

“DEALING WITH INDECISION”

1 Kings 18:16-39

INTRODUCTION

1. If you haven't noticed, idols permeate American culture today. The death of Michael Jackson demonstrates how much some people idolized him. We have music idols like Carrie Underwood, Taylor Swift and Keith Urban. We have sports idols like LeBron James (today's NBA All-Star), Tiger Woods, and the New Orleans Saints.

We've got fashion idols. We've got political idols. We even have a television show that creates idols. Everywhere we turn, there is a hunger in our culture to idolize.

2. In many ways, our culture is not much different from ancient Roman world. When Paul went to the city of Athens, he saw a city filled with images of many different gods. The Parthenon included worship of Aphrodite, the Goddess of Beauty; and Ares, the God of War; and Artemis, the God of Fertility.

The truth is, every culture has its own set of idols.

Eg. When I visited Southeast Asia several months ago, I saw outside our hotel a small statue to Buddha. Every day, the owners of the hotel would place a plate of food in front of the idol to Buddha.

For most of us, that's the image that comes to our minds when we hear the word. “idolatry.” But, the evidence of modern idolatry is all around us with the shrines that we call office towers or stadiums or workout facilities.

Author, Tim Keller, says it like this:

“We may not physically kneel before the statue of Aphrodite, but many young women today are driven into depression and eating disorders by an obsessive concern over their body image.

We may not actually burn incense to Artemis, but when money and career are raised to cosmic proportions, we perform a kind of child sacrifice, neglecting family and community to achieve a higher place in business and gain more wealth and prestige.”

3. Many years ago, John Calvin simply said,

“The human heart is an idol factory.”

*Idolatry is NOT just common in primitive cultures-It's common in modernized societies.

Now, an idol is someone or some thing that occupies the place of God in life. It's preeminent in life. It's the most important thing in life. It's what brings identity, meaning and significance in life.

Eg. I want you to listen as Mark Driscoll provides a definition of idolatry for us in the following video clip...

Every one of us will decide to worship something. That's why 3500 years ago God said:

“You shall have no other gods before me”
(Exodus 20:3).

Do you know why God said that? Because anything in life can become an idol or a counterfeit god.

God said to the people of Ezekiel’s day:

“These men have set up idols in their hearts.”
(Ezekiel 14:3).

We may not bow down to little statues, but the human heart can take good things like a career, material possessions, love or even children, and turn them into idols. It’s no wonder He warned us about idolatry.

4. So, with that backdrop in mind, today we turn our attention to an ancient story from the life of Elijah that gives us three antidotes for the problem of modern idolatry. If you have a copy of the Scriptures, why don’t you turn with me to 1 Kings, chapter 18?

5. Now as you are turning, you might remember that we began a new series last week called, “*Just Like Me,*” from the life of Elijah.

The Bible tells us Elijah was a man just like us. He was a man who experienced great accomplishment, followed by times of great discouragement. Like many characters of the Bible, he had moments of great faith only to later battle great fear.

Elijah lived during the reign of King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in Israel. These two characters had led the nation of Israel into idolatry where prostitution and child sacrifice became a part of the false worship of the people.

The God of Heaven sent the prophet, Elijah, to bring the people back to God. Through the words of Elijah, God brought a drought to the country for three years. The economy of the nation ground to a halt. The king and queen were not happy campers and they blamed Elijah for

this misery. We pick up the story in verse 16 of 1 Kings 18. Look at what it says.

“Ahab went to meet Elijah. When he saw Elijah, he said to him, ‘Is that you, you troubler of Israel?’ ‘I have not made trouble for Israel,’ Elijah replied. ‘But you and your father’s family have.

You have abandoned the LORD’s commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel.

And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel’s table” (1 Kings 18:16-19).

Now the first antidote for idolatry is to...greatest challenge

1. **DETECT THE IDOLS IN MY LIFE**

In Elijah’s day, the idolatry of the people was obvious. They worshiped the gods of Baal and Asherah. Elijah identified them and challenged them to a showdown on Mount Carmel.

Today, we’re not tempted to worship gods named, Baal and Asherah. We’re tempted by other kinds of idols. The only way out of idolatry is to identify what those idols are. Let me mention 4 that influence our thinking today. The first is the idol of...

❖ Pleasure.

That doesn’t sound so bad, does it? After all, the American Declaration of Independence suggests all of us are endowed with certain inalienable rights, among which

are “*life, liberty and...*” What? “... *the pursuit of happiness.*”

Eg. Even a movie...Pursuit of Happiness...

It sounds innocent enough, doesn't it? So, Americans love things that bring us pleasure. We love playing golf, going to football games, watching television, or buying a new car. It all sounds innocent. But remember, idolatry is when some one or some thing occupies the place of God in my life. It's when my identity, meaning and significance is wrapped up in something. The real issue is control.

Eg. I like to play golf. But, suppose we took 6 golfers, put them in this room, and let them hit chip shots to the back wall. Could you spot the one golfer who's an idolater? Of course not, because idolatry is a matter of the heart.

What about television? Is television inherently evil? No. The technology of television is neutral. It can be used for good or evil. But, in many homes, we can't live without the background noise of television. The same thing could be said of computers and cell phones.

We've heard a lot about sex addiction recently with the problems of Tiger Woods. Sexual addiction is nothing more than idolatry.

Food can become an idol. You can be overweight and worship the idol of food, or you can be skinny and fall into idolatry to food. All these things produce pleasure.

The apostle Paul warned about the idol of pleasure when he writes that at the end of this age, men will be...

“Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”
(2 Timothy 3:4).

Theme Parks, Stadiums, Recreation, Hobbies-We see it everywhere

The love of pleasure is called, “hedonism.” Solomon says it like this in Proverbs 21:

“He who loves pleasure will become poor...”
(Proverbs 21:17a).

Another modern idol is...

❖ People

Some think, *“If I can just have this relationship, I'll be satisfied.”* The music of our culture promises that if we can just fall in love, we'll find real meaning in life. Years ago, the Beatles sang, *“Love is all you need.”* It's another way of saying, *“If I can just find the right relationship, then I'll be happy.”*

Some people run from one relationship to another because they're living in idolatry. Even people who avoid romantic love because of bitterness or fear are actually controlled by its power. (Life's Healing choices)

Eg. Tim Keller said it like this:

“No person, not even the best one, can give your soul all it needs.” - Classes starting on marriage

An author named, Ernest Becker, said it like this:

“The failure of romantic love as a solution to human problems is so much a part of man's frustration... No human relationship can bear the burden of Godhood.

After all, what is it we want when we elevate the love partner to this position? We want to be rid of our faults, of our feeling of nothingness.

We want to be justified, to know our existence has not been in vain. We want redemption – nothing less. Needless to say, human partners cannot give this.”

My friend, the God of heaven invites us to make Him the love of our lives. The Bible even uses the imagery of a bride and a groom to depict God's love for us. Look these words of Isaiah:

“... as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you” (Isaiah 62:5b).

Yet, some of us have made a relationship with somebody else an idol that we worship instead of God. –We don't worship Baal or Asherah- but people, pleasure

There's a 3rd modern idol that occupies the place of God, and that's...

❖ Profit

Jesus warned far more about the danger of greed than almost anything else. But few of us ever think we're greedy.

Eg. As a pastor, I've had people confess adultery, anger and gluttony to me. I don't remember anyone ever saying, *“I spend too much money on myself.”* We don't see it for what it is.

-One reason we're hosting Dave Ramsey Simulcast

Most of us think of ourselves as middle class. But, compared to people in other parts of the globe, we're wealthy!

The feeling of security that money can buy can be addictive. It's no wonder Jesus said:

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money” (Matthew 6:24).

Eg. After the economic crisis that started in mid-2008, the acting Chief Financial Officer of the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corporation hanged himself in his basement. (Freddie Mae) The chief executive of a leading real estate auction firm shot himself behind the wheel of his Jaguar. A French money manager lost \$1.4 billion of his client's money, with Bernie Madoff, slit his wrists and died in his Madison Avenue office. An executive at Bear Stearns took a drug overdose and jumped from the 29th floor of his office building. All those stories sound like the suicides that occurred after the stock market crash of 1929.

-We may not commit suicide, but we give our lives away for it

That's the “end game” when profit becomes an “idol.” If Elijah identified the modern idols, he would list things like pleasure, people and profit. He'd also probably list...

❖ Power

Eg. Chris Evert was the leading professional women's tennis player during the 1970's '80's. Her career win-loss record was the best of any singles player in history. But, as she contemplated retirement, that she was petrified. She said:

“I had no idea who I was or what I could be away from tennis. I was depressed and afraid because so much of my life had been defined by my being a tennis champion. I was completely lost.

Winning made me feel like I was somebody. It made me pretty. It was like being hooked on a drug. I needed the wins and the applause in order to have an identity.”

That’s what success and power can do to you.

The Bible tells us about a powerful king named, Naaman, who was a leper. He was told by a prophet to take a bath in the dirty Jordan River. Do you know what he said? to be healed

“Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?’ So he turned and went off in a rag.” (2 Kings 5:12).

In other words, why should I stoop to do something so silly when I have all of the authority and power of a king available to me? That’s what the idol of power can do to you. If I’m going to overcome the modern idolatry of our culture...first, I have to detect the idols in my life. And then I must... it’s the hardest step to take!

2. DECIDE WHAT GOD I WILL WORSHIP

Ahab assembles all the false prophets on Mt. Carmel. The odds are 850 to 1...and the 1 is Elijah. Let’s pick up the story in verse 21:

“Elijah went before the people and said, ‘How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God,

follow Him; but if Baal is God, follow him.’ But the people said nothing” (1 Kings 18:21).

Those last four words are disastrous!

Eg. Some of you have visited the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem or in Washington D.C. Perhaps you visited Dachau or one of the other death camps of World War II in Nazi Germany. History tells us as many as 6 million Jews were slaughtered during the days of Nazi Germany. Perhaps 2.7 million of those were at Dachau. Nothing about that makes sense.

If you drive through Dachau today, it feels like most other European cities. Business goes on pretty much as usual. It’s almost as if nothing happened there.

-The people said nothing!

Eg. In the middle of Phnom Penh, Cambodia, there is an infamous torture camp called, Tuol Sleng. It’s right in the middle of the city. In fact, if you don’t know where you’re going, it’s even hard to find.

But, during the days of Pol Pot’s regime, hundreds and thousands of people were tortured at Tuol Sleng. Many didn’t even know it was happening.

-The people said nothing

How can humanity commit atrocities like the Holocaust of Nazi Germany? How can human beings commit the wholesale genocide that occurred during Pol Pot’s regime? How can human beings commit murder, rape and abortion at the rate of over a million babies a year in this nation? How does this happen? There is only one answer: Idolatry.

Eg. Ravi Zacharias said it like this:

“The Holocaust was the direct result of atheism. Man was beginning to live without God.”

When people choose another god, there is no direction. There are no standards. All bets are off.

One author says it like this:

“Idolatry is always the reason we do anything wrong”
(Tim Keller).

Eg. Martin Luther, in his treatise on good works, wrote that the Ten Commandments begin with the commandment about idolatry. He said, *“We never break the other commandments without breaking the first one.”*

In Elijah’s Day...

When the time came for the people to choose the God of heaven or the gods of Baal, they said nothing because they had already succumbed to idolatry.

By the way, the word, “waiver,” in this verse means to “hobble” or to “limp along.” If you and I do not decide that we will worship the God of the Bible, we will limp through life. Our lives will be characterized by instability. Elijah says, *“Make up your mind.”* It’s what Joshua said to the people about 500 years earlier:

“...Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River,

or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (Joshua 24:15).

Choose whom you’re going to serve. Decide what God you’ll worship. Since the beginning of time, that has been the call of God for every human being.

Eg. Garden of Eden- “Like God...” Basic question-my way or God’s way?

But, if I’m going to overcome the trap of modern idolatry, there is one more antidote. I must detect the idols in my life. I must decide what God I will worship. And then I must...

3. **DECLARE MY COMPLETE DEPENDENCE ON GOD**

Elijah plans the two sets of sacrifices to be prepared.

Look at verse 23:

“Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it.

I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD.

The god who answers by fire - he is God.’ Then all the people said, ‘What you say is good’”
(1 Kings 18:23-24).

The people say this is a good idea!

Where did Elijah get his courage? If you were here last week, you know he got it during the setbacks of his life at the Kerith Ravine where God provided food and water and in the house of the widow who had nothing. Elijah stood

with courage when the odds were 850 to 1 against him. He knew God would show up. Let's read on in verse 26:

“So they took the bull given them and prepared it. Then they called on the name of Baal from morning till noon. ‘O Baal, answer us!’ they shouted.

But there was no response; no one answered. And they danced around the altar they had made. At noon Elijah began to taunt them. ‘Shout louder!’ he said.

‘Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened.’” (1 Kings 18:26, 27)

Elijah engages in a little prophetic trash talking. He ridicules the prophets of Baal. He accuses their god of being too busy for them. So, the prophets shout louder and louder, but nothing happens! (He's even a little crass! original-“Relieving Himself”

Elijah turns toward his own sacrifice, douses it with the most precious commodity of the day – water, and he starts to pray. –No shouting and slashing-humble prayer

Look at verse 36:

“At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: ‘O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that You are God in Israel...

and that I am Your servant and have done all these things at Your command. Answer me, O LORD, answer me...

so these people will know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You are turning their hearts back again”
(1 Kings 18:36-37).

In athletic terms, Elijah sold out! This is saving faith-selling out to Jesus Christ

Elijah could stand with courage because his heart was fixed on God Himself.

The Apostle Paul said it like this:

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:1-3). (Decide to follow Jesus!)

The truth is, idolatry is easy to see in others. It's not easy to see in ourselves. We call it a hobby, job, relationship, entertainment, recreation or a diversion. But anything or anyone that takes the place of God is idolatry.

CONCLUSION

It's no wonder the Bible has so much to say about this subject. You see, idolatry is not just a failure to obey God, It's setting your heart on something besides Him. It's why Jesus said to the Church at Ephesus:

“I hold this against you: you have forsaken your first love...repent and do the things you did at first”
(Revelation 2:4,5).

There is only one solution to all this: Jesus must become the central focus of our lives. He must become more attractive than anything else. The only lasting cure for idolatry is...

❖ a fervent love for God Himself.

Would you bow your head with me?

May I ask you this question? *“What is operating in the place of Jesus Christ as the love of your life? What’s more important than Him?”*

The Bible says He showed you the full extent of His love by giving His life for you so you could experience the forgiveness of God. Have you invited Him into your life?