

Purging Idols from OUR Lives

Preached: 1/24/2021; 3rd Sunday after Epiphany – Germantown;

Scripture

2 Chronicles 34:1-8
Matthew 6:19 - 24

Message

Purging Idols from Our Lives

We have been doing a study of the story of Josiah. Josiah became the King of the nation of Judah when he was 8 years old. When he became king, the people of Judah were heavily involved in worshipping idols. Josiah's father, Amon, had influenced the people in this practice. He built altars to worship idols in the "high places" around the country. He encouraged the worship of Asherah and Baal. The people believed that Asherah and Baal controlled the land, and were responsible for keeping the women and the land fertile.

After some time as king, he matured enough to make some changes. The writer of the book of Chronicles tells us about **3 decisions** that Josiah made. They become "mileposts" that mark significant moments in his spiritual journey and in his leadership of the country. When Josiah had been on the throne for 8 years, he experienced a spiritual awakening. We don't know what his life was like before that, but the text that we read, says that **when he was 16 years old, he began to seek the God of his ancestor King David**. That was the first significant decision of his spiritual journey. He would give time to his relationship with God, learning about God, praying, following His way. The next decision came when he was 20 years old. **"In the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of high places, Asherah poles and idols."** As Josiah decided that he was going to "Seek God" it became his desire that the whole nation join him in Seeking God. He understood that **living in relationship with God was the reason for their existence**. The practices of False religion **distracted the people from worshipping God**. They turned the attention of the people away from God. God had given the people 10 commandments that they were to follow as His people. The first 2 commandments spoke directly to the matter that Josiah was trying to address in his Purging: (Exodus 20:2-4)

² ***"I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.***

³ ***"You shall have no other gods before^a me.***

⁴ ***"You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.***

So, Josiah sets out to Purge the land of Idol worship, because it was a violation of these first two commandments.

As I concluded my message last weekend, I asked this question: **"Why do we have to learn about idol worship and false religion in Judah in the days of King Josiah?"** I made some sarcastic comments (not to be taken literally), suggesting that Idolatry is not a problem in our day, so why do we have to talk about it. Most of us would probably not consider ourselves to be idolators. But Bible teacher Christopher Wright challenges that assumption that idolatry does not exist in our day. He stresses that **"Idolatry is alive and well, even if it often operates outside our conscious awareness."** He points out that **we give the idols different names, but it is still idolatry.**

If we think that idolatry only involves the use of some graven image of gold, then we are deceived. Earlier in their history, the Jewish people made a golden calf **that they worshiped as their god**. Their worship involved a wild celebration that included immoral activity. In the time of Josiah, the idols were images of gods – Asherah, or Baal. Worship of the Asherah and Baal included some of the same wild partying that we read about when they worshiped the golden calf. Those are the kind of practices that we think of when we talk about worshipping idols.

But the Bible teaches us about **other idols**. In the passage that I read from Matthew, Jesus talks about possessions or treasures as an idol. He warns that if the focus of our life is on accumulating treasures, we will be distracted from serving God. **“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.”** In the book of Colossians, (3:5-6) Paul also talks about idolatry. **⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.** **⁶ Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.** These other pursuits or cravings become idols.

Webster’s Dictionary defines Idolatry like this:

Definition of idolatry

1: the worship of a physical object as a god

2: immoderate attachment or devotion to something

Pastor John Piper defines it like this:

“...[An idol] is the thing. It is the thing loved or the person loved more than God, wanted more than God, desired more than God, treasured more than God, enjoyed more than God. It could be a girlfriend. It could be good grades. It could be the approval of other people. It could be success in business. It could be sexual stimulation. It could be a hobby

So, when we understand that idolatry is not just the act of bowing down to, or offering sacrifices to some statue or image, we are forced to ask ourselves if there are idols in our lives? How would we know that? **Whenever we find all of our joy or pleasure in anything, or anyone other than God, we have crossed into the realm of idolatry.** Pastor Diane Gilliam Weeks suggests three clues that might confirm if we are trapped in idolatry:

1. We have a **pre-occupation with ourselves**, our own influence and power
2. We have a **pre-occupation with pleasure** in general, and sexual pleasure in particular
3. We have a **pre-occupation with money and possessions**

How do we break free from the idols, or the powers that control us? Idolatry has the force or power of an addiction. Addictive behavior is difficult to break free from. Adele Calhoun in her book: **Spiritual Disciplines Handbook** suggests a spiritual practice or discipline that we don’t often hear about or talk about. We usually think of Scripture Reading, or Praying, or Contemplation as Spiritual Disciplines. She suggests that we begin to practice the discipline of **Detachment**. **Detachment means replacing the attachment to 1) idolatrous relationships**, Sometimes we can elevate a person to the position of an idol. We feel as if we can’t live without them. We begin to believe that they can solve our problems. We submit our will to them as if they are a god. We defend them. We will do anything that they ask us to.

We also may need to detach from **2) self-serving goals and agendas for success: money, power, ego, productivity, image**. We are willing to do anything to get ahead. We will compromise values, principles, the teachings of Scripture in order to succeed or in order to find pleasure.

Breaking free from these powerful forces that control us can be difficult. Adele Calhoun suggests several steps:

- **Naming and confessing attachments that take priority over God.** We may not even be aware that we are under the control. It will require that we spend time in prayerful reflection. The practice of **Examen**.
- **Letting go of image management:** (not buying clothes just to stay in fashion. Doesn’t mean we turn into a slob)
- **Letting go of notions that your money and possessions belong to you and make you who you are; choosing to live on less.**

So as we are thinking about Josiah’s work of purging the nation from the power of idolatry, he took strong, decisive action – destroyed the altars on the high places, knocked down the Asherah poles, destroyed the altars that were used in the worship of idols. We may need to take decisive action to detach ourselves from

the cravings that we prioritize in order to find pleasure, contentment, fulfillment. We may need to be relentless in removing anything from our lives that turns our attention away from the LORD.

Prayer – Open our eyes Lord, we want to see the truth about ourselves. Give us the courage, the power to purge from our lives any semblance of idolatry. Amen.

Benediction: **“May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all”**