

**Intro:**

Why a worship series? Whether we're Christian or not, we need to constantly remember this question and the answer. We've looked at a positive answer: It is what we were created for, and so it makes us truly human. We've looked at a negative answer: if God is there and truly exists, then there can be some serious consequences if we get this wrong. It's important stuff. And hence this series...

Our talk today is going to touch again on some positive and negative aspects of worship, but focus more how the "how" of it- the method involved. Every week as included a how, of course, but this week a little more. And my hope is again that we will push forward and continue to be who really ought to be.

Now, I want to get started with a little question for you and your neighbor to discuss: what first comes to your mind when you hear the word "idol?" (ask group)

Idol is one of those words that means different things in different contexts. In the context of worship, it is crucial to be aware of it. In fact, setting up an alternative god-an idol- has drastic consequences. But there is hope and a way forward in terms of how we can and should worship: worship in spirit and truth.

Background: Our story is about again, a king of the nation of Israel, a king who existed almost a thousand years before Jesus came on the scene. In fact, we will be talking a few more times about these kings and events in their lives, so we've created a little timeline of history here to help us understand the Bible a little better.

Last week, we talked about the second king of Israel, a king named David. David had a son, Solomon, who reigned after him. But because of various events, the kingdom was split in two after king Solomon- the northern part was called Israel, the southern part called Judah. Today, we're looking at the beginnings of Israel, and how their first king setup a system of idolatry, with its consequences. Our hope is to learn from this and move toward worshipping correctly.

Let' read our text: 1 kings 12:25-33

**Idolatry is bad and has its consequences.**

It's pretty clear that our man Jeroboam here is setting up an alternative system of worship that is clearly bad. But I think it's important to note how it is happening. First, it happens through certain motivations. And second, it happens through something called syncretism.

*1. Motivations:*

Text: v.26-28. How would you describe Jeroboam's motivation? (ask group)

Control, Self-Centeredness, Fear, Convenience.

Notice how this leads to idolatry. And on its way, these motives use a little bit of syncretism as well. What does this word mean?

*2. Syncretism*

Idolatry- worship something who is not actually god, usually with an image to help.

Syncretism- blend religions or worldviews together where the end product is something that is not the true God, and does not actually please the true God. The calves were borrowed from the cow worship of some of the indigenous people of the area, Baal was the name of the cow-god. And these shrines on high places were also taken from the indigenous people there. Note how he is blending this with the people's concept of the God who brought them out of Egypt, their god. This blending is called syncretism.

*Why do I bring this up?*

While some of us do deal actual idols that have sway over us, the rest of us deal more in the realm of motivations and cultural syncretism more than anything else. And you know what, many us as a result actually end up struggling with idolatry. Let's look at some examples of how this happens:

*Motives.* Note how the various motives can lead us down the wrong path:

Self-centeredness. Religion is how I determine it; I pick the rules. I'm Christian, but I think sleeping with my boyfriend is ok, or not committing to a church family is ok, or getting rich is alright.

You know what we end up becoming? We end up becoming idolators- we call the shots. Or we end up being polytheists- we put God in a box here, and over here we don't let him affect our lives- we have two gods! We are polytheists!

*Syncretism.* One of our biggest cultural values as people living in the US is comfort. Isn't it? Now, God is not against comfort, but for some of us we have incorporated this cultural value of comfort- we've syncretized it- to such an extent that it has become a god.

I mean, just think of how the idea of "comfort" factors into your answers to these questions (on slide):

- What do you daydream about?
- How do you think about your future?
- What occupies your thoughts?
- What do you spend most of your time doing?
- What would you like to spend most of your time doing?
- In what ways do you envy others?

Reality is, you can substitute anyone of cultural values, and discover that you are an idolator: Power, Relationships, Work/Money, Pleasure, Wisdom, Spirituality, Immortality, Comfort

Again, not to say that God is against this. Which leads to the question: how do I not do it, or more so, how do I know when I'm crossing the line? I mean, you may feel after this that it is nearly impossible to worship God correctly, almost hopeless. How can we begin to worship truly?

**Two points:**

**True Worship takes consistency over time, or perseverance.**

How do I get this from our text? By taking a look at the bigger picture of the book of Kings. You know, its interesting to note the unfortunate consequences that result in Jeroboams idolatry. There are some personal consequences that happen in the next chapter- read it when you get a chance, because it is one of the most dramatic stories of the Old Testament.

But the amazing thing is that there are long term consequences as well. This sin of Jeroboam is repeatedly committed by subsequent kings, and it keeps going until the destruction of this nation of Israel. See 1 Kings 15:30, 34; 16:19; 16:26, 2 Kings 17:22-23.

Here's the deal: if idolatry and syncretism, or false worship, is a constant temptation, then true worship is something that is going to have to be pursued and fought for continually and consistently over time.

This is key for some of us at this moment, because some of us have been slowly giving in to inconsistency in some areas of our lives that God wants us to be consistent in. You know it- I don't have to get in it here. Can I just exhort you to hang in there, fight with all you have to be consistent, to persevere?

**True worship is actively engaged by spirit and truth.**

It is interesting that in this same territory where one of the most definitive acts of false worship is setup, Jesus gives one of the most definitive statements of what true worship is.

Read John 4: 21-26. Worship is done by Spirit and truth. What does he mean? I don't think it means heart and head.

*Spirit*- Generated, produced, brought about by God's Spirit, not just by us (as seen in John's usage). The implication is that we will have to cry out to God desperately to help us to avoid idolatry and syncretism, and become worshippers. We can't "get rid of our idols" by ourself. That is not the Christian message, anyway- hey, get your life in order, and then come to God. The Christian message is that you and I are so messed up, we need God to help us even take the first step!

*Truth*- Focused around Jesus (as seen in John's usage). That means we have to let Jesus and all that he taught us- which involves the whole Bible, actually, if you were to look at it- be the ultimate guide and authority for us, for every part of our lives. No more picking and choosing, us playing God. No more polytheism with God in a box.

This sort of worship with spirit and truth helps us navigate through the perils of idolatry and syncretism, and help us become **contextual**- truly authentic and relevant as people in our culture. Here's the deal: our lives and worship will always be affected by culture, from what we think about God to how we relate to Him. There has never been a time where worship and theology have ever been devoid of culture, even when the Bible was first written. The question is, what will actually distort the picture of God, and what won't? And how will we know if and when we cross the line? How can we be contextual?

The answer is by Spirit and Truth.

*This is helpful on a heart/soul level:* How will I know if my pursuit of making money becomes an idol?

*And this is something that is helpful on an external, form level.* One typically talked about example with this is in the area of music. And let me talk about this, because I think this is something we do need to further develop. We have languages, yes, to reflect the various cultures represented in this community. That's great. But the music style our world bounces their head to is not always what our music style is like here. We have an acoustic, unplugged, alternative folksy feel. Cool. But some of us bounce better to something like Heartless by Kanye, or the song Jai Ho in Slumdog Millionaire. Still others, of course, do Coldplay or American Rejects more. What if our worship had more of this musical diversity? I think it would be truly awesome. And I hope some of you will take up this challenge, let the Spirit and Truth guide you.

But back to the our hearts- that's where I'd like us to focus as we close. Where are our hearts?

Are we committing idolatry: Do we find some motives and desires for cultural syncretization that are leading to idolatry? Are we actively worshipping in Spirit and Truth- crying out to God's Spirit, giving Jesus the right and authority to have His way with us? Are we fighting to stay consistent?

**Response:**

Come receive prayer.

And especially those of you who are at the beginning stages of the spiritual journey. I hope you see today that this sort of stuff is super relevant to you. And God is perhaps calling you, challenging you, to begin to respond to him. What are the gods running your life right now? I want to challenging you to come on up and get some prayer as well.