

The Gospel that Replaces our Idols

1. Intro

- One of the fascinating things about studying ancient history is learning and understanding their culture
- One of the distinctive aspects of virtually all cultures in the ancient near east ... was they were all polytheistic
 - That is, they worshipped many gods
 - Egyptians
 - Ra – God of the sun
 - Isis – God of magic
 - Greeks
 - Aphrodite > Artemis > Dionysius > Poseidon > Zeus
 - Romans
 - Venus > Mars > Diana > Vulcan
- If you've ever been to Rome, Athens, Corinth, or Ephesus ... you can see ruins of the temples build over 2,000 dedicated to the various gods of those cultures
- While it makes for fascinating reading and tourism ... I suspect most of us think of culture where various gods are worshipped and idolised as antiquated, naive and simple-minded
- However, if we are prepared to be honest with ourselves ... and look beneath the surface of our own culture and our own hearts ... we will see that we are no different
 - For we live in a world where many things are idolised and worshipped
 - The only difference is we don't turn them into images of marble like the Greeks and Romans did
- For instance
 - Aphrodite – goddess of beauty
 - Head down to Fitness First / Crunch gyms and see lots of men and women idolising that one
 - Apollo - god of music, arts
 - When The Beatles, One Direction, George Cluney or Oprah turn up on our shores ... people go nuts to see them or hear them
 - Dionysus - god of wine, parties, festivals, madness, chaos, drunkenness, drugs, and ecstasy
 - Plenty of ppl idolising that on a Friday and Saturday night

- We are made to worship > that's how God built us
 - Doesn't matter if you are religious or not
 - We all worship something > like the ancients ... we often worship more than one thing
 - Religious ppl will worship their gods
 - Non-religious will worship their gods
 - Because we are made to worship > we all worship something

- Why is that?
 - Well it's because we all have hearts?
 - What do hearts do > they **love** things
 - God made us with heart, mind and will
 - Hearts love
 - Minds think
 - Wills decide

- **Thomas Cranmer** – Archbishop of Canterbury during Reformation in 1500's said this
 - *What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies. The mind doesn't direct the will. The mind is actually captive to what the will wants, and the will itself, in turn, is captive to what the heart wants*

- Because we all have hearts ... there will always be something that we love, adore, idolise or worship
 - You may not think it ... but I hope by the end of today you will see that is true

- So what?
 - So what if I idolise something?
 - So what if my heart is captivated by something?

- First of all ... the things we worship / idolise control us
 - It shapes our thinking, our behaviour, our speech, our priorities

- Secondly, I want to suggest that the things you idolise is harming you and others around ... and often we don't even know it
 - Therefore, if we're going to flourish as human beings, you and I need to get rid of our idols
 - If we're going to live the good life God created and raised us for, we need to deal with the idols of our heart

- This morning, show

- How we are made to worship
- Expose our idols > what they are and how they destroy us
- Replace our idols with something better
 - Repeat

2. Made to worship

- Turn to Exodus 20
- Very famous passage
 - Context
 - Egypt > slaves > Moses > rescues > Red Sea > Mt Sinai
 - Mt Sinai God establishes his covenant with the nation of Israel
 - Gives them the Law
 - Moses goes up on Mt Sinai comes back with the 10 Commandments
 - Summary of the Law
- 10 Commandments = a covenant
- A covenant is a promise / agreement between two parties > like marriage
- Whole purpose of the covenant at Sinai was God establishing with Israel their relationship with each other
 - God was to be their God
 - Israel would be his people
- God had already proven his love for his people in rescuing them from Egypt
 - Out of all the nations on earth they were to be his treasured possession
 - That was his commitment to them
 - Israel's commitment to God was spelled out in the 10 Commandments
- As you look at the 10 Commandments you'll see
 - First 4 ... all about to how we relate with God
 - No other gods
 - No idols
 - Not misuse the name of the Lord
 - Remember the Sabbath
 - Final six about how we relate with one another
 - Honour your father and mother
 - Murder
 - Adultery
 - Steal
 - False testimony / lie
 - Covet

- But notice the fundamental requirement of the first commandments is that God calls on his people to worship him and him alone
 - You shall have no other gods but me
 - Second is like it - You shall not make an idol and bow down and worship it

- Notice also that the commandment doesn't envision any third option
 - There's no possibility of us worshipping nothing
 - Since we will always worship something, because of how we are created ... we cannot eliminate God without creating God substitutes
 - Something will inevitably capture our hearts and imaginations and be the most important thing / the ultimate concern in our life

- John Calvin (16th Reformer) recognised and said "our heart (nature) is a perpetual factory of idols"
 - That is ... our heart is always making an idol of something

- And yet God as creator and sustainer of us and this world has the right to command our loyalty
 - As the founder, owner and financial backer of Virgin ... Richard Branson gets to decide the culture of the company and what products they sell
 - It's totally his call

- God has the same authority to say to Israel, "You ought to worship me"

- Israel was not to worship created things / things of this world that God made and gave to us > ridiculous!
 - Like praising Adriano Zumbo's macaroons rather than Adriano Zumbo who made them
 - Sure his desserts are amazing, but he is the one who created them!

- And despite all that God had done and continued to do for his people ... they did turn away and worship other gods and idols

- Why?
 - Because they didn't trust in God to deliver on his promises
 - They didn't think he could save them, keep them secure, provide for them, give them satisfaction and hope
 - They forgot how good, powerful, gracious and loving he had been in calling them to be his people and rescuing them countless times

- So they turned to foreign gods and idols

- That's what an idol is
- It's anything you look to more than you look to God for your sense of security, comfort, satisfaction and hope - something you adore and serve with your whole life and heart
 - Idolatry is not so much wanting bad or wrong things ... but its turning good things into ultimate things ... things like
 - family, achievement, work and career, romance, talent, etc - that we turn into ultimate things to give us the significance, security and joy we desire
- Paul speaks about this in Romans 1 (NT)
 - ²⁵ *They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator-- who is forever praised. Amen.*
 - Humanity forsakes God to worship and idolise things God created for us
- As you go through the Bible and see how God's people turn to other gods and idols ... that's when their lives, their society, their nation unravel
 - Sin becomes rife
 - Sexual immorality
 - Greed
 - Injustice
 - Exploitation of the poor, weak
 - Abuse of power
 - Murder
 - Eventually they face God's judgment and are taken into exile
 - In other words, Israel forgot all about the 10 Commandments and they destroyed themselves as a result
- In Martin Luther's exposition on the 10 Commandments, he concluded, that you never break one of the other commandments without also breaking the first
 - In other words, all our sin stems from the fact that we have forsaken God and made an idol of something else
- Luther observes that you do not lie, commit adultery, or steal unless you first make something more fundamental to your security, comfort, satisfaction or hope than Jesus

- When you lie, for example, your idol of reputation and approval with others is more important to your sense of happiness than the love of Jesus
- When a person commits adultery, their idol of pleasure and comfort are more fundamental to their sense of fulfilment than knowing Jesus
- In other words, Luther is saying we sin because, at that place and moment ... we trust something / idolise something other than Jesus to give us the heart's desire we are craving other than what we have in Christ
- Idolatry, then, is the fundamental root of our sins and problems
 - Whatever it might be
 - Anger, laziness, porn addiction, greed, pride, selfishness, overwork, relationship problems
 - All because we are looking to some idol to give it to us,

3. Exposing our idols

- As we've seen, an 'idol' is anything more fundamental than God to our security, comfort, satisfaction or hope
 - Idolatry is not so much wanting bad things ... but it's turning good things into ultimate things
- This means anything can become an idol including good things such as
 - career, family, success, a cause, material possessions, other people, physical attractiveness, romance, human approval, financial security, your place in a particular social circle or institution
- **Identifying your idols**
- How do you identify what your idols are?
- Helps to ask yourself questions like
 - What do I fear losing the most?
 - What do I worry about most?
 - What makes me inordinately angry?
 - What do I rely on or comfort myself with when things go badly or get difficult?
 - Where does my mind go when I am free?
 - What makes me feel the most self worth?
 - What would really make me truly happy?

- Asking those questions is helpful to identifying your idols, however as Tim Keller points out, it's too simplistic to say a
 - A person's idol is material possessions just because they work too hard
 - A man who has a series of one-night stands idolises sex
- Because more often than not there is deeper idol of the heart sitting behind the idol that's more observable on the surface
- Keller says we have four deep / far idols that are really at the root of our life and wellbeing
 - Comfort
 - Power
 - Approval
 - Control
- Those are deep desires of the heart that we are so often craving to be fulfilled and we look to things other than God to give them to us
 - And they reveal themselves in different ways
- Examples
 - Porn > seeking to satisfy your desire for comfort
 - Careerism / workaholism > power or approval
 - Sex / romance > approval, power, comfort
 - Beauty body image > skinny or muscles, wrinkles, hair etc > approval
 - Money > working hard > two jobs > comfort or control / security
- Kids
 - Overly angry at kids
 - Because our sense of worth as a parent is bound up in the behaviour of our kids
 - We want our kids to behave, be good boy because that will reflect well on us > it will give us our of worth or value
 - But when they misbehave this threatens his idol and others will think of me as a failure / failed parent > we get excessively angry
 - Our deep idol is approval, near idol is our kids and their behaviour
- Also make idols of our children as we seek to ensure
 - Right schools
 - Good grades
 - Right friends
 - Right opportunities
 - It could be that we're trying to nurture and care for our children
 - But it could be that deep down we're really motivated by our idol of security

- We want them to be secure
 - Have good grades, to get a good HSC mark, to get into a good uni course, so they can get a good job, earn enough money to live in a nice suburb
- All these things ... work, sex, romance, our bodies, money, children and families are all good things
 - The Bible not calling on us to hate or renounce them
 - We are to rejoice in the goodness of them
 - The issue is when we turn these good things into ultimate things
- That's what our idols looks like
- But we also need to be aware of the effect idols have on us
- ***Idols are the root of our sinful behaviour***
- The Bible doesn't consider idolatry to be one sin among many
- Rather, idolatry is always the reason we ever do anything wrong
- Why do we ever fail to love or keep promises or live unselfishly?
- Of course, the general answer is "because we are weak and sinful"
 - But the specific answer is always that there is something besides Jesus Christ
 - that you feel you must have to be happy,
 - that is more important to your heart than God, and
 - that is enslaving the heart through inordinate desires
 - For example, we wouldn't lie unless first we had made something—
 - human approval
 - reputation or
 - financial advantage
 - more important and valuable to our hearts than the grace of God
- So the secret to change is always to identify and dismantle the basic idols of the heart
- All our sinful behaviour therefore stems from our lack of unbelief in the gospel
 - That is, we are failing the to delight in the Lord and the grace of the gospel ... because **at that moment** we love the idol of heart more than Jesus

- Therefore we will never really change ... until we come to grips with the way in which our heart is resisting the gospel and continuing to love earthly things more than Christ

- ***Idols are false saviours***
- One of the reasons we hold onto idols is we think they can give us the things we want better than Jesus can
 - We look to them to give us power, comfort, approval or control
 - If I have that thing ...
 - then I am okay
 - I feel good
 - my life is worthwhile
- Israel saw their idols as alternative saviours
- Didn't think God was going to come to the party, so turned to other gods to save them and provide for them

- But idols are false saviours
 - They don't deliver
 - They let us down

- ***Idols are powerful and enslave us***
- The other thing we need to be aware of about our idols is they are powerful and enslave us
- On the one hand, idols are an empty nothing with no real power to help or to save us
 - A carved image or a love of cycling
- But on the other hand, they're also very powerful and exercise great control over us
 - They enslave us
 - Once we've come to believe that something will really make us happy, then we cannot help ourselves--we must follow our god

- Then they drive us into the ground because we must have them
 - If we lose a good thing, it makes us sad
 - But when we lose an idol, it devastates us
- And so we'll do all we can to maintain our idol ... often doing things that are irrational or damaging

- Example - cycling is an idol
 - Up watching TDF until 2am in the morning non-stop for three weeks

- Spend more money on your bikes than normal ppl spend on cars
- Have all the latest gadgets, gear and
- You're happy to wear lycra in public!
- Idea of fun is to go on long rides on the weekend ... and you're quite ok to get up at 5am to do it!
- You think all this behaviour that is driven by a love for cycling is normal ... but in reality your idol is controlling you

- More seriously
 - If a person's idol for comfort compels them to start gambling
 - Horses, casino, pokies, lotto, scratchies
 - Want a big pay day so they can have a comfortable life
 - But such a person's idolatry of comfort destroys them
 - They don't know when to stop / they can't stop
 - They spend huge amts of money > usually more than they can afford > often end up ruining their marriage and losing their house along the way

- Anxiety
 - A person's idol of control makes them extremely anxious when with their kids
 - Not let them out of their site
 - Won't let them do anything remotely risky
 - Always saying "No" to things when the kids ask to do something
 - Getting irrationally angry when they kids do something they are uncomfortable with
 - Far idol of control > revealing itself in anxiety ... and it's powerful and enslaves

- At the fundamental level, our idols are destructive because they cause us to turn our hearts away from God

- If you're a Christian ... I hope you're start to get the picture that it's the idols of our heart that are the things holding you back from growing in godliness and Christ-likeness
 - If there's a particular sin in your life that you want to get rid of
 - You can't just simply try harder and over-come it
 - Because that's just engaging the will
 - You can't just say to yourself ... I'm a Christian, Jesus died for my sin, I have the HS, I shouldn't doing this
 - That's just relying on your mind

- And so for the person struggling with porn, you can't just say
 - It's a sin, just stop it
 - Get an accountability partner, put blocking software on your computer
 - You gotta pray more
- That's all well and good ... but you can bend the will and appeal to your rationale all you want ... but until you deal with the heart ... you won't actually change anything

- If we are going to put sin to death in our life and mature as a Christian ... we need to deal with the idols of our hearts
- Because remember
 - What the heart loves, the will chooses, and the mind justifies.
- So we have to deal with the idols of our hearts

- Even if you're not a Christian person here this morning, ... you also need to deal with the idols of your heart ...
 - because that's the only way you are going to change and become a better person and help you flourish in life
- The only way you're going to overcome your
 - anger problem
 - selfishness
 - anxiety
 - workaholism
 - excessive spending
 - Is to dig deep and identify the heart idol that driving all that and controlling you and undermining the type of person you desire to be

4. Replacing our idols

- So what do you do?
 - Once you've recognised your idol/s and you know you need to do something about it ... what do you do?
 - How do you get rid of it?
 - How do you do the surgery on your heart that you need to in order to bring about the heart change you desire

- For starters, you can't just say you're going to get rid of it ... you actually need to replace your heart idol with something else > something better
- Listen to this by Thomas Chalmers
 - Scottish minister and theologian of early C19th > language not modern

- Chalmers talks about the 'Expulsive power of a new affection'

[SLIDE x3]

- *It is seldom that any of our [bad habits or flaws] disappear by a mere process of natural extinction. At least, it is very seldom that this is done through the instrumentality of reasoning...or by the force of mental determination. But what cannot be destroyed may be dispossessed--and one taste may be made to give way to another, and to lose its power entirely as the reigning affection in the mind.*

The boy ceases at length to be a slave of his appetite, but it is because a [more 'mature'] taste has brought it into subordination. The youth ceases to idolize [sensual] pleasure, but it is because the idol of wealth has...gotten the ascendancy. Even the love of money can cease to have mastery over the heart because it is drawn into the whirl of [ideology and politics] and he is now lorded over by a love of power [and moral superiority]. But there is not one of these transformations in which the heart is left without an object. Its desire for one particular object is conquered---but its desire to have some object...is unconquerable....The only way to dispossess the heart of an old affection is by the expulsive power of a new one...It is only...when admitted into the number of God's children, through faith in Jesus Christ, that the spirit of adoption is poured out on us--it is then that the heart, brought under the mastery of one great and predominant affection, is delivered from the tyranny of its former desires, and the only way that deliverance is possible. Thus...it is not enough...to hold out to the world the mirror of its own imperfections. It is not enough to come forth with a demonstration of the evanescent character of your enjoyments. . . to speak to the conscience. . . of its follies. . . Rather, try every legitimate method of finding access to your hearts for the love of Him who is greater than the world.

- Chalmers explains
 - Can't just get rid try harder and get rid of your idol
 - Even if you do overcome your idol ... it's not because you overpowered it ... its normally because you've replaced it with a new idol
 - As men mature throughout life ... typically their idols change ...
 - Young men > pleasure / girls
 - 30's > money
 - 40's > career
 - 50's > more senior roles > power

- Nearing retirement > legacy
- The only way to deal with your idol is to replace it with something else ... something bigger, better, more beautiful
- Chalmers point is ... that its only when Jesus is the hearts number one love and desire ...
 - that lasting transformation can take place ...
 - because only Jesus and the grace of the gospel has the power to truly transform the heart
- If you want a pattern in your life to change in any lasting way, it will not be enough to simply resolve to make a change or even have good friends encouraging you in your struggles
 - You must apply the gospel to your heart at the point of your idols
- Colossians 3:1-9
 - *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² **Set your minds on things above**, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*
 - Our hearts as well as our minds need to be renewed > they need to be set on heavenly things
- 'Setting your mind and heart on things above' where 'your life is hid with Christ in God' means an appreciation, rejoicing, and resting in what Jesus has done and offers you in the gospel
 - And as you are able to apply the gospel to the particular idol of your heart and begin to see how Jesus is bigger, better and more beautiful than the earthly things you are idolising ...
 - You and I will begin to re-order our loves
 - That is ...
 - our hearts affection will switch from loving, desiring and being controlled by our idols ...
 - to loving, desiring and obeying Jesus
- Because if you uproot the idol and fail to 'plant' Christ in its place, the idol will grow back
- So for instances ...
- Beauty
 - See that Jesus came to be the Suffering Servant who was ... Isaiah 53:3
"*despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with*

suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

- In going to the cross he gave up his beauty ... so he could take all our ugliness and deal with it at the cross so that we could be washed clean, clothed in righteousness and made beautiful in the eyes of our maker once more
- Money
 - See that Jesus Christ, even though he was rich, was willing to go to the cross and become poor, so that for our sakes, we might become rich and share in all blessing of a heavenly inheritance
- Anxiety / Security
 - See that Jesus Christ was so anxious about going to the cross for our sin that his sweat was like blood falling to the ground. Yet he did it so that you and I could have the unshakable assurance of our eternal future being utterly secure because of what Christ has already done for us
- And friends as we begin to apply the gospel to the idols of our heart we will begin to see Jesus is far bigger, better and more beautiful than anything, any earthly idol might promise but inevitably fail to give us
- As you and I begin to see that ...
 - little by little
 - day by day
 - we'll begin dismantling the idols of our heart and reordering our loves
- As we relinquish our idols
 - We'll start to see them having less and less power and control over us and our lives
 - We'll begin to see a transformation of our lives happening
 - Not because we are trying harder
 - But because there has been a transformation happening within our hearts
 - And rather than being enslaved to our idols, we'll begin to see and experience how the good news of Jesus and grace of the gospel actually sets us free

5. Conclusion

PRAY

Almighty God, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden: cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the

inspiration of your Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love you, and worthily magnify your holy name; through Christ our Lord. Amen.