

Counterfeit Gods

Bible Talk

TEXT - ACTS 17:16-31

BIG IDEA: To emphasize how disciples of Jesus must be, as Paul was, greatly distressed by “all the idols” - that is, Counterfeit Gods - which surround us. And going a step farther, we must allow that distress to move us to reach up to God and out to others.

OPENING QUESTION

- What makes you angry and/or upset? How do you typically respond/react (get quiet and depressed, loud and agitated, internalize thinking you can't effect any real change?)
- We're going to look at a man who was greatly distressed by something. We'll see what he was distressed by and what he did about it.

READ ACTS 17:16-21

- What upset Paul as we walked around Athens? (city was full of idols)
- What's an idol? (anything/anyone we put before God or trust in vs. God... examples?)
- Why was this upsetting to Paul? (hurts God and us... gives us a false security, deceived, damned)
- What did he do about it? (spoke up! began to reason with those who were present... tells them about Jesus)
- What did the people spend their time doing? (sitting around and talking about the latest ideas)
- Let's see how Paul's reasoning progressed...

READ ACTS 17:22-31

- How do we see Paul reaching out to the people? (looks for a common starting point “I see you are very religious – doesn't just bash them)
- What points is Paul making about the “worship” of the people? (he clears up God's true qualities, the real God doesn't live in temples, not served by human hands...)
- Was it controversial to the first century listeners? (1. the bulk of their culture and economy was based on this false idolatry. 2. he calls them out on ignorance. 3. he calls them to repent because ignorance is no excuse)
- How would things in Athens change if people really repented and believed? (temples would close, people would be out of work, tourism would decrease dramatically as people wouldn't be coming to “worship” their own gods, citizens would)

Ok, let's take ourselves out of the first century for a moment and imagine if Paul were to visit our city in 2010. Would he be greatly distressed? How do we accept counterfeit versions of God? What idols would he see? How would our city change if people exposed and actually the counterfeit gods of our culture?

ACTS 17:32-33 Responses to Paul's reproof

1. Some sneered (arrogance, dismissed him - how can you do that to challenges)
2. Others "we want to hear you again" - - good or bad? Seems good until you remember that they probably just wanted to sit around and talk about it more (why Paul left). Have you ever studied out a reason to repent without doing anything about it? Tell me about that.
3. A few actually believed. How would Dionysius' and Damaris' lives change? How would your life change if you radically repented from idols in your life?

FINAL CHARGE:

- There is a lot of things which can upset/distress us (recall some of the things which were shared). Let it be that we are upset by what God is upset by. Let's be like Paul, ultimately – Jesus, who did something about it.

Extend invitation to guests to study the Bible and learn more...

I was made for another world!

Bible Talk

TEXT - HEBREWS 11:8-10; 13-16

MAIN IDEA: The more we emphasize our possessions and life on earth, the less we're concerned about heaven. The more we emphasize heaven, the less we're concerned with this world and its possessions.

OPENING QUESTION

- What are some of your 'prized' possessions? How hard would it be to part with them?
- OR What would be the hardest possession for you to part with? Why?

BACKGROUND

- We know from Genesis, Abraham had accumulated a lot of *possessions* while living in Haran (Gen 12.5). God calls Abraham to leave his country Haran and travel to a place he is not familiar with. Along his travels, his *possessions* increased (Gen 13.2) In fact, between Abraham and Lot, their *possessions* were too much for the land (Gen 13.6). To solve the problem, they part ways and Lot chooses the nicer city. Despite his wealth, Abraham was not bound to it. He always answered the call of God instead the call of the world and its possessions; he was made for another world.

Read Hebrews 11:8-10

- **11: 8**
 - What does it mean to "obey" even when you don't know where you're going?
 - How would you respond if you had to take your wife (if you are married) and all your possessions and travel somewhere unfamiliar?
 - Just the thought of moving for most is not fun. It takes a lot of time and thought to get all your possessions together, etc.
- **11:9**
 - What do you think it means "he made his home" in this place?
 - How attached do you think Abraham was to his Haran, his home country?
 - How many have visited a foreign country? How many have visited a foreign country in which you didn't speak the language?
 - What are the difficulties, especially for us as Americans, in visiting or traveling to foreign countries?
 - How hard would it be for you to exchange where you are living now to live in tents? Why? What kind of mindset would it take to make such a transition?
 - How hard do you think it was for Abraham to adjust? How hard is it for you to adjust when going from having more to having less?

- **11:10**
 - What does it mean to look forward to something?
 - What is something you look forward to?
 - How does this explain why Abraham is able to live in tents in a foreign land?
 - Do you think you get more excited about a new TV, phone, car, clothes, vacation, home, etc. than a city whose builder is God?
 - Why is it hard to look forward to heaven?

Read Hebrews 11:13-16

- Does having faith mean we will get we ask for? Why or why not?
- What does it mean to live as a stranger/alien while on earth?
- What are practical ways you can live as a stranger/alien? (For example, not attaching ourselves to the things that the world does: possessions, fame, power, love, etc.)
- What are the reasons we don't live as strangers/aliens?
- What does it mean to long for something?
- Why do you think people have trouble longing for heaven?
- Do you have trouble longing for heaven?
- What can you do to change?

FINAL CHARGE

- Most of us haven't experienced the type of change of lifestyle that Abraham did. However, the principles that guided his life are principles we must embrace as well. Certainly there are 'possessions' or 'idols' in our lives that have too much of our attention.
- In order to long for heaven, we need to first identify what our 'idols' are.
- In addition, we need to change our mindset.
- This takes place as we use God's word to shape the way we think and behave.
- Break free from the world and long for heaven.

Extend invitation to guests to study the Bible and learn more...

I want to hear Him say well done....

Bible Talk

ICEBREAKER

- **Read Matthew 25:14-30**
- **Read Luke 19:11-27**
- Next, split the group into 2 teams: Team 1 will prepare in 5 minutes a skit re-enacting Mt 25:14-30 & Team 2 will prepare in 5 minutes a skit re-enacting Luke 19:11-27. The person leading the discussion will judge which team did WELL and which team will be weeping & gnashing their teeth. The judge may also want to throw in 3 funny props that must be used in the skit to make it a little more entertaining (Ex: Toothbrush, football, kids princess tiara, etc.)
- **Leader:** Declare which was “Well Done”, which team is “weeping & gnashing their teeth” at the end of competition (NOTE: Prizes for the winning team may encourage more feeling in all this.... Feel free to skip the judging part and just transition to the discussion since both passages were acted out - Either way, have fun!)

Let's examine a few ideas from the parable we just read & acted out in Matt. 25:14-30:

- What did the master entrust to his servants?
- How did it differ?
- What do we think the talents represent (Help people be practical)?
- What do we think this tells us about our relationship with God?
- What does the master's response in vs.21 & 23 teach us?
- What does the master's response in vs.26-28 teach us?

Now let's examine a few ideas from the similar parable we just read & acted out in Luke 19:11-27:

- What is different in this parable than the other in Matthew 25?
- What might the Minas represent (help them think of what all have EQUAL ability in- Faith, Love, Fellowship, etc.)?

- What does the master's response in vs.17 & vs.22-27 teach us that might be different from the parable of the talents?
- What do we think all this tells us about God & us?

FINAL QUESTION:

Read Romans 12:21 - "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

- Part of overcoming the evil of idolatry (Counterfeit Gods) is making sure we are doing the good we ought to do: We should be living & wanting to hear from God – 'Well Done!'
- How can our Bible study tonight spur us on in defeating idolatry & living for the will of God?

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The Hidden Idols Bible Talk

MAIN IDEA: Be aware of hidden idols, even among those committed to God.

INTRODUCTION: Most of this month we've discussed more obvious idols in our lives (success, \$, etc.). Tonight, we'll consider 'hidden' idols...

Jonah 1:1-3

- Who was Jonah? *<one of God's prophets>*
- What did God ask him to do? *<go to Nineveh and preach against it>*
- What did Jonah do instead? *<ran away, set sail for Tarshish>*
- God sends a storm upon Jonah's ship: Jonah 1:4
- And they throw him overboard... Jonah 1:12
- Jonah is swallowed by a fish! Jonah 1:17

Jonah 2:1-10

- While in the fish's belly, what realization does Jonah come to about idols? *<vs. 8>*
- How can we forfeit grace by clinging to idols?
- Why would Jonah disobey God? What idols could he have been holding on to? *<fear, selfishness, stubbornness>*

Jonah 3

- How did the Ninevites respond to Jonah's preaching? *<they repented immediately!>*
- What idols were the Ninevites holding on to? *<evil ways, violence>*
- How did God respond to Nineveh's repentance? *<He was compassionate>*

Jonah 4:1-3

- How does Jonah respond to God's compassion? *<he gets angry!>*
- Why would Jonah be angry? What **hidden** idols was Jonah still holding on to? (let people wrestle with the answer before giving it to them) *<deep seated nationalism for Israel, hatred for the Ninevites, judgmentalism of those who were NOT of Israel, racism, he wanted God to punish them>*
- Jonah was a prophet of God and his life shows that it's possible to have hidden idols even among those committed to God.
- What hidden idols relating to your commitment to God might you have? (let everyone share) *<religious traditions, doctrine, arrogance in dealing with other faiths/beliefs/denominations, etc.>*

Matt 12:38-41

- The Pharisees & teachers of the law had no visible signs of idolatry. What were their 'hidden' idols? *<religious traditions, doctrine, arrogance in dealing with other faiths/beliefs/denominations, etc.>*
- Instead of a miraculous sign, what sign did Jesus give to call the religious to repentance? *<The sign of Jonah. His own death, burial, and resurrection>*
- If the Ninevites repented at Jonah's preaching, and now one greater than Jonah is here (Jesus), how should *we* respond? *<repent!>*

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