractions, live in negative thoughts, and we fail to care for our bodies, which are a temple of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. Jesus called his disciples to love God and love their neighbors as fully as they could. And in order to love God and love their neighbors, they were called to clear out those things in them that prevented them from doing that.
- v. And as Jesus' disciples, you and I are called to do the same thing! And, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit we CAN!
- vi. In fact Jesus wants us to simplify our lives in order to give more and more devotion and worship and attention to God.
- vii. In Matthew 6:31-33, Jesus gave us words of encouragement which I think are helpful at the beginning of a new year. He said, "Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What will we eat?' or 'What will we drink?' or 'What will we wear?' For it is the gentiles who seek all these things, and indeed your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."
- viii. When we declutter our spiritual lives, we can grow in our seeking first the Kingdom of God and right relationship with God, every day...free to love God and love our neighbors.

B. This morning, we'll start with **decluttering our hearts.**

- i. In your notes, write this down: **Removing the emotional clutter from my heart allows me to restore the joy of my salvation.**
- ii. There are many places throughout the bible that talk about the heart. In the Jewish culture, the heart was the place where emotion was housed.
- iii. But more than that, throughout scripture, we get the distinct sense that what you say, or think, or do, originates with what's in your heart. When the heart is filled with fear, resentment, anger, or is broken by life's circumstances, what comes out of our mouths or into our thoughts is negative and even toxic.

- a. Proverbs 4:23 says, “Keep your heart with all vigilance, for from it flow the springs of life.”
- b. Proverbs 21:2 says this, “All deeds are right in the sight of the doer, but the Lord weighs the heart.”
- c. Or this one from Jesus, which is very convicting, Mark 7:20-23, “And he said, “It is what comes out of a person that defiles. For it is from within, from the human heart, that evil intentions come: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, debauchery, envy, slander, pride, folly. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person.”
- iv. When all that clutter is found in the heart, it not only blocks our ability to connect with God through the Spirit, but it comes out into our lives and blocks our ability to love others in the ways God loves them.
- v. Proverbs 15:13-15 gives us some hope!
 - a. A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance,
but by sorrow of heart the spirit is broken.
The mind of one who has understanding seeks knowledge,
but the mouths of fools feed on folly.
All the days of the poor are hard,
but a cheerful heart has a continual feast.
 - b. (pile) When our hearts are filled with spiritual junk like this pile of unwanted and unloved items, then not only does it prevent us from being emotionally healthy, but it also creates A LOT of static. That static prevents us from connecting with God through prayer, worship, passion for service, love for God and others.
 - c. If we stop and listen, we hear God’s still small voice amongst the clutter, saying, “I’m right here. Let’s begin to remove that, and that, and this.” That starts a process of restoring a pathway in our hearts that are filled with joy knowing that we’re connecting with God.
 - d. And when we begin to restore connections to God, then we also begin to restore connections with those around us who are connected to God.
 - e. Loving God becomes a passionate desire. Loving others becomes a passionate desire. And you and I start living into the joy of the salvation that God has so graciously given us through Jesus Christ!
 - f. Removing the emotional clutter from my heart allows me to restore the joy of my salvation...a cheerful heart that is having a continual feast, as Proverbs 15:15 said.

3. Application

- A. The last thing any of us wants is to be as a hoarder of unwanted, unnecessary, and damaging emotional junk in a heart that was created by a loving and gracious God who desires the worship, devotion, and service that comes from a heart set free for joyful obedience.
- B. Becky did such an incredible job last week inviting us to have that right relationship, faith, and the humility that moves us to obedience to God.
- C. Clearing out the clutter in our hearts is not simply a pathway to connecting more with a loving God. We are commanded to do so and would be disobedient if we know that we have emotional clutter in our hearts and did nothing about it.
- D. Think with me about what clutter you might be hoarding in your heart.
 - i. Do you have resentment from a past hurt or betrayal?
 - ii. Are you holding onto anger at someone or something?
 - iii. Are there some broken relationships that seem too hard to reconcile?
 - iv. Do you have fear or anxiety?
 - v. Is it that you're too busy to spend time with your own emotions?
- E. Again, this is not psycho-babble. This is an invitation to become a more effective disciple of Jesus Christ by asking God to give you a cleaner heart - a clean heart.
- F. God wants so much to connect with you. Isn't it an incredible thing that the God of the Universe wants to connect with YOU? The clutter in the way is not preventing God from doing anything, but it IS preventing you from letting God's grace and forgiveness and mercy to flow into your heart...and then out of your heart into the world.
- G. So, how do you and I begin to declutter our hearts?
- H. First, **Pray for a clean heart!** Pray Psalm 51:10-12 every day, maybe multiple times per day.
 - i. Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.
 - ii. In the darkest times in my life, this prayer has been a lifeline to communicate with God...to declutter what was and is a pile of junk in my heart. If I don't pray for that, then what I'm saying to God is that I like the way things are - clutter and all - and what God desires is not what I desire.
 - iii. That's certainly NOT where God wants me to be...or you.

- iv. Create in me a clean heart, O God...
- I. Then, when you begin to allow God to move some things aside and remove the junk, **Let your heart connect with God's heart.**
 - i. Decluttering is hard, no matter if it's physical stuff in our houses or emotional junk in our hearts. Decluttering takes intentional sacrifice of baggage that we've carried around with us...maybe that even gives us some level of comfort.
 - ii. Connecting with God's heart in a bigger way requires clearing away the clutter so that we can do things like:
 - a. Worship with passion and gladness, despite how you feel.
 - b. Pray without ceasing for God to keep moving those hurts and hang-ups aside in your heart so that what comes OUT of you is from God - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5).
 - c. Serve with gladness and humility, as we obey the voice of God in the deepest parts of our hearts.
 - iii. When your heart is more and more connected with God's heart, then your whole life is transformed into the image of Jesus.
 - iv. Let your heart connect with God's heart.

4. Conclusion

- A. Before we come to the table, hear this: **God desires for the world to see the impact of a decluttered heart.**
- B. Jesus did the hard work of decluttering His heart when he was wrestling with the sacrifice He'd have to make in order to fulfill God's plan for the world, through death on the cross.
- C. That sacrifice is what we celebrate today. That may seem like a strange way to say that - celebrate. But that's what it is! This is one important way for us, as followers of Jesus, to begin to declutter our hearts. To come to this table, know that you've been forgiven and set free for joyful obedience, and to give thanks and praise to Jesus, who paid it all for you.
- D. As you rise from this table, you are commanded to go and love God and love your neighbors with everything you've got. If you're burdened with clutter today, leave it at this table. If your heart is a mess, come here to let the Holy Spirit begin to point to those things that need to go first...and then let Jesus take those.
- E. Removing the emotional clutter from my heart allows me to restore the joy of my salvation. Come allow Jesus to restore the joy of your salvation today... here...now. Let's Pray... PRAY!