

Christ Fellowship 9/18/22

“Consecrate Yourselves” – Joshua 3

Well, good morning and welcome to the new Christ Fellowship 2.0, Chico Edition! Let me ask you a question. The question is, “Why?” It’s my favorite question of all. But specifically, why do you think God moved us from Lake Bridgeport to Chico? I believe it is because there are people in and around Chico that need this church. There are the poor, the addicted and the incarcerated around here that need somebody to minister to them. There are other churches around here but there are lots of people that don’t go to any of them and they need our kind of no-rules, laid-back, but Jesus-focused worship and they need our kind of ministry.

Okay, I have another question. Are you ready to minister to them? Are you ready to do whatever it takes to lead the people of Chico to have a life-changing relationship with the Lord? Really? Because I guarantee you some of you are thinking, *“Uh, I came here to be ministered to. I came here to get fed, not do work. I’m no minister.”* And I understand that and we are here for you. We want to minister to you and feed you the meat of the Gospel.

But...technically, if you are a disciple of Jesus then you are a minister. And Jesus said that, as we go, we should be making more disciples. (Matt. 28:19) Now, don’t raise your hand and don’t elbow your spouse but how’s that going for you so far this year? How many of you are pleased with yourself in 2022? You lived a pure and holy life. You weren’t sinless, necessarily, but you feel like you are closer to God today than you were last year? How many of you saw God answer your prayers this year like never before?

Maybe you feel like Satan took more away from you than God gave you. Maybe you feel like you got hammered by the devil this year and you hope 2023 will be better. I know a lot of you probably feel that way. This year has been a year of great loss for lots of us. So, what are you going to do about it? Is there something you need to do more or less of? Are there changes you need to make in your life? Are you living the full and abundant life Jesus said we could have in **John 10:10**? If not, why not and then the question is, how bad do you want it?

The new year is a big time for making resolutions. People resolve to lose weight, save money, be better people in some way and most of the time it lasts a few months and then we say, *“Well, maybe next year.”* I’ve tried real hard for a long time to eat better. My diet is awful. I know it and I haven’t been eating right lately at all. But I’ve tried to stop eating when I feel satisfied, not wait until I’m full and miserable. I’ve also tried to stop snacking between meals and to eat more vegetables but you know how that is for me.

I seriously have been eating less and I think I’ve lost a couple of pounds this year but do you know how bad I want to be slim? This bad (hands on fat belly). This is how bad I really want

it. I can dress in vertical stripes and wear dark colors and suck my stomach in all I want but at the end of the day and at the end of the year, this proves how bad I want it.

That's a shame because I know being overweight is not healthy and will ultimately take years off of my life but do you know what is worse than being out of shape physically? Being out of shape spiritually is way worse because the consequences are eternal and don't just affect you but everyone around you. Paul told Timothy in **1 Timothy 4**, *"For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."*

So, the question is, how bad do you want to be in good spiritual shape? Do you want it bad enough for yourself? Do you want it bad enough for the people of Chico? Are you in better shape spiritually than you were last year? Are you closer to God? Have you seen your prayers answered? Have you memorized helpful scripture verses? Have you brought anybody else to Christ this year? Would you call yourself a disciple – one who learns from Jesus and then tells others what you have learned? If not, then how are we going to change Chico, much less the world? How can we as a church say we will do whatever it takes to lead people to have a life-changing relationship with Jesus if we are not growing closer to God at least every year?

Well, the good news is that it's not too late. And I promise not to give you any "win one for the Gipper" motivational speeches, nor will I think any less of you if you fail. But I will stand here with scripture in hand to tell you, not what I think you should do or what is best for you, but what God commands and the first thing we must do to change ourselves and Chico spiritually, according to the Word of God, is to consecrate ourselves.

If that sounds familiar to some of y'all that have been around a while, it should. I gave this same encouragement from the same passage of scripture the first Sunday after we moved into the building in Lake Bridgeport 10 years ago. No, it's not the same exact message. In fact, as I have studied this lately, things were revealed to me that have not been before like only the Spirit of God can do through the scriptures.

Look at **Joshua chapter 3**, please. We are going to take a break this week from our study of the book of 1 Corinthians to go back to the Old Testament book of Joshua and see that we are in a similar situation to what the Israelites were in. They are about to go into the Promised Land but they are going to have to fight for it every step of the way and they are still fighting to stay there even today. Their first official battle was in Jericho on the other side of the Jordan River but they first had to cross the flooded Jordan. So, they had to prepare themselves so God could use them in the place to which He brought them.

For today, I only want to read one verse. **Joshua 3:5** says, "Joshua told the people, "Consecrate yourselves, for tomorrow the LORD will do amazing things among you." Ten years

ago, we read this verse and, more importantly, we did just what Joshua told the Israelites to do. We consecrated ourselves in preparation for what God would do in us and through us. December 2nd will be our tenth anniversary as Christ Fellowship and I want you to think about some of the things God has done through our church.

Think about some of the stories. Think about the people that have come to know Jesus in the past 10 years. Think about packing 420 shoeboxes for Operation Christmas Child last year. Think about ministering to the RV Park and through our food pantry. We've had weddings and funerals and parties. We have cried – a lot – some happy tears and some sad. But think of all the laughter that has gone on in our church as well. Think about how many times two convicted felons from days gone by have collected the offering on Sunday mornings for us.

Speaking of felons, I can think of at least two guys I met in jail that have since gotten out, got married in our church and still today bring their blended families to church with them. Folks, those are some of the amazing kinds of things God will do through a church that consecrates itself.

Now, it would be real easy to just coast from now on, telling about what God has done in the past; how he brought us “angels unaware” in old vans, protected us from crazy women with cell phones and got us over the flooded Jordan River - which for us was Hwy 380 - twice (and we have the pebbles on the pulpit to remember it by).

It would be easy, in ten more years, to tell those same stories and laugh at them and praise God for them and we will but I want new stories; not just so we can sit around and talk about them and laugh but, if you think about it, every one of those stories is testimony to how God provided for us and protected us from the evil one. We are in a battle - every one of us, whether you want to be or not – and it is time we put on our armor, faced the enemy, and allowed God to fight the battle through us but to do so means we MUST consecrate ourselves.

No, Joshua was not talking to us specifically when he gave his command to the Israelites to consecrate themselves, but scripture is full of similar commands that we can and should take. My concordance tells me the word is used 172 times in the Bible about things or people that should be set apart for God's work. The word “*holy*” and “*consecrated*” are used almost interchangeably all through scripture and we know that “*holy*” means to be set apart, different, sanctified, purified or hallowed.

But as I studied the word “consecrate” a little further I found that it differed from “holy” in that it also means to be full or filled up and running over. Look at **Joshua 3:15**. It says the Jordan was at flood stage during the harvest. The original word used for flood stage is the word “qadash” (kaw-dash). Qadash is the word from which we get “consecrate”. Same word. That's fascinating to me.

I hear people sometimes complain about how bad their lives are. Sometimes they are good Christian people and they are not exaggerating about how bad they have it. Maybe they struggle physically or financially or spiritually or any other way. Sometimes they struggle with how God would allow them to go through such difficulties and I don't know the answer to that most of the time. We know that the rain falls on the just and the unjust as it says in **Matthew 5**.

But sometimes, because we are not completely sold out to God and His plan and His will for our lives, we allow ourselves to go unprotected. In **Isaiah 59:2** it says, *"But your iniquities (your sins) have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."* Our sin, even the small and so-called insignificant sins put a barrier between us and God and allow Satan to attack us.

We have studied **Ephesians 6** in depth in the past and we know what armor we have available to us to protect us from the devil but he is way stronger than we are and without God's mighty right hand to protect us, we don't stand a chance. We have to put on that armor and stand behind God – completely abiding in Him and behind Him, filled with Him until He starts to overflow in our lives.

Ninety percent of Him isn't going to cut it. If we give 90% of ourselves to God, we can expect to have unnecessary problems. Don't expect God to bless your life if you are not completely sold out to Him. I'm always surprised at how merciful God is to us when we are not living completely for Him. But we can't expect the storehouses of Heaven to open up onto our lives when there are places in our lives where Jesus is not Lord.

To consecrate ourselves, we have to get every aspect of our lives right with Him. We have to be right with God in our prayer life, our Bible study, our finances, our sex lives, the music we listen to, the shows we watch on TV and the web sites we click on. Where we go, what we read, what we put in our mouths and what comes out of our mouths all needs to be radically different than the world and filled up and overflowing (qadash) with the things of God.

Now, I know that sounds like a bunch of rules and a bunch of "don't do this" and "don't do that" and don't have any fun and act like good old Christian fogies who don't approve of smiling and only enjoy a few rounds of the "Quiet Game" or Bible trivia for entertainment. Because that's what we do at this church, right? That's funny!

We say all the time that we don't have any rules around here and do you know why? Do you know that Jesus didn't have a lot of rules? In fact, He was a rule-breaker! Do you know what Jesus' rules were? Love God and love your neighbor. That's pretty much it. That's what He said in **Matthew 22**. When you truly love God and truly love your neighbor, you will consecrate

yourself. You will want more and more God and less and less of this world until pretty soon, you are overflowing (qadash) with God's love.

But, do you know what? You don't have to do all of this. You don't really have to consecrate yourself or love your neighbor or any of that. You really don't. You don't have to fight in the battle against the evil one. You don't have to study or pray or any of that.

You just keep doing what you are doing but you will continue to get the results you have gotten. You will continue to lose out on God's protection but don't worry, He's very gracious and merciful and you **probably** won't die tomorrow. The problem is, you will continue to live without living a full and abundant life. You will continue to live with the heartaches and unnecessary pains that God's mighty right hand could save you from. You will continue to live and Chico and the rest of the world will still die in their sins and go to Hell. And you'll still be in the battle. You just don't stand a chance at winning.

Let's pray right now as the music plays. I usually invite you to come to the front if you want but for a few minutes, I just want you to ask God what areas of your life you need to turn over to Him today. Ask Him, as David did, to search you and try you and to reveal any wicked way in you. Then, if you want to, you can come down and I would love to pray with you. Maybe you need to rededicate your life to Him. Maybe you want to join this church. Maybe you need to ask God to help you consecrate yourself, for your sake and for the sake of our church.

Maybe you don't have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus today. All you have to do is believe that Jesus died for your sins, ask Him to forgive your sins and then allow God to change you and start to consecrate you and make you more like Him as He fills you up with Himself. Do that right now.

Invitation

One last thing really quick. I referenced these pebbles earlier and most of you know the story behind them. In the next chapter of Joshua, chapter 4, it tells how, after the Israelites crossed the Jordan River on dry ground, God had them take some stones from the riverbed. Let me read **Joshua 4:5-7** where Joshua tells the people what God has said to do.

Each of you is to take a stone on his shoulder, according to the number of the tribes of Israelites, to serve as a sign among you. In the future, when your children ask you, "What do these stones mean?" tell them that the flow of the Jordan was cut off before the ark of the covenant of the Lord. When it crossed the Jordan, the waters of the Jordan were cut off. These stones are to be a memorial to the people of Israel forever.

So, the Israelites stacked up some rocks just to remind themselves that God is always faithful. He is always protecting and providing for His people. So, that is what these little rocks in these cups represent to us.