

THE COMPETITION – TEARING DOWN THE IDOLS**Exodus 32:1-6; Matthew 6:25-34****(Read Matthew 6:25-34)**

Intro: Three years ago this weekend we canceled live services and did not reconvene until 13 weeks later. For a couple months we had been told about this thing called the Corona Virus. We also soon learned that if you really knew what you were talking about you called it Covid-19. But no one really knew what they were talking about. The world went kinda crazy. This thing made people who thought they had the world by the tail realize they had no control at all. People who thought science would and could solve anything and everything looked hopefully to the experts and the experts said, “Whattaya askin’ us for?”

There was a lot of fear. And, truth be told, we all felt the tinge of fear. But for the most part Christ Followers knew then and, looking back, it has been confirmed, what we should always hang our hat on, that God never left his post. He always had control and we knew he’s got this. We still know he’s got this.

This series is addressing the fact that the earth and the fullness thereof (that includes us) is God’s first and we are stewards/caretakers of it. Last week we talked about creation care, and this week we are talking about being stewards by not giving in to idols.

Karen read from Exodus 32 where Aaron fashioned a golden calf for the people of Israel out of gold they had swiftly relinquished to him. That calf was an idol.

When I was in India my friend Dan and I traveled to the ancient city of Hampi which is roughly in the middle of the southern part of the sub-continent. This was a holy city and I was amazed at the idols everywhere. There were idols of elephants – which are apparently especially revered there, there were any number of Hindu gods, and there were even idols that depicted human sex organs. It was bewildering at best and threatened to drive me into despair at worst. I was amazed by the idolatry.

Graven images like that are often what we have been conditioned to think of as idols – and they are. But, and you know this probably, but idols are anything that take the place of God in your life. Mike Slaughter, the retired pastor of Ginghamburg Church here in Ohio defines an idol as “*Anything, or anyone, that receives the primary focus of my energy or resources, which should first belong to God.*”

And then those things that compete for our primary focus must be seen for what they are: IDOLS that must be torn down.

Let’s begin with what I just alluded to a bit ago . . .

Worry can be an idol

- What are you anxious about? What gets you worried? What I just read from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 6 tells us there are lots of thing we could worry about and that’s why Jesus dedicated an entire section of his sermon to it. Worrying about food, health, clothing, where we live; all these things can distract us and compete for our attention and energy. Jesus offers a simple solution - we should *seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness*, and God will take care of the rest. Make God first in your life and he will take care of the rest.
- Also . . .

Forgetting can be an idol

- Maybe it’s more like getting too comfortable. We’ll unpack the Golden Calf before we’re done this morning, but let’s talk about how the people of Israel are a perfect example of this all through their history. If you’ve ever studied the book of Judges in the Old Testament an example of this is laid out in detail. The faithfulness, unfaithfulness, judgment, and deliverance was cyclic to the extent that it actually followed a pattern like this as described by Lindsey Bomgren, “The people abandon God with disbelief and worshiping false gods → God gets angry and punishes the people → the people cry for God’s help → God raises up a deliverer, or judge → the people repent and turn back to God → the people fall back into sin and the cycle repeats.” This went on for hundreds of years.
- And you’d think they’d learn – but they didn’t. Hundreds of year later it’s recorded in 2 Kings 17 that even though many prophets of God had shared the path to walking with God, the people of Israel still wandered. Listen, *And the statutes and the rules and the law and the commandment that he wrote for you, you shall always be careful to do. You shall not fear other gods, and you shall not forget the covenant that I have made with you. You shall not fear other gods, but you shall fear the Lord your God, and he will deliver*

you out of the hand of all your enemies.” However, they would not listen, but they did according to their former manner. So these nations feared the Lord and also served their carved images. Their children did likewise, and their children's children—as their fathers did, so they do to this day. 2 Kings 17:37-41

- Here’s the problem . . .

Idolatry is worshipping the gift instead of the Giver

- Paul points this out in Romans 1. After pointing out in the preceding verses how plainly God can be seen in creation, humanity is still prone to fall short in what they worship. Listen, *For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. Romans 1:21-25*
- Notice Paul isn’t just talking about carved idols – he’s referring to anything that takes the place of God in our lives.
 - It might be a person. I cringe when I hear star struck lovers claiming their worship for one another. Oh, I know, they’re just going over the top in infatuation, but it still stands that for the Christ Follower the highest relationship is the one we have with God and all others are subservient to that. It’s best anyway – since as you make God first, all other relationships fall into place.
 - It might be a job or money or status. You’ve heard of the almighty dollar – well it’s true – wealth and status very quickly become idols for those who substitute them for the true ALMIGHTY.
 - It might be one’s sexuality. This has become Satan’s most effective tool. It actually shows his stupidity that he only got around to it in the past few decades, but boy is it effective! One’s sexual identity has become a hugely distracting idol. This is what Paul means when he writes, *Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator Romans 1:24-25.* Our identity is not our gender or what we have decided our gender is. Our identity is in Christ who makes us a new creation and as we worship him we can celebrate who he has made us to be.
 - It might be hate. Satan has made the sexuality struggle so effective by not only designing the LGBTQ+ confusion to be so destructive to confused souls, but also he has stirred up hatred in the hearts of those who stand against it. Yes! Hate is an idol. And it’s easy to bow down to it.
 - It might be politics and nationalism. Remember this ABC, we are God’s first and our nationality is somewhere down the list. Politics and national identity become a sordid idol when they pull us away from our first love – Jesus Christ. Politics and national identity become an idol when we allow that thing called worry (which we already talked about) drive us to distraction if our guy doesn’t win. Politics and national identity become an idol when we begin to hate those who’s politics are different than ours. We are Christ Followers, Church! Let’s be salt and light in our divided nation and world.
- The list could go on, these I mostly pulled from Paul’s words in Romans 1. Just remember, an idol is anything that takes our worship from where it belongs.
- Let’s finish up by unpacking the golden calf a bit . . .

Idols never deliver what they promise

- Think back to the scripture Karen read: Moses went up the mountain and the people got worried. THERE’S THAT WORD (worry) AGAIN!!!! I think this may be the first recorded case of the adage “While the cat is away the mice will play.” Moses would soon come down the mountain, but they’d given up on him. In fact, they wrote him off with – “We never really liked him and his God anyway!” David Guzik writes “*How we handle God’s ordained delays is a good measure of our spiritual maturity.*” And the Israelites were proving to be big babies.

- They turned to Aaron – Moses’s brother and “Hey! Make us gods to go before us!” And Aaron should have flatly refused – but he idolized power and attention and authority and acceptance (all of these are some of the worst idols you can fall for) and he gave them exactly what they wanted. He could have said it was a case of majority rule, but it’s example of why just because everybody wants it, doesn’t make it right. The will of the people is more often than not contrary to the will of God. Aaron made a calf.
- Guzik makes a great point here. He writes, “*The people wanted gods to go before them, leading them to the Promised Land. They knew the LORD led them out of Egypt and they knew the LORD God had revealed Himself at Mount Sinai. Yet, they were willing to trust a god they could make to finish what the LORD began.*” And then they actually praised this image – made by their own hands, for leading them out of Egypt! How crazy is that?! Guzik again, “*This shows the foolishness of idolatry. This statue of a calf did not exist the day before, yet they worshipped it as the god that brought them out of Egypt.*” How did that work out for you Children of Israel?
- But don’t be too hard on Israel’s idolatry. We fall for the same things when we rely on likes on a Facebook post, or science, or politicians, or a better job, or a prettier wife, or a smarter kid, or a smoother talking preacher, or a church with a worship band, or ANYTHING to fit into the place where only God can fit in the hole in our soul.
- Idols NEVER deliver what they promise – because they promise nothing. Nothing is what you get when you fall for an idol. Exactly nothing.

Conclusion: Part of your life’s stewardship is identifying and eliminating the competition that vies for lordship in your life and that means identifying and eliminating the idols that prevent the Lordship of Christ in your life.

Probably you already know what your idols are or perhaps something new has been revealed. Get rid of them. You are God’s first! Tear down the idols. Amen.