

It's a Beautiful Life: Living In, Living Out

“Devoted”

10-23-15

Text: Jeremiah 2:1-13



Reflection questions... [please consider the teaching notes, first, as a basis of your reflections]

“If our idols are essentially the “work of our own hands”, what kind of gods are we making?”

“Who or what are you sacrificing to/for your idols? Your reputation, your character, your family, your integrity? What is it that you are trying frantically to preserve (hold onto)? Would others consider you pre-occupied with your pursuits? Would they say that your attachments are getting the best of you?”

“What are you afraid of? Is fear the appropriate response? How do you know? How is fear currently directing your decisions/pursuits? What if your fears come true?” (“What I always feared has happened to me. What I dreaded has come true.” Job 3:25-26)

“What are you trusting? What are you worried about? Might the two be somehow connected? What do you have? Who will you be when it's gone?”

“Which time-honored wells are we dipping in to find satisfaction? (John 4) Why are we still thirsty? Why do we keep coming back to that well? What is it that we hope to experience on our next visit?”

“What is the desire promising? What is the lie here? What happens if you finally get everything your heart desires and you're still not satisfied?”

Teaching Notes...

It's a “Far Side” cartoon, really.

Jeremiah knew that the only way to effectively comment on such absurdity is to offer a caricature exposing the life to which we have been called (and the people we have been called to be) and the futile attempts at experiencing this independent of God. People caught up in such deception are rarely able to see it for what it really is.

This may not “land” for us in the Pacific NW. Imagine a farmer “abandoning” (forsaking) such an uninterrupted, life-giving resource on his land and spending months, hacking away at the rock to dig a holding tank, in hopes of rain?! Only to find that, after all of the “sweat equity”, that the rock is cracked and can't hold the rainfall, anyway.

Our hearts were created 'sacred-space'; for singleness; devotion.

It was to be this presence that established our identity; that shaped our sense of value and worth; that determined for us ultimate reality. He was to be what mattered most to us. He was to be worshipped.

The issue is not that we “*don't*” worship (**glory**; delight in; cheer for), but that we worship the wrong things. We attach the wrong value (price tag... “assess”) to things which, in turn, causes us to order our lives (**righteousness**) around things which cannot carry the weight we assign them.

1 John 5:21 [interesting ending to a letter attempting to convince us of our identity in God and his love for us] “*Dear children, keep yourselves from idols* (NIV) [*keep away from anything that might take God's place in your hearts.*” NLT]

Because we are “image bearers” (reflectors), we become what we behold (pay attention; take notice). Whatever we find ourselves consistently “before”, shapes who we are becoming and we become almost synonymous with the object of our affection.

2 Corinthians 3:18

But we all, with unveiled face, beholding (contemplating) as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

The biblical story offers this posture as “idolatry”.

So, we're not melting down grandma's silver and dancin' around the image of some barnyard animal we have fashioned. We've chosen a much more sophisticated approach. In fact, if it were that overt, its ridiculousness would be manifest and we'd be more likely to call it out in one another as “unbecoming”.

We package it differently, but it's the same premise: attaching our hearts to something other than God. It's the inability to see in God, all of the goodness, all of the beauty, that our hearts could ever want.

Idols...

... **all displace God's love as the ultimate source of our deepest desires.** That's why God expressly says, “*No other gods...*” (Exodus 20); not because he is egocentric and insecure or that he feels threatened by the other gods, but because that's what's best for us; it's that for which we were created.

... **make trivial/hollow things into ultimate things.**

vs. 5: “*they worshipped worthless idols, only to become worthless themselves...*” They diminish God and, of necessity, diminishes us. We abandon the “artwork of God” we are (Ephesians 2) and settle for our own paint-by-our-own-numbers expression!

... **deteriorate our freedoms, then offer themselves back to us as the solutions** (i.e. more money, a different sexual partner, a stronger drink, etc.) [Proverbs 23:29-35] I have yet to meet anyone who visited that first porn site in order to purposefully become a sex addict.

... **never fail to fail.** *“Your wells leak!”* Solomon ate Waygu every day in his man cave and had a different woman for every night of the week and he still concluded, *“Vanity! All is vanity!”* (Ecclesiastes 12)

... **work of human hands.**

Habakkuk 2:18-19

“What have you gained by worshiping all your man-made idols? How foolish to trust in something made by your own hands! What fools you are to believe such lies.”

Our gods come from things we “treasure”.

“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Matthew 6:21

Life always orders itself around our hearts. Treasures are the things we attempt to obtain and preserve because of the significance we have attached to them. We always serve/sacrifice to our idols. Treasures always get the best of us (time, energy, resources, attention) and, eventually, we become identified by them.

Our gods come from the things we fear.

We fear future financial collapse, so we are consumed with anxiously managing our investments to mitigate the fear. We fear being alone, so we accommodate the certainty of life-less and love-less relationships because we're afraid that someone else will not come along.

Our gods come from the things that make us feel secure.

The paradox is that the things that make us feel secure have a tendency to enslave us and the things that really free us feel too risky (e.g. we use the term “financial security”, but our pre-occupation with security leads to worry and anxiety... and less freedom.

“So, if the gods are the making of our own hands, are they really something or are they nothing?”

The gods are nothing, in relation to God, but something in relation to their worshippers.

On the one hand, they are obviously empty and created things which are impotent, but they wield an enormous amount of power over us. **gods** have real influence in the lives of those who treat them like gods.

When will I know that I am ready to displace all of these other attachments so that I might love God and you more fully?

When I am ready to make the declaration found in Isaiah 44:20... *“What I have in my hand is a lie.”* It's the initiation of the process.

Response...

Know that God hates what sin does to you.

God's jealousy for his people is a validated and legitimate form of anger. It is precisely because God loves us and wills our good that he hates to watch us 'self-destruct'.

Know that if you're digging in the wrong spot, digging harder and faster is not the solution.

Know that the conflict against the idols in our lives can only be won as they are constantly exposed for the deception that they really are, and we are able to exchange the lie for the truth of God's goodness.

Know that, in most cases, it will be necessary for your idols to disappoint and fail you before you realize that they will not and cannot ultimately satisfy you.

In fact, if they don't see them as failing you, you will remain convinced that given enough time and energy and creativity, you can make it work (e.g. it's why we are addicted, it's why we're indebted, it's why we are stuck!)

Invite someone into your struggle and refuse to believe that you can live free of your idols through stubborn determination alone.

Keep bringing who you are, not who you want to be, to God and others. Risk believing that God is good and that he loves you without condition--- and that there are others who are sincerely trying love you, as well.

Surround yourself with people who can keep you pre-occupied with hope and not simply consumed with guilt and shame. Keep company with those who are "grace-full" and willing to be present with you in your struggle; those who won't permit you to use your failure as an excuse to abandon blessing--- to life God dreams for you.

Know that it's precisely at those times when we feel the least powerful and the most out-of-control, that freedom is most available; that we are best postured to embrace grace.

Ironically, we might actually be the most free when our attachments have left us so defeated and confused that we are powerless... therein lies our power!

“A healthy, emerging relationship with God will always result in a greater awareness of your own brokenness and need to be made right; which will, in turn, develop in you a lingering appreciation for God's love for you and a desire to give yourself to him completely, considering no other options.”

[Jeremiah 32:38-41]