

Idols of the Heart

Part 4

Exodus 24:13-18, 32:1

1. Idols of the heart: comfort and control.

- *John 13:3-15*

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Comfort and Control Bowl and Towel?

Today we are in the fourth part of our summer series called “Idols of the Heart.” In the Bible, idolatry is the number one issue, making its way into every book. Of course, today we don’t worship statues, but we do have idols, just as bad as they were in the Old Testament. Ultimately, idolatry is an issue of Lordship – who or what is Lord of our lives? Something will be, and we must decide, and be honest with ourselves and identify the idols of the heart. We’ve looked at why idol worship is such a big issue, and if you weren’t with us, I really encourage you to go back and watch them or read from our website and get caught up with us. Last week Pastor Mike preached on idols in relation to the self, and we’ll continue that today. Starting in Exodus chapter 24:

Then Moses set out with Joshua his aide, and Moses went up on the mountain of God. He said to the elders, “Wait here for us until we come back to you. Aaron and Hur are with you, and anyone involved in a dispute can go to them.” When Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights. (Exodus 24:13-18)

Now I’m going to skip ahead a few chapters to chapter 32:

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, “Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don’t know what has happened to him.” (Exodus 32:1)

Israelites built idols after waiting – two idols in relation to self can come up when we have to wait...

1. Idols of comfort and control.

According to a Lifeway survey I found, these are the top two idols that have significant influence on churches in the USA – comfort and control.

Let’s talk about comfort first. We want to be comfortable, and God is a God of comfort, but it becomes an idol when our comfort and our feelings cause us to be disobedient to God.

The Israelites were reliant on God for everything They had to trust God to feed them, provide for them, and lead them. He was their source of life. Moses was the leader between the people and God, and now Moses gives them instruction before going up the mountain.

They weren't told to do anything, just wait. Moses leaves Hur and Aaron in charge, although Hur is not mentioned ever again. Some scholars think it's because the crowd had killed him, and now Aaron, feeling the threat from the crowd, gives in to what they wanted.

Either way, the Israelites were told to wait. Who knows how long. Was Moses even alive? The Israelites saw a consuming fire on the mountain, was Moses dead? How long should we wait and see? Moses didn't say how long to wait, just wait. 40 days he was on the mountain inside what appeared to the Israelites as a consuming fire.

Imagine looking up at Mount Adams, and its completely on fire. And we watched Moses hike up into it. We all know what fire is like. He dead. You can see how it would have been easy to sit and wait and grow uncomfortable. Was he alive? He was the one supposed to speak to God for the Israelites. He's gone now, so what should we do. We need to fix this; we need a plan. All they had to do was wait, but Israelites grow uncomfortable, not sure what's going to happen or what to do, besides wait. Ever sit in a restaurant and your server comes over and greets you, then says they'll be with you soon, but then don't come back? After a while, you start wondering if they forgot about you. At first, it's not a big deal, you're sitting and talking. Kids are coloring on their menus. Then kids start saying how hungry they are. You start thinking, why did we bring them. At that point you just have to wait.

For the Israelites, waiting brought questions without answers, too many unknowns. They didn't know what was going to happen and their comfort was challenged. Jesus would often challenge the comfort of his disciples too. Like leaving their jobs and homes, spreading a message of hope even to people they don't like (Samaritans and tax collectors), having a tax collector in the group (Matthew), going near people with leprosy (a contagious disease), or healing others considered unclean. Following Jesus means being uncomfortable sometimes. Here is another example, from John chapter 13:

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so, he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him...When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. (John 13: 3-5, 12-15)

Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and yet, he washed their feet, like a servant would. There is no parallel in ancient literature for a person of superior status to voluntarily wash the feet of those under him. It was unexpected and unthinkable for Jesus to do this for His disciples. That would have made them very uncomfortable.

That would make most of us uncomfortable. If I came down these steps, picked one random person, brought them up on stage in front of everyone and said I'm going to wash your feet. Some of you are already squirming. (I knew I should've trimmed my toe nails this morning, don't make eye contact, please don't pick me...)

Jesus confirms that the disciples were right to call Him, “Lord”, but now the Lord has made himself an example of service to them. The disciples were so far beneath Him, as we are too, but He served them. He has given us the example of serving others, so we will too. Sometimes loving others and serving them makes us uncomfortable.

2. God calls us to Sacrifice our comfort.

Sacrifice is something that Jesus asked of his disciples many times: lay down your nets, leave your father and mother, give what you have to the poor, deny yourself. Jesus does not hesitate to ask his followers to make sacrifices. If they love Him, they will, they did. When you love someone, you make sacrifices. As a parent you sacrifice sleep for your children, so much sleep. Money, so much money, you go without things you want because you want them to have something else, or you want them to have things or experiences you didn’t have. The disciples would have never expected Jesus to wash their feet, and then be told to go wash others. When you love, you are willing to do things you never thought you would’ve done, you’re willing to sacrifice your comfort.

Six years ago. Spanish wedding...nunca pense... when you love someone, you are willing to sacrifice your comfort.

Sometimes our comfort gets in the way of our love for God, and it can keep us from being obedient to God in how we love others.

The second of the two idols is **control**. We want some control, and you should have some. You should have a level of control if you have a job, or if you’re a parent, or how you manage your money, a level of control of your behavior and actions. but control (or being controlling) becomes an idol when we want more power, or abuse the power we have. and then we trust God less. If you are waiting in the restaurant, you have no control over when you’ll eat. Even after your order is in, you can’t control when it’s done, you just wait. The Israelites had to just wait. They had no control over when Moses would return. They had to sit back and trust that when Moses said “wait here until I return” he would actually return. No control, just wait for Moses and wait for God.

Waiting on God is hard because we don’t have control. When we pray to God, He sometimes gives us a yes or no answer. But sometimes the answer is “wait”. We want to show God we know what’s best and take matters in our own hands, like the Israelites did, but we need to give up control. The disciples learned this lesson too. In Matthew 16, Jesus asks Peter, “who do you say I am.” Peter replies, “the Messiah, the son of the living God”, and shortly after that, let’s pick up the story in verse 21:

From that time on, Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. “Never, Lord!” he said. “This shall never happen to you!” Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:21-24)

If we are going to call Jesus our Lord and Savior, as we should...

3. We need to **Surrender** control.

When we make control an idol, we trust ourselves or others in power more, and God less. Jesus instead says following Him means we deny ourselves. We deny our comfort, we deny control, so we can fully follow Jesus.

The disciples had a lot to learn (like us), they knew Jesus is the Messiah and preparing to bring his kingdom. The disciples are ready for His kingdom to come. Historically, the kingdom doesn't rule if the king suffers and dies. That's not normal. So the disciples thought. Peter and the disciples had to surrender their ideas of what they thought God's kingdom was going to be like. The disciples thought that Jesus was the Messiah, but they were thinking in terms of a conquering Messiah, a warrior king who would sweep away the Romans and lead Israel to power. A few verses before this, Jesus had just announced that Peter was the one the church would be built on, the rock, now he gets called the stumbling block.

Ever been like Peter? Your own concerns, and didn't have in mind the concerns of God? A stumbling block to Jesus and what He's doing in this world? We all can be, when we focus on the idols of comfort and control.

Jesus calls Peter, Satan, harsh words. Let me clarify one thing though: in Matthew 4, Jesus said to Satan after He was tempted, "away from me" but to Peter he says "get behind me" as in follow me, Peter might be mistaken, and he might fall, and he might sin, BUT for him there's always the invitation to follow Jesus. To learn from his mistakes and enter into a deeper loving relationship with Jesus. Same for us, no matter what idols we have or what we stumbled over, we are invited to leave it, and follow Jesus.

Following Jesus means denying ourselves. Denying the gods in our life of comfort and control, so we can keep God first. With God first, we will sacrifice our comfort for God's mission, we will **surrender** our control to trust God.

Not too many people get excited to hear we need to sacrifice and surrender. Think of it this way; most of us are here today because someone sacrificed or surrendered for us. Someone else was obedient to God and did something or said something that helped us experience the love of God and helped shape us into who we are today. So, what comfort can we sacrifice, or control can we surrender to help someone else experience God's love the way we have?

Jesus had control over everything. He surrendered it. He invites us to deny ourselves and follow Him. The word "follow" here is in the present tense, which means it's always happening. It's something we choose to do every day. It's not something you did years ago at camp or last week at church, but a daily decision to wake up and choose to surrender our desires and instead seek God.

Follow the leader, you do what the leader does no matter how hard; if you can't or don't, you lose. Except Jesus doesn't want to see us lose, Jesus wants to help us follow Him. Help us do what He does. The biggest thing that gets in our way of following Jesus, is ourselves.

Comfort and control as self-idols come down to trust. The Israelites didn't trust Moses was coming back. The disciples called Jesus the Messiah, but they didn't trust His plan. Do you trust God? Do you trust Him to be in control and to be your comfort? Here is what Paul wrote to the Corinthians about comfort:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. (2 Corinthians 1:3-4)

God comforts us, so we can comfort others. If we make our own comfort an idol, we aren't likely to help comfort others. Having comfort or having control isn't bad, but when we choose our comfort, or what we control, over God, it becomes an idol. When you are uncomfortable in your faith, you have an opportunity to grow. We can sacrifice our comfort, to grow. We can surrender control, to grow.

God invites us to sacrifice comfort and surrender control. if you are placing your identity, or your desires, your comfort, or control, in anything other than Christ, you have created an idol. Don't leave today without examining the idols that we have created for ourselves. Do you need to sacrifice some comfort or surrender some control in order that you might draw closer to God today? Is there something that is making you a stumbling block, like Peter?

Let's pray.

Please stand for this blessing:

May God help us to deny ourselves, trust Him, sacrifice our comfort and surrender control so we can fully follow him, and help others to do so. God bless you, we'll see you next week.