

Faith Triumphs Over Idolatry

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[0 : 00] you in this matter. If this be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O King. But if not, be it known to you, O God, that we will not serve, or O King, that we will not serve gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Thanks, Corey. This is how advertising works. Ready? This is how advertising works. Make consumers aware of what they are missing, what they don't have, what they are lacking, what they wish they had, you know, if only. And then once that need is exposed, whether it is a real need, or whether it is just a perceived need, then you exploit the consumer's desire to meet their need by offering them a service or a product that they right now can't possibly live without.

You can see this especially in infomercials. You know what I'm talking about. Maybe you are not sleeping as well as you could be. Do you know what you really need? You need a new pillow. Or perhaps you are concerned about the environment, right? Then what you really need is to mow your lawn with a new battery-powered mower. Maybe if you are exhausted or bored or just hungry, you need to book a cruise right now. Advertising is successful in this way. When consumers reflect or imitate the images they see. I see others sleeping well on a new pillow. I want that for myself. I see others concerned about the environment, mowing, not having to deal with gasoline or oil anymore. I'm tempted by this. One of you men needs to talk me out of this. So I need to go and get a new mower that's battery powered. Maybe I just need to go on a cruise and just get away. Okay? Now, this desire to imitate or reflect is observed quite easily in children. If you give them a plastic kitchen, a plastic play set, don't be surprised if they prepare meals like mom and dad.

And suddenly you are also having to pretend to eat this food that they have prepared for you. And when kids play with Play-Doh, inevitably someone is going to either make a snake and be thinking about being a zookeeper or they're going to turn that snake into spaghetti or a burger or whatever.

[2 : 53] Why? Because they want to imitate the things, the pictures, the images that they see. Perhaps you have observed your children disciplining their dolls or their pets or their siblings in some way.

Like you're going to time out now. What are they doing? They are reflecting, imitating the image that they are seeing in you.

We have some cute videos of Samuel and Chloe playing church and pretending that they are preaching.

Some of it's pretty good. Some of it's pretty good. Maybe you have recently purchased a Bible for one of your children. What are you doing? They want to be like you.

They want to have what you have when you go to church. So they are wanting to imitate and reflect your likeness. Do you see that? Kids want to be like those that they look up to.

[3 : 57] And all of us adults, we are just big kids. We see an ad and we want to be like those well-rested, environmentally conscious, and happy people who are on cruises.

And so we buy pillows and lawnmowers and vacations. Where does this behavior come from? Where does this behavior that makes us inclined to imitate or reflect come from?

Well, in Genesis chapter 1 and verse 27, we read this. God created man, male and female, in his own image. Why did God make us this way?

He made us so that we would be his representatives on earth. So that we would imitate and reflect him in our dealings with others on earth.

Humans make the invisible God visible. Do you see that? We think like him. We love like him. We respond like him.

[4 : 59] And when we do those things, we make the invisible God visible. And we are imaging, we are reflecting his likeness in the way that we act.

But, like a muffin that occasionally comes out of the muffin tin, all crumbly and broken, far more often than we would like.

We do not look very much like the God that we are supposed to be imaging. We do not think or love or respond like him.

What went wrong? What went wrong? In the garden, the serpent tempted Adam and Eve to reflect his image rather than God's image.

He tempted them to imitate his desires and conform their behaviors to his rebellion against God.

[6 : 06] Instead of worshiping and serving their creator, Adam and Eve bowed down and worshipped the creature that God had made.

And they began to pattern their lives after a creature rather than a creator. And what is he like?

What are his behaviors?

Unbelief, disobedience, deception, devouring of those around him. Friend, you will become like what you worship.

Character is never neutral. You are either being conformed to the desires and the responses and the behaviors under the world, under the direction of the devil, or you are being transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit to the desires and the responses and the behaviors that image, that reflect, that imitate the Lord Jesus Christ.

But your character is never neutral. Paul confirms this in Romans chapter 12. He writes, Do not be conformed.

[7 : 27] Do not be conformed. Do you see it? To this world. But be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Character is never neutral. Do you remember Guess and Esprit and Exclamation Perfume?

Or maybe Jerbo Jeans or Doc Martens or Jakar Cologne? Man, my freshman year at Moorhead High School, it came after nine years of Christian school education and a fairly well-sheltered childhood.

And I just desperately wanted to fit in. And I didn't. Not at all. Not even a little bit. I remember my parents taking me out to buy some new clothes.

And I did not get Jerbo jeans or Doc Martens shoes. But a pair of Levi's and a couple quick silver t-shirts certainly did not hurt my image. Okay?

[8 : 37] I wanted to be like those that I was looking up to because I wanted them to like me. And so I was willing to pattern my looks after them so that I could fit in.

So that I could belong. You will become like what you worship. Look for a moment at Isaiah chapter 6.

Isaiah chapter 6. It will be on the screen. This is verse number 8. Isaiah 6 verse 8. Here is Isaiah's commissioning.

Keep on hearing.

Can you imagine a commencement speech at a college that sounds like this? Isaiah is being sent to God's people and yet his message is a message of judgment and not hope.

[10 : 27] Imagine installing elders with this type of a sermon. Tell the people to listen but not understand. Tell them to see but not be able to make sense of the things that they are seeing.

Make the people's hearts dull and not tender so that they do not repent and come to me for healing. Wow.

This is the irony of idolatry. The irony of idolatry.

Why does God commission Isaiah with words that seem to lack mercy and grace and forgiveness that we would expect from God? And the answer to that question is this.

For hundreds of years, God's people have worshipped and served idols. The people are guilty of idolatry and they refuse to repent.

[11 : 31] And so God gives Isaiah this message of judgment. My people have ears but they won't be able to hear. They have eyes but they are not going to be able to see.

They have hearts but they will not be healed. I wonder if you would watch for this principle as you read scripture. Whenever you are reading scripture and you see sensory organs like eyes and ears that are malfunctioning, God is speaking not about sin in general or sinners in general.

God is speaking about sinners who are idolaters. Whenever you see ears that are not working and eyes that are not working, we're talking about idolatry.

Look at Psalm 115. I talked to the kids about this for just a few minutes. So they are well versed on this text. This is verse number four.

Their idols are silver and gold, the work of human hands. Are you ready kids who are in the room? They have mouths but what? They do not speak.

[12:41] He's describing the idols. They have mouths but they do not speak. They have eyes but what? They do not see. They have ears but do not hear.

They have noses but do not smell. They have hands but do not feel. Feet but do not walk. And they do not make a sound in their throat.

All of this describing their idols. Verse 8. Those who make them become like them. This is the irony of idolatry.

You become like what you worship. And if you choose to worship an idol. You will become like that idol.

No longer able to see. No longer able to hear. A heart that becomes hardened and not tender to God's spirit and God's word. Daniel 3 is Nebuchadnezzar's response to his dream in chapter 2.

[13:55] There's some clues in the text that help us pick up on this. In his dream he sees an image. And then he makes an image in chapter 3.

A statue. But his statue, his image is not made of a variety of metals like what he saw in his dream. No. No, not Nebuchadnezzar.

He makes his entire image of gold. He is not content merely being the head. What is the message that Nebuchadnezzar sends?

My kingdom will last forever. My kingdom will last forever. I am not content to be the head. God's revelation of the future.

I'm going to thwart that. How am I going to thwart that? By gathering all of the people and causing them to bow down and to worship this image that I have set up.

[14:54] Not an image with a head of gold and so on down the image. But an image made entirely of gold. I find it so interesting that even though Daniel writes to us from a pagan, in other words, a godless nation of Babylon, Daniel doesn't mention specific Babylonian gods.

It would make sense if Nebuchadnezzar's image, if the statue that he set up, was an image of Marduk or Bel or some other Babylonian deity.

But Daniel doesn't tell us that. We do get one clue about this image. And that is nine times Daniel tells us Nebuchadnezzar set it up.

Would it surprise you if this image was of himself? That would not be surprising at all, would it?

The head of gold is now an entire statue of gold. So when the people bow down and worship this idol, they are not bowing down to some Babylonian false god.

[16:08] They are bowing down before Nebuchadnezzar himself. His kingdom of gold, his feet, his achievement. Look at Babylon that I have made.

This is idolatry without religion. They are not bowing to one of the Babylonian deities.

They are bowing to a man-made kingdom of gold. Daniel chapter 3 and verse 1.

Notice how the scripture repeats words as I read through this. I will try to emphasize some things to help us capture this. But I'm also not going to, I don't want to overdo it.

Okay? So listen carefully. King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold whose height was 60 cubits and its breadth 6 cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

[17:20] Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Then the satraps, the prefects, and the governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And they stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up.

And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. Therefore, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, the pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, all the peoples, nations, and languages fell down and worshipped

the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

Therefore, at that time, certain Chaldeans came forward and maliciously accused the Jews. They declared to King Nebuchadnezzar, O king, live forever. You, O king, have made a decree that every man who hears the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music shall fall down and worship the golden image.

[18 : 59] And whoever does not fall down and worship shall be cast into a burning, fiery furnace. There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego.

These men, O king, pay no attention to you. They do not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up. Did you smirk a little when I read those lists of the people and the list of the instruments?

Friends, I think God intends for us to smirk a little bit when we read those lists. Do you know why? Because idolatry without religion is foolish. It is as ridiculous as repeatedly writing the same lists of words over and over and over in the text.

We smirk because it seems so strange to have to repeat yourself again and again and again. All the people hear all the instruments and they bow in worship.

[20 : 13] They act like Pavlov's dogs. Kids, you remember what I taught you about that this morning? They act like Pavlov's dogs. The bell rings and the dogs begin to salivate even though there is no food for them.

So with these people, the music plays and mindlessly, thoughtlessly, they bow down in front of the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

And the music plays and they bow down in front of the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

What are they getting from this image?

Nothing. Idols are consummate consumers. They're only takers. Never givers.

In mass, they absentmindedly and automatically bow down. Isn't this behavior absurd? Doesn't it seem ridiculous?

[21 : 14] Isn't it foolish? They have become like what they worship. Thoughtless, mindless, undiscerning, robotic.

Hear the music, bow down in worship. Hear the music, bow down in worship. This is what sets Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego apart. Everyone else is doing it thoughtlessly and mindlessly like robots.

And Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego's faith in God says no. We refuse to be thoughtless.

We refuse to be mindless. We refuse to do this thing, whatever this thing is, without careful thought and consideration and discernment.

I don't think this will surprise you, but I'll just say it for the record so we have it on record.

[22 : 17] I don't bow down to the statue that I brought to show you last week. I put it back in the bag. I threw it in a cabinet in my office.

It is good for two things. One, a visual during a sermon. And two, a white elephant gift someday. It's no good for anything else at all.

We don't tend to bow down and to worship actual idols. Not so much here in this country. I'm not saying it doesn't happen. I know it does and it can happen.

But that is not our typical. It is not our default. But steadfast, we can also be guilty of idolatry without religion.

And we may return to our idol so often to worship that we become locked in its grip.

[23 : 19] So that like the people in Daniel 3, we absentmindedly and automatically just do it again. We just bow down before whatever our idol is again.

We just worship it again. Thoughtlessly. Mindlessly. We have become like what we worship.

We no longer see or hear or think or feel the grace of guilt that leads us to repentance. This is the foolishness of addiction.

Causes us to behave in mindless, thoughtless, undiscerning ways. I want people to like me.

I want to feel valued and respected. With the help of counselors and friends who love me, I have become aware that I am a relationship addict.

[24 : 23] I will protect my relationships with people at all costs. And on the one hand, that may sound like a lovely bit of loyalty. And on the other hand, I may begin to have behaviors that demonstrate I am no longer being careful or thoughtful or honoring God with my behavior.

And I am no longer caring that these relationships that I am fighting to hold on to are actually harming me and the people that I love. I begin to engage in these relationships, not out of loyalty, but out of addiction.

Out of a sense of having to have it. Out of a sense of never wanting to lose it. And I think that I have the idol in my grasp.

And what is the reality? This idol, without religion, has gripped me. It's holding on to me. It's not letting me go.

And I keep coming back again and again, like Pavlov's dogs, bowing before it absentmindedly. Thoughtlessly. Carelessly. What do you do absentmindedly or automatically?

[25 : 46] Where does your mind go when you have a few moments of quiet? What do you default to thinking about? What do you default to doing? What do you ruminate on when you're on a walk and you have finished praying and now there's nothing really going on in your mind?

What is it that comes to mind that you choose to dwell on? What do you return to again and again and again, oblivious to the effects on yourself or others?

I wonder if there is an idol that has you in its addictive grip. Maybe it's your wealth or your financial security and you begin to look like your idol because of how you dress or what you drive, the property that you purchase, the vacations that you take.

All of it says, I've got it made. You have become like your idol. Maybe you think too much or too little about what you're eating and you have become consumed with what you are supposed to be consuming.

Maybe your addiction is a relationship and you return to it again and again. But you've stopped thinking carefully about it. You've stopped committing it in prayer to the Lord because you don't want the relationship to change and you're afraid of losing it.

[27 : 11] Maybe the addiction is lustful pleasure. Maybe it's alcohol. Maybe it's an activity that you just can't stop thinking about. Maybe it is some grievance, some hurt that you have endured, some wrong that has been done to you.

And when you have moments of quiet, that's where your mind goes. That's what you want to talk about. Maybe your addiction is control.

And when your life spins out of control, your anxiety and your insecurity flare up and you respond with anger or domineering behavior. You want control so bad.

But listen, your idol is controlling you. Do you see that? You have become like what you worship. Three Jews face a life or death decision.

But rather than fitting in with these lists of mindless people, rather than participating in idolatry, rather than breaking God's commandment and dishonoring the God who is rightly jealous for his people's attention and affection, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refuse to bow and demonstrate remarkable faith.

[28 : 41] Look again at verse 16. Yeah. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego answered and said to the king, Oh, Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter.

No debate. No dialogue. No discussion. You're not going to convince us. You can't plea bargain us into bowing. No second chance. No third chance. None of that matters.

We have thought about this. We have probably, I think we can assume, prayed about this. We are not going to absentmindedly follow the example of all of those other people.

If this be so, if you are going to throw us, if you throw us into this burning, fiery furnace, our God, whom we serve, is able to deliver us from the burning, fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of your hand, O king.

But if not, but if not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the golden image that you have set up.

[29 : 52] In contrast to the foolish mindlessness of our addictive idolatries, authentic faith is careful thoughtfulness.

Think about that for a minute. Sometimes we think about faith and we describe faith as like taking a leap in the dark. That's terrible. That's an awful descriptor of faith.

Faith is not a leap in the dark. Faith is careful, reasoned thoughtfulness. What is it that you are carefully reasoning and thinking about and being mindful of?

The object of your faith. What is the object of our faith? It is God. It is the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

