

“Decluttering our Souls”

Scripture: Mark 12:28-34; Mark 8:31-38

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: Clearing out the devotional clutter in my soul allows God to be my only focus.

1. Introduction

- A. **PRAY! (Jesus, You are Lord...)**
- B. Last week, we started this sermon series called **Decluttering our Lives**. Our homes and offices tend to collect lots of clutter like this pile. When that happens, it makes it harder to get around our physical spaces.
- C. Our spiritual lives, though, can also be cluttered. Our hearts have emotional clutter. Our souls have devotional clutter. Our minds have informational clutter. And our bodies have nutritional clutter.
- D. The first message, from last week, was Decluttering our Hearts. (You can go back and watch that to catch up, if you weren't here). To declutter our hearts from the damaging and negative emotions in our lives, we pray for God to give us clean hearts. Pray Psalm 51:10-12 often. Then, allow God's heart to connect to our hearts and live into the joy of his salvation through Christ.
- E. This week, we'll look at the second part of the Greatest Commandment, our **souls**. Jesus said the Greatest commandment was to love God with all our hearts, with all our souls, with all our minds, and with all our strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves.
- F. So, if Jesus is asking us to love God with all our soul, we have to first find out what a soul is and how it works. Then, we have to identify what clutters our souls, in order to ask God to declutter our souls, just like we did for our hearts.
- G. This message will have some more challenging theological ideas, when it comes to our souls. So, get your best Greek listening on and let's dive in...
- H. Open your bibles to Mark 8, starting in verse 31.
- I. In Mark 8, Jesus was teaching the disciples one day about the fact that he would have to suffer and die as the Messiah in order to fulfill the salvation plan the Father had for the world.
- J. Well, as you can imagine, that didn't sit well with the disciples, especially Peter, who decided it was time to challenge Jesus a little. See, Peter was worried about Jesus' physical presence with them, and possibly didn't like the

prospect of his friend and Lord suffering. That caused him to not fully see that Jesus was more than flesh and blood.

- K. Decluttering our souls requires that we move out of the way that which is physical or worldly so that it is under, or less than, that which is spiritual and eternal.
- L. In your notes, write this down: **Clearing out the devotional clutter in my soul allows God to be my only focus.**
- M. Let's read...

2. Scripture

A. READ Mark 8:31-38

- B. Before we get to the text, let's talk about our **souls**. A soul is a theological concept that's not super clear in scripture, but we can find some basis for our theological doctrine of the soul.
 - i. First, and most importantly, your soul was created by God, not by you or your parents.
 - ii. Second, your soul IS you, but it is not YOURS. It's God's. He made it. And it's distinct from but spiritually connected to your body.
 - iii. George MacDonald said this, "You don't have a soul. You are a soul. You have a body." As much as you may think that you are what and who is represented by your body, you are not your body. You ARE a soul. You have a body. Your body will someday die. Your soul will not.
 - iv. The essence of who you know yourself to be is what your soul is.
 - v. Because God created your soul and it is His, He wants to be connected to it in the same way that an artist connects with a painting or sculpture, knowing everything about it at a deeper level.
 - vi. So, logically, if there are things in your life - in your essence - that are more important than God, then your soul is conflicted, since your soul was created for one purpose: to glorify God.
 - vii. Said another way: soul clutter is anything that does not fulfill your soul's purpose to give glory to God.
 - viii. Soul clutter blocks the single devotion your soul was made to have for God.
 - ix. The question we have to ask ourselves is: **what do I love more than God?** The answer to that question will identify the idols in your life that become soul clutter.
- C. When Jesus rebuked Peter that day described in our text, and then taught the disciples and crowds about discipleship, what he was really talking about was soul clutter...the thing that Peter loved more than God's plan.

- D. In the first part of this passage, when Jesus told them he was going to suffer and die, and then Peter rebuked him, Peter was reacting to the very human emotion that comes when someone we love is dying. There was grief - denial, anger, bargaining, and other emotions. Peter was not thinking eternally or spiritually, but merely from a human standpoint.
- E. What that tells us about Peter is that he cared more about having Jesus WITH HIM than he cared about the fact that Jesus was trying to tell them how much God loved them and would sacrifice for them.
- F. Jesus ended the discussion with this harsh rebuttal, “Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things.” Peter’s soul was cluttered with worry about the human things related to Jesus’ physical well-being. Understandable, for sure. But, not what Jesus wanted.
- G. In the second part of our text today, Jesus spoke to crowds, with his disciples.
- i. Jesus said, “If you want to be my follower, you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me.” Denying yourself is another way of saying that you must set your essence - your soul - on divine things and not human things, like Jesus did with Peter.
 - ii. Then Jesus talked about this idea of LIFE.
 - a. Now, our Greek lesson for today is this: the Greek word that Mark records from Jesus here for LIFE is **psuché**. **ψυχή** In the Greek, it means life, breath, or soul.
 - b. In that first century culture, your psuché was who you were and who God created you to be. It’s not very precise, but your soul is who God created you to be, connected to Him, fully aware of who you are to God.
 - c. This passage used this word psuché multiple times. In this translation, the English word is *life*, although it’s more than just physical life.
 - d. Going back to Jesus’ rebuke of Peter, Jesus was concerned that Peter was too focused on human things...and what was happening now.
 - e. As disciples, Jesus gives us the same caution. Don’t be so concerned about your human body, or the experiences of this temporal existence, that you neglect the real and spiritual existence of your soul...which is eternal. Did I mention that your soul is eternal? Created by God to last forever and ever?
 - f. So, Jesus said, if your soul is eternal and your body is temporal (at least in its current form) then more care should be taken for the well-being of your soul than your body.
 - g. Now, in a couple weeks, we’re going to talk about our bodies. They’re NOT insignificant or unimportant. They’re VERY important. However, Jesus told his disciples and the crowds that they are not to be so

concerned about the temporal life here - and the things IN this world - that they forfeit their psuché - their life...their eternal souls.

- iii. The name of the things of this world that take our attention away from God and the eternal things of God - like some of the things on this pile do in our temporal lives - is **IDOLS**.
 - a. An idol is anything in this life that we love more than we love God.
 - b. Now, you may say, “Pastor Steve, there’s nothing I love more than I love God!” Great! But, a careful look at your calendar, or checkbook (do people have checkbooks anymore?), or phone or internet history might give you some clues about what things might fall into the category of idols, or potential idols, in your life.
 - c. It’s those idols that have the very real potential to be or become the soul clutter that blocks your full devotion to God, said Jesus.
 - d. And, as we wrap up today’s passage, Jesus gave a very ominous caution. He said, “Those who are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.” Meaning, Jesus will be ashamed of those who are ashamed that their Lord and Savior died on a cross for their redemption. We are part of this adulterous and sinful generation, before Jesus returns.
 - e. As a church, we believe that Jesus’ sacrifice was the ultimate example of being fully devoted to God, with no soul clutter, no idols, and full focus on the Father alone. And God is inviting you to proclaim the same.
- H. Clearing out the devotional clutter in my soul allows God to be my only focus.
- I. Jesus cleared it all out as he submitted his life to be fully obedient to the Father and to the will of the Father for him and the world.

3. Application

- A. Let’s get some application today. In order begin the process of decluttering your soul, let’s go back to our question: What do I love in this life more than I love God?
- B. For me, this consistently shows up in my soul as my desire to complete my to-do list, get everything done, and do it well. There are days, honestly, that I get so focused on what I think I need to get done, that I completely forget the One who is calling me to do it. That’s my idol. I have some others that God is working on. What about you?
- C. I’m certainly not going to go around the room and ask you what your idol is, but you may be thinking of something right now that you are pretty sure is something you love more than God. Something to do with your calendar, your desire for someone’s approval, your money, your work, your sport, your hobby.

- D. That *thing* - those *things* - are the things that are cluttering your soul. And the things that clutter your soul are blocking your soul from having full devotion to God. Like the things on this pile, you and I lose sight of the simple connection that God wants us to have with him - to worship, to pray, to listen, and to respond.
- E. So, first step in the soul-decluttering process is to **identify your idols**.
- i. This takes intentional prayer and reflection, with the help of the Holy Spirit, and maybe some trusted people in your life.
 - ii. None of us like to have someone else point out our potential idols, but I sense that you already have a sense of those. The Holy Spirit is at work, even when we're not actively praying for that.
 - iii. Start with your calendar. or bank account, to identify things that are taking time or resources that God is asking you to use for Him - worship, service, giving, prayer, using your spiritual gifts.
 - iv. Make a list - a physical list - and then share that with someone you trust them completely. Use your list as a prayer guide.
- F. Then, and **let God begin to move those idols or potential idols aside**.
- i. It's not that you completely get rid of all those things, probably, unless they are rooted in sin and God wants to completely remove that idol. It's most likely that they need to take a backseat in your psuché, so that your focus is on God alone.
 - ii. I need my to-do list and calendar, especially in this season, to keep me on track. You and I will always have money and people in our lives. Hobbies and sports are wonderful.
 - iii. Yet are they cluttering your soul today? If so, they're the first things that God wants to move aside so that you can see Him more clearly.
 - iv. Make room in your soul for more worship, prayer, scripture reading, and serving as God calls.
- G. Then, **love God and love your neighbors** so that those idols don't start making their way back into your soul and cluttering you up.
- i. The best way to ensure that you keep idols out of your soul is to fill your soul with more of loving God and others.
 - ii. When your soul is filled with worship and prayer, then your idols don't stand a chance. Why? Because our God is a jealous God...and idols don't stand a chance in His presence. Idols are worldly and your soul is eternal. Those idols don't even belong there...and don't fit God's design for your psuché. Square peg, round hole.

4. Conclusion

- A. Your soul was made to glorify God. When there's devotional clutter, you're hindered in that.
- B. Yet, God keeps calling you name and asking you to declutter your soul - the soul he made and gave you.
- C. You probably wouldn't make a mess of a space that was given to you to live in if you knew you didn't own it and the owner was coming home soon.
- D. Jesus is coming back. At that moment, Jesus will spend time with you - not your physical body, but - with your soul...that eternal part of you that is the real connection with God.
- E. Are you - your psuché - your life, your soul - ready to stand before God and show him everything that's there?
- F. Let Him identify your soul clutter, allow Him to move it aside, and then love God and your neighbor to keep your focus on Him alone.
- G. Clearing out the devotional clutter in my soul allows God to be my only focus.
- H. As we close our worship, let's pray for more focus and less clutter.
- I. And then, we can give thanks to God for loving us and saving our souls.
- J. Let's Pray... PRAY!