

November 10, 2013

“Is Your God a Liar?” (Part II – Based on “Gods at War” by Kyle Idleman)

Joshua 24:14-15

This message is part 2 of a message I preached a few weeks ago from 1 John 5: 1-12, called, “Is Your God a Liar?” That comes from: 1 John 5:10b-12

Those who don't believe this are actually calling God a liar because they don't believe what God has testified about his Son. And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life.

People know something is missing from their life; they just can't put their finger on what it is. They try to fill the void with many things, all of which ultimately do not and cannot satisfy. Why? because life is only in Jesus. God has put eternity in our hearts and only the gospel of Jesus can prepare us for it. God testifies that life is in His Son, whoever has the Son has life, whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. If you don't believe that you are calling God a liar, because you don't believe His testimony about His Son. Jesus is our Lord and our God, if you have a different god, your god is a liar, there is only one true, living God, everything else is an idol.

Exodus 20 records the 10 Commandments. Here is how they begin:

Exodus 20:2-6

"I am the LORD your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery.

"You must not have any other god but me.

"You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. I lay the sins of the parents upon their children; the entire family is affected—even children in the third and fourth generations of those who reject me. But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.

The first 2 commandments are:

1. "You must not have any other god but me.
2. "You must not make for yourself an idol

Why did God list these commands first? Because idolatry is not one of many sins, but it is THE sin from which all other sins come. Not only do we have idols/other gods, but our idols are the source of every sin/struggle that we have.

These first 2 commandments are still relevant today, but the problems of identifying idols today is that they don't look like idols.

- Is God against pleasure: food, Sex, sports/entertainment?
- Is God against money, success, achievement?
- Is God against romance, or families?

Of course not, yet these things can become other gods in our life.

A god is something that is most important, something or someone we adore, sacrifice to and sacrifice for. The problem is that the moment we put something or someone before Jesus, the moment it replaces God on throne of our lives it becomes an idol.

The last time preached on this topic someone from our church told me how the message related to an experience in her life. I asked her if I could share her testimony, and I told her I would not use her name. She said that would be okay, "but I can almost guarantee that half the church will know it's me because I've told my story to so many! How could I keep such a victory secret? The funny thing is that I have yet to put an updated picture on the website (directory). As a joke you have my permission to tell the congregation to see if they can pick out who wrote this story! I keep my old driver's license as a reminder of what I looked like then.

"I am reminded (from) 2 Cor 1:4: that after we have been comforted we can comfort others. It's given me a ministry of hope and encouragement to others who struggle with placing God second to their pacifier, whether it's food or not it stems from the same root." Here is her testimony:

"For many, many years I turned to food as a way to escape the pain of an unhappy marriage. I was mildly overweight during childhood, almost normal weighted when I married, but after I had children the marriage troubles greatly increased and my size increased too. Overeating was the way I handled the stress. I was almost 100lbs overweight when, in 2006, Mike Iarocci was led by God to begin a bike club. I joined up and on my first ride I thought I would have a heart attack. I stuck with the riding but still hadn't done anything about the eating problems. I felt ugly, disgusted, unhealthy and ashamed over what I had done to myself. Let me also say that I was a devout practicing Christian! Finally, in a moment of despair I cried out to God for help in July 2008. He replied with a question that I will never forget. "Who is your God? Me or food?" When I realized that I had actually replaced God with food for solace, comfort and pain-relief it was very easy to understand why I had not conquered my overeating.

"After I put food second to God the weight started coming down for good. It took three years and hard work (and a lot of bike riding) to lose almost 75lbs but I have kept it off. When I am tempted to overeat I hear that simple question in my head all over again- "who is your God?" As long as I keep that in focus I will not fail! I have His promise."

Following Jesus means turning away from the gods that so many people spend their lives bowing down to. Ultimately in this testimony, food became a worship choice.

Sometimes we face choices and we know our entire future hinges on the choice we make. Other times we wander down a particular path without really thinking about it. We make many choices without even being aware that we are choosing. We do things because it's the way our family always did them. Or because it's the way people we want to be like does them; or because these days everyone does them that way. We

regularly make choices and the choices we make declare which gods are winning the war in our lives.

Today we are going to look at **Joshua 24:14-15**

"So fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt. Serve the LORD alone. But if you refuse to serve the LORD, then choose today whom you will serve. Would you prefer the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates? Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live? But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD."

Moses took God's people on what should have been a one month camping trip that instead lasted 40 years. Moses and his generation died before entering the land God promised to Abraham hundreds of years earlier. Joshua replaced Moses as the leader of God's people and he brought them into the Promised Land.

By the time we get to Joshua 24, Joshua himself is an old man. He gathers the Israelites around him and gives what is probably his farewell address to them. In this address this old man who had fought many battles and faced many challenges now lays down a challenge for the people he has led. He tells them it is time to make a choice. The people can follow the Lord God, the Living God, or they can choose a different god.

And he lays out their options. They can follow:

- The gods from beyond the River where they had started out
- The gods in Egypt where they were slaves
- The local gods recently defeated by the one true God

You might be thinking, "No problem! I don't worship Egyptian gods, or local gods, or gods from beyond the river." But wait, you are not off the hook that easily. I want you to think of each of these categories as a time and a place in life. The gods that are competing for your soul come at you based on circumstances of your everyday life. They may look different than the specific one's Joshua was referring to, but the categories are the same.

Now, before I continue let me make clear that you *will* make a choice. Notice that Joshua doesn't give his list and then say, "Or you could choose not to worship anything at all." All of us are worshipers. It's who we are. We all worship something or someone. We actually sacrifice a great deal on the altars of our gods. We choose our gods and make offerings to them. Ultimately, the real offering is ourselves.

"The opposite of theism is not atheism, it's idolatry." - Peter Kreeft, philosopher

In other words everyone is going to worship a god. The question for you is who or what will be the object of your worship.

Here again are your options. **Option #1(Joshua 24:14b)**

The idols your ancestors worshiped when they lived beyond the Euphrates River.

Abraham came from the land beyond the Euphrates River. In that area there were gods for every conceivable purpose. Abraham came from a society that believed in these gods. In fact the Bible tells us that Abraham's father was an idol worshiper. Belief in these gods continued through the time of slavery in Egypt and right up to Joshua's era. And so Joshua asks, "are you going to worship the idols of your ancestors?" It's still a valid question, isn't it? Parents today raise their children in the faith or the lack of faith that they have. I have to laugh when I talk to people about bringing their children to church and they say, "We don't want to influence our child's religious decision. When they are older they can choose which religion they want to follow." Guess what the decision to do that *is* influencing your children. What does it say to our children if church is not important to the parent? And, what do we say to a child by the things that are important to the parent?

We may not do so consciously but we have idols in our homes and teach our children about who or what is worthy of our worship. Think about how this is true for you and the family you were brought up in. Is it possible that the gods fighting for your heart are the same gods your parents or grandparents worshiped when you were younger? What was important in your house growing up, making money, your appearance? We have a tendency to worship the gods of our ancestors, the gods of our parents.

Option #2 (Joshua 24:14b)

The idols your ancestors worshiped... in Egypt.

Joshua mentions gods from Egypt, during a time of slavery. These are gods from the past that never went away. Do you struggle with things from your past that you thought you had left behind a long time ago? We invite Jesus into our lives, we want Him to take the throne in our hearts, but we find we have brought some stuff with us. We've invited the Lord into our lives, while still paying attention to the old gods. The problem is we have tried to follow Jesus without leaving something behind. Old gods die hard. They creep in, they want to rule our hearts again.

Option #3 (Joshua 24:15b)

Or will it be the gods of the Amorites in whose land you now live?

This would be the gods of our culture; the gods of our time and place. We struggle with the gods of our culture every day. They are so common that they have become invisible to us. Paul writes...

Romans 12:2

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think.

Paul also tells us how to change our thinking: **Philippians 4:8**

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (i.e. fill your mind up with good things)

The “customs of this world” is a way of describing the gods of this age. We see here that the Bible advises us to change the way we think by letting God, and the truth of the One true, holy, living God transform us into a new person. Joshua says it this way:

So fear the LORD and serve him wholeheartedly. Put away forever the idols (of option 1, 2 & 3)... Serve the LORD alone. (Joshua 24:14)

Joshua gives options to those he is addressing, and then says to them, “choose today whom you will serve...But as for me and my family, we will serve the LORD.” (Joshua 24:15)

We don't just get rid of the old gods, we replace them with the Lord God.

They have to make their choice, but no matter what they choose to worship, he's already made his choice to serve the Lord. This is Joshua's final option to them and really what all along he has been presenting as the only option. After all, none of those other options are even real. They look promising, but they ultimately will not satisfy our thirst.

The Lord God alone is alive, and active; he alone has worked powerfully among them – redeeming, protecting, guiding, and providing. What have these other gods done for us?

In making your choice, ask the same question. What enduring value has the god of wealth, sex, or pleasure or any of the others been to you... “enduring value” is the key phrase to consider. What have these gods done for us? They have enslaved us; they have robbed us; they have disappointed us.

Tom Brady was interviewed on 60 Minutes. Do you know who Tom Brady is? He is the superstar, 3 Super Bowl rings, record breaking, multi-millionaire, supermodel dating quarterback of the New England Patriots.

In that interview he said, “Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there's something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, “hey man, this is what [it's all about].’ I reached my goal, my dream, my life. Me? I think, ‘It's got to be more than this.’ I mean this isn't - this can't be – all it's cracked up to be.”

When the interviewer asked him what “the answer” might be, Brady replied, “What's the answer? I wish I knew.”

Psalms 86:8

No pagan god is like you, O Lord. None can do what you do!

What can He do? He can give things like forgiveness, fulfillment, love, hope, joy, and peace.

Think about your choices:

What do you choose to do for a living?

How do you choose to manage our money?
What do you choose to watch on TV?
Who do you choose as your friends?
What web sites do you choose to visit?
What clothes do you choose to wear?
How do you choose to spend your day off?
What food do you choose to eat?
What do you choose to think about?

The choices you make reveal your god of choice. So I will not ask you what gods you are worshiping. Rather I will ask you what choices are you making. Stop for a moment and consider your options, and then choose carefully. Choose not only to get rid of the old gods, choose to replace them with the Lord God.