

McCabe United Methodist Church

The Idols We Love: A Holy Tug-of-War

“Everybody Worships Something”

Sermon on Joshua 24:14-24 (03/04 & 03/05/17)

Pastor Mark Ehrmantraut

Prayer: Holy and Mighty God, may the words of my mouth, and the meditations on each of our hearts be acceptable in your sight. You alone are our Rock. You alone are our Redeemer. Amen.

Good Morning...

During this season of Lent we examine our lives. We think about the things that separate us from God and we think about the things that draw us closer to God. As we think about these things, did you know that scientists and missionaries have gone into uncharted territories? They've gone into the bush and they've met people who've been there their whole life, no contact with the outside world.

One thing they repeatedly discovered, it doesn't matter the conditions and it doesn't matter the group, we are all hard-wired to worship.

The question is NOT DO we worship.?

The question is WHO or WHAT we worship.

We can go all the way back to Adam and Eve. We can see that tug-of-war over who or what we worship.

Remember Adam and Eve. They were doing pretty good. They had everything they needed, but their eyes drifted...that tempting apple. Little did they know it would tear apart their soul.

Everybody worships something...

We worship God or we allow ourselves to worship something else.

Remember the people of Israel? They got scared when their leader Moses went up on the mountain. He was gone too long for their comfort.

They got nervous. They wanted to worship, but they didn't know what to do, so they made a golden calf. They felt better for the moment. They felt better until they realized what they were actually doing.

We don't think of ourselves as bowing before a golden calf...

And then:

- We lose a friendship over our politics...*or*
- We come unglued when a scratch shows up on our car...*or*
- We get exhausted building and protecting our reputations and our checkbooks and our cash cards.

Everybody worships something.

- It might be the God made known through Jesus Christ *or* it might be a sports team.
- We might worship social status or a sense of personal safety.
- We might worship the way our summer lawn looks, or the right house
- We might worship our phone or a fancy quilt.
- Our families are beautiful gifts from God, but if we start to worship our family instead of our family worshipping God, our family can become false gods.

Life gives us so many options.

Joshua, in this morning's Scripture, says: Pick one. Make a choice. Know who or what you worship.

Joshua 24:14-15: from the New Living Translation.

¹⁴ "So fear the Lord and serve him wholeheartedly. (Worship God). Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River. Put away the idols your ancestors worshiped in Egypt. (Put away the carved and metal statues, put away the rituals and the asherah poles. Put away anything that competes for priority in your life) and serve the Lord alone. (Worship God)..."

¹⁵ But if you refuse to serve the Lord, (If you think something else is more important than your relationship with God) then choose today whom you will serve. (There are plenty of options).

Everybody worships something.

Then Joshua continues in verse 15: ***But as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.***”

Friends, we’ve framed this Lenten series around Kyle Idelman’s work exploring some of the idols competing for our minds, our hearts, and our souls.¹

Let’s consider a couple questions he asks to aid us consider:

- Worship
- Potential idol(s)
- Who or what we worship.

We left room in the printed message if you want to make any notes or jot down any answers to these questions.

¹ “Gods at War: Defeating the Idols that Battle for Your Heart”, Kyle Idleman, [City on a Hill Studio, LLC, Louisville, KY, February 2013].

First question regards potential idols: **What disappoints you?**

Think about your greatest disappointment:

- Where does it come from?
- What's the source?
 - Is it your career?
 - Is it your marriage?
 - Maybe it's your kids or your parents?
- Maybe your greatest disappointment is that you just can't find acceptance or you don't get the recognition you think you deserve.

Then consider if your disappointments are:

- Proportionate *or*
- **Dis**proportionate to the situation.

If your disappointments are **dis**proportionate, could it be that we're trying to find hope, peace and/or satisfaction from something other than God?

The things that cause us our greatest disappointment have the potential to compete for our worship.

∞True hope ∞Lasting Peace ∞Contentment

These come from Christ Jesus alone.

Second question: **What do you complain about the most?**

If you asked someone close to you: “What do I complain about the most?”
What would they say?

- Your car or your cable service?
- Your friends or your family?
- Maybe you’re always complaining about work or politics?
- Maybe you complain about not getting the credit you deserve,
- Or there’s money. Jesus had something to say about money, didn’t he? Jesus wanted us to be fully aware that money can become an idol for us.

Maybe our eyes get taken off the Kingdom of God, and in the process, our eyes get too focused on the Kingdom of Man or Woman.

What do you complain about the most?

Then try to picture if it’s a priority through God’s eyes.

Because everybody worships something...

Third question: **Where do you make your financial sacrifices?**

Think about how and where you spend your money. Look at your checkbook, your bank statements, your credit card bills. For example:

- New clothes
- Classic cars
- Fantasy sports
- Fast food
- Hotel rooms
- Hobbies

Where do you spend your money?

Then, look objectively at your spending habits.

- What are you willing to sacrifice financially for?
- Are these God's priorities?

You've probably heard:

Where your treasure is, that's where your heart is too.²

***Where your money goes,
it sheds light on what is winning your heart.***

² Matthew 6:21

Fourth question: **What worries you?**

What wakes you up at night, or for that matter, what keeps you up. It has the potential to be an idol in your life.

If we toss and turn all night; if we can't sleep at night because we're too worried about something; **then consider if it's something that worries God too.**

The Apostle Paul wrote that we should pray about anything and everything.

We can thank God for everything He's done.

In doing so, we begin to experience God's peace, a peace that passes anything we can understand. A peace that can guard our hearts and our minds as we live in Christ Jesus.

Fifth question: **Where is your Sanctuary...???**

Where do you go when you're hurting?

Let's say it's been a tough week. You come home and where do you turn?

For example:

Where do you go for emotional rescue?

- Comfort food?
- The phone?
- Novels?
- Movies?
- Alcohol?
- The internet?
- Exercise?

All these things, they're not all automatically bad things.

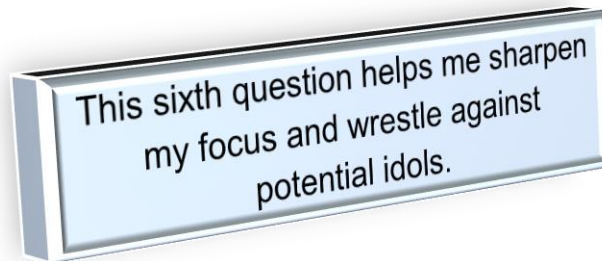
They're not necessarily idols, but they have the potential to become idols.

The Psalmist writes in Psalm 46:1-2

God is our refuge and strength. Turn to God in times of trouble.

These were Idelman's questions.

I'll add one of my own. I know I need all the help I can get, so on my office wall I have a note card with one more question. Call it Number 6 if you want.



Sixth question: ***Is this a Kingdom decision?***

TRY asking yourself ... what you're wrestling with, is it:

- A Kingdom decision?
- About God?
- About yourself?
- About something else?

Joshua, from this morning's Scripture, didn't tiptoe around the issue. He got right to the point. He threw down the choice.

- It's time to choose.
- It's time for people to choose.

The rest of this Scripture gets pretty confrontational. Our Scripture continues with Joshua 24:16-18.

¹⁶ The people replied, "We would never abandon the LORD and serve other gods. ¹⁷ For the LORD our God is the one who rescued us and our ancestors from slavery in the land of Egypt. (The Lord our God has, and does, save us). He performed mighty miracles before our very eyes. As we traveled through the wilderness among our enemies, he preserved us. ¹⁸ It was the LORD who drove out the Amorites and the other nations living here in the land. (We can't do it alone). So we, too, will serve the LORD, for he alone is our God."

(The people confessed their sole desire to worship God, but Joshua knew the people were human. He knew they needed to battle back against the temptations. He knew there was competition for their hearts and their souls, so he offered a dramatic exaggeration. Joshua wanted to emphasize this was serious).

Verse 19 & 20 continues:

¹⁹ Then Joshua warned the people, "You're not able to serve the LORD, for he is a holy and jealous God. He will not forgive your rebellion and your sins. ²⁰ If you abandon the LORD and serve other gods, he will turn against you and destroy you, even though he has been so good to you."

(Joshua was saying: If you're in, be in. If you commit, don't be lukewarm about it. This is an ALL IN commitment).

Verse 21 through 24 says:

21 But the people answered Joshua, "No, we will serve the Lord!"

22 "You are a witness to your own decision," Joshua said. "You have chosen to serve the LORD."

"Yes," they replied, "we are witnesses to what we have said."

23 "All right then," Joshua said, "destroy the idols among you, and turn your hearts to the LORD, the God of Israel."

24 The people said to Joshua, "We will serve the LORD our God. We will obey him alone."

Friends, that's our challenge today, isn't it?

That's our challenge during this time of self-examination we call Lent.

God sending Jesus Christ demonstrated his love for us.

God, merciful, forgiving, compassionate.

At the same time, God doesn't want to be second fiddle to anyone or anything.

So here and now we're challenged with Joshua's words.

- Will you destroy, will you set aside your idols?
- Will you commit your life to the God made known to us in Jesus Christ?

Because Everybody worships something, and It's time to choose.