

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Destroying Our Idols

Anthony Ballard

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Scripture:

²⁴ "No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

Matthew 6:24

³¹ When the Lord saw that Leah was not loved, he enabled her to conceive, but Rachel remained childless. ³² Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Reuben, for she said, "It is because the Lord has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now."

³³ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the Lord heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon.

³⁴ Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi.

³⁵ She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the Lord." So she named him Judah. Then she stopped having children.

Genesis 29: 31-35

Transcript:

My name is Anthony Ballard and I'm the Discipleship Associate for Justice and Racial Reconciliation and I want to give a special shout out to my All In Group. I think you guys are awesome and I'm looking forward to seeing you guys again this week. Please open your Bibles if you have them near you and turn to Matthew chapter six, verse 24. This is Jesus speaking.

And he says, "No one can serve two masters. Either you will love one or hate the other, or you will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money." Around this time, last year we were preparing for what would become the All In Sermon Series, which is the series that coined that term that you keep hearing about, about being an "all in follower of Jesus Christ."

So in these planning stages, we could see that this was the sermon that seemed to hold the most weight and fervor from Pastor Scott Dudley. Because in our staff meetings, he was giving these epic Braveheart type speeches to us and we were just getting so inspired and invigorated about it. And when he was sharing the vision, he was saying that he wanted us, BelPres, to become a church of more than just churchgoers and good people, but that we would be dedicated followers of Jesus Christ in every aspect of our lives. And so he was serious about this and he was on fire and our team and our staff, we were excited and we were like, "When does this start? Let's go, let's do this." But the response was that the start of this sermon series, this amazing sermon series, was contingent upon whether or not the Seahawks made the playoffs. And the reason was, well, we knew that most of you would have stayed home and watched football instead of learning what it means to be an all in follower of Jesus.

And so the Seahawks made the playoffs and we delayed the start of that all in sermon series. And that, BelPres, is called idolatry. Please bear with me. I know that's a hard word, but bear with me. Let me finish. Because I empathize with you. I'm from Los Angeles and the Lakers are in the Finals right now and game four is on Tuesday and that is actually the time during my All In Group, and so I'm going to miss part of it. I understand you, is what I'm trying to say. But enjoying the Seahawks is a good thing, but when it becomes more central to our lives and more central to our function than Jesus, then the Seahawks become an idol or, as some will call it, a competing God. So here's the thing, for the sake of this sermon, there's a lot we can say on idols, but for the sake of this sermon, idols are good things that is anything in our lives that we turn into ultimate things. I'll say it again. Idols are good things, anything in our lives that we turn into ultimate things.

So the greater the good, the more likely we are to expect our deepest desires can be satisfied from it. And then we're going to turn that thing into an idol. And because idols are some of the best things life has to offer us, idols are actually Satan's best, one of his best strategies, in keeping us from the greater things that Jesus has for our lives. Pastor Tony Evans says this. He says, "In most of our lives, Jesus has too many masters with whom he has to compete. But the important thing to remember is that Jesus is not willing to be one among many. He's not willing to be part of an association or a club. He's not willing to be relegated as a personal assistant. Jesus as Lord means that Jesus is to be the one and only Supreme ruler and master in our life. He calls the shots. He has to be acknowledged in everything that is done. Too many people want a savior, but don't want a Lord."

In the scripture from Matthew six, when Jesus says you can't serve two masters, you either love one or hate the other, he uses really strong language there. He doesn't give us three or four options. He only gives us two and he says it's him or the other guy. And then Jesus goes on to

say, "You cannot serve both God and money," and in some of your Bibles, you'll see that there's a capital M there for money, because what Jesus says in other versions is that he says, "You can't serve Mammon, which is the Semitic God of wealth," which should tell us something about the importance of idols. There's a spiritual seriousness to this. The reality is they are counterfeit gods that we turn to, to worship. And so idolatry really is our worship gone bad. And again, Jesus says, "It's loved one or hate the other."

There's always, always an urgency from Jesus to stop what we're doing and to follow him. In the sermon a couple of weeks ago, we read in Matthew four where Jesus tells Peter and his brother to, "Drop your nets and follow me." And what he meant was, "Quit what you're doing. Quit your job and come with me. Let's go." And there's other places in scripture where Jesus makes similar cause for people to make tough decisions and to follow him. He doesn't wait for us to decide. He doesn't wait for people to decide. He forces them to choose him or the idol. So when most of us think of idols today, we think of a golden calf, a statue of a king, and then we visualize people bowing down to an actual physical thing. But in the 21st century, most of us are not going to do that thing, especially in the Western world. And so 21st century idols are way more sneakier than the golden calf and a statue.

So if we ask ourselves, what's a modern day idol? The first thing we're going to think of to say is cell phones, right? But I think we should go a little bit deeper than that because cell phones aren't the actual idol themselves. Rather, they're the type of portals that we use to get to the real thing. So we if we erased phones from existence we would still find a way to worship these idols in our lives. Phones just make it easier to do it than before. So here is some of the idols that we worship today. There's money, relationships, attention and popularity, boyfriends, girlfriends, or your spouse, your children, grandchildren, your parents, a type of success, sports, beauty, sex, a career, political ideologies, culture, comfort, all those things. Pretty much anything you can imagine. And the thing is, everything I just named are all good things. But there's something that consider.

An idol is anything we run to you in times of trouble instead of Jesus. Or an idol is anything so central to our lives that if we were to lose it, we would lose our sense of purpose and meaning. So the first effective way to get rid of our idols is to be straight up and honest about when we have them, and you have to name what they are. And as we go through this sermon together, my prayer, and I hope you pray with me, that the Lord will reveal what our idols are. He'll reveal the roots of our idols and not just the stems. Amen. I know you said, "Amen," at home. So the shocking thing about idols is that the promises that they offer, they can actually deliver. If they didn't offer us anything and if they didn't make it happen, we wouldn't consider them an idol or a God. We wouldn't have any reason to worship them. So they actually deliver on these promises, but it's always with a catch, or their promises overall are pretty empty.

There's a cartoon that I watched as a kid and I still do as an adult, and it's called Fairly Odd Parents. And it's about this little kid named Timmy Turner who had these godparents and they would grant Timmy's wishes. Just about anything Timmy asked for, he would get. And there's the episode where Timmy asked for Christmas to be every single day or there's another episode

where he asked for that his only meals are desserts. So the first half of every episode is good because Timmy got everything that he wanted. But then, as the episode keeps going, things turn out really bad because Timmy got everything that he wanted. So then he realizes that all the trouble he caused, he has to now undo because of the wishes that he wished. So he ruins his life every single episode by making these good things, ultimate things, by leaving his desires unchecked. Timmy could have just wished for one extra day of Christmas, but instead he had to make it an idol and wish for Christmas to be every single day. And we all are a lot like Timmy.

We go to our idols with these wishes, and they deliver when we get the success or we get that person to love us. And it's good. But when we go too far, we put them in place of Jesus and we realize that our spiritual lives began to suffer from this. So once we flip those priorities of the good things, they become these idols, and we get into this dangerous spiritual ground that Jesus warned us about in Matthew where he tells us not to serve two masters. And in Jonah 2:8, Jonah says, "Those who cling to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them." I'm going to read that again. "Those who clean to worthless idols turn away from God's love for them." And Jonah is saying that we turn from God's real love for something that's counterfeit and we have to rid ourselves of this.

So the second way to free ourselves from these destructive idols and counterfeit gods is to ignore their false promises and turn back to the true God that is Jesus. And we have to answer Jesus' call to choose only one master. The promises of these idols will ultimately fail us. And there's another idol that we are all very susceptible to falling to over the next month, and that is of our political ideologies. We're constantly on this edge of making conservatism or liberalism or libertarianism our religions and then our pastors become Trevor Noah or they become Ben Shapiro. And we need to be careful letting influencers and tweeters and commentators shape our worldview. I talked to Scott Dudley and we talked about how at the church, when we receive critique about our stance on racial justice and healing, it's never critiqued using the Bible or using scripture. It's always critique using political language.

And then the other problem is that, when we get praise and support for our stance on racial justice and healing, people also don't use scripture. And both aren't okay. So we have to turn from YouTube, from Twitter and all that, and really seek what the Lord is telling us to do in this time and in this season, because he has an opinion and he's given us a source in his word and it's the ultimate source and we've got to use it. Our pastors here, we're blessed to have pastors here at BelPres who lead us well and who will be a better guide than any analyst or political commentator out there. Rich Leatherberry and Rosalyn Renshaw are way better pastors than Trevor Noah or Ben Shapiro. I've seen these two inaction off-camera and I'm telling you, they're all in followers of Jesus. These are people you want to listen to for such a time as this.

In fact, every pastor, deacon, and elder at our church are all in and our roster is absolutely stacked and they are trustworthy people. They are true people. So please hear me, I am not telling you to call our pastors and ask them to tell you who to vote for. That is not what I'm doing here. But instead, I'm making a point that where we run to in times of trouble and chaos is what we worship. So I'm suggesting what if, instead of turning to Twitter to form your opinion for

what's happening in the world, what if instead you reached out to one of our pastors, your All In Group leader, or anyone in our congregation, someone who you know is dedicated to following Christ, and you turn to them and see what they have to say on these matters and how they can point you and direct you back to Jesus?

Because the truth is, you're really not turning to the person, but you're turning to who they follow. In First Corinthians 11, Paul tells his followers, "Follow my example as I follow Christ." In our leaders and our congregation, many in our congregation are following Christ. Trust me, because I talk to them and I know what they're about. So with all that's happened today, point number three is use God's people around you to help clear through the smoke to direct you back to him. God's word, his people are better than anything else that's out there on the internet. I was in California recently, and I met up with a good friend of mine who's probably watching right now on live stream. And he's one of my oldest friends and he was giving me an update about a girl that he was dating at the time. And I had been in the know about their relationships so I was really invested about what the update was. And my friend, he really cared for this girl and he was all in for their relationship.

But then they began hitting these relational roadblocks because she had just started her own clothing business and wanted to give every piece of her time and attention to that. So she said she couldn't have both him and the business. She couldn't serve two things. So she made her choice and chose her business and broke off the relationship. Ouch, right? If you're in the chat, type of heart in there for my friend who's watching. He needs it. That's a joke. But this was devastating for my friend. It really broke his heart. And while he and I were talking about this, he had this response to me, and pay attention to this. He said, "You know, I never cared about making money before, but now, since I don't have her, maybe I'll just focus on making as much money as I can and go from there." And what my friend was really asking was this question, "Now what? Now that I lost this person that I worshiped, what should I worship next?"

And I warned him in that moment. "Do you realize what you're doing? You're preparing to build your next idol. You're looking for a new God to worship." And he didn't know he was looking for this and I wouldn't have either, but I was preparing for this sermon so I had this really wise response. Any other time, I would've told him, "Make as much money as you can and then you can pay for everything when we hang out." But this type of thing happens to all of us, no matter who we are. We lose one God, whether it's a person, career, or school and then we want to find another one. And all the while, Jesus is standing there saying, "I love you." He's saying, "Choose me over these other gods and I have greater things in store for your life." And that's the full good news of the Gospel of Jesus, that he not only saves our souls, he not only forgives us of our sins, but he gives us totally new desires, desires that reflect him, desires that are counter to our culture, desires that are counter to even our own hearts.

And in Psalm 27, verse four, David writes that, "One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." That's a psalm for an all in person. And point four is, once destroy our idols, don't build a new one. The only way to free ourselves from the influence of idols is that we turn and worship the one true God.

"One thing do I desire that I will seek after, that I will dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life." So if you're listening to this and you're wondering that why sometimes your relationship with Jesus struggles and why you have a hard time hearing from him, chances are it's not because you're not trying hard enough or you're not praying hard enough or you're not tuning into church enough or going to church. But, again, as Pastor Tony Evans said, it's because we have too many gods with whom Jesus has to compete. Jesus is not willing to be one among many.

While on earth, Jesus spent time with sinners. He spent times with prostitutes and tax collectors like Zacchaeus and mean religious people, but he didn't spend any time with other gods. He had no time for other masters. Jesus knew that every idol, every competing or counterfeit God would eventually let you down and would eventually break your heart. Some of you know that I'm an artist, I'm a drawer and illustrator. And on the screen, you can see some of my work right there. And then you may remember that from the Love Where You Are booklet that we made last year, those Scott Dudley cartoon drawings was my work too. And this one is Bradley Cooper, Scott Dudley with hair. But really for a significant portion of my life, becoming an artist was my ultimate goal, my driving force. It was the main reason I moved to Seattle, because I wanted to be an artist and I wanted to work on a book.

And I'm from L.A. And so for years while I was there, I was a youth leader on Wednesday nights. I was a young adult group leader on Thursday nights. I was going to church on Sunday and my regular job was basically ministering to youth all over L.A. County. And then I left, because I wanted to draw, and my reasoning was, "God, you gave me this gift. Let me use it fully." And so I moved here to pursue art and I avoided anything that was ministry related, partially because I was tired, but mostly because I was avoiding God's nudges. And it wasn't until I moved here that people started to pay me for artwork. And this was a good thing. But at the same time, I made art my ultimate thing, an idol, by totally hiding from any type of ministry work that I knew God was calling me to. But then Jesus began to break that idol down. He began to destroy it, and he did it against my own will.

And probably the moment that changed for me was a Sunday here at BelPres. I told our hospitality associate, Hannah, and I said, "You know, Hannah, I think God wants me to join the coffee ministry." And from there, God began this journey of pushing me into ministry here at BelPres. So three and a half years ago, I was sitting in the back of every service trying not to be used in any way. And then now I'm here in front of you preaching a sermon probably for the third time. And it's just how God works. So the day before my birthday, this year, I was sitting out at my art desk and I was drawing some stuff and I had this moment where I felt God in the room. And I was thinking about some things that were developing in life and I was just like, "Ah, man, God, you're not going to let me be an artist anymore, are you?" And he said, "Anthony, you will still do art, but it's not the only thing that you're going to do."

And while it was hard hearing that, I still had peace because this good thing in art that God had given me is still good and I'm still going to do it, I'm still an artist, but it's not the ultimate thing anymore. So I knew Jesus as savior but I had to start living my life with him being Lord. I'm

learning what it means to say yes to his greater things in my life, and I don't know where this is all going to pan out. But I'm trusting him every step of the way. I'm trusting that he's calling the shots. And that's just my story, but I want to close with this. If you're listening to this message and you're thinking over in your mind that you have some idols in your life, I want to encourage you to reach out to us for prayer. On your screen now you can click in the chat and you can get prayer from some of our prayer ministers who are standing by. And you can also email prayer requests at belpres.org.

And then, you're in small groups this week and you're all in groups this week, take some time to pray around identifying idols and then hopefully to eventually destroy those idols. And you're probably saying, "Anthony, it's not that serious. I don't need prayer for this." Yeah, you do trust me, because I did. Because what's happening is that we're moving everything that's in the center of our lives, we're moving it out and we're putting Jesus there. That's going to totally reorganize a lot of things in our lives. Some of you have already built your entire life on the foundation of an idol, and that is faulty ground. That's a faulty foundation, bound to crumble, and it's bound to break your heart. And then maybe some of you are a parent and you spend more time encouraging your kids to do well and succeed in school and in their sports than you spend encouraging them to be an all in follower of Jesus.

Jesus said in John chapter 14, he says, "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing." And then he says, "And they will do even greater things than these because I'm going to the father. So you may ask anything in my name and I will do it." So here's the question, BelPres, what greater things are waiting to be done through you once you lay down those idols and once you make Jesus the center of your life. Lord Jesus, I pray now for this church, this great church, Lord. I pray for every household that is watching, every child, every parent, every grandparent, Lord, that you will become the center of their lives, that they will destroy these idols. They will identify these idols. They will destroy them. They will lay them down for you, for your greater things that you have in store, God.

No matter how hard it is, no matter how uncomfortable it is, God, I pray that we will all do the thing that we know we're supposed to do. And I pray the Lord that you will reveal the greater things in store for us. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Discussion Questions: Please Read Matthew 6:24, Genesis 29:31-35

1. Looking back, how did it go last week?
2. What stood out the most from the sermon this past week?
3. What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage and sermon?
4. What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?
5. If idols are good things we turn into ultimate things, what "good things" in your life are at risk of becoming more central to your being than Jesus?
6. In light of what we've learned (application):
 - How might God want us to apply this to our own life and the lives of the community this week?
 - Who needs to hear this message/good news?