

A World of Idols - Tim Keller

by From the Pulpit & Classic Sermons

Tim Keller's sermon emphasizes the need for Christians to engage their faith publicly in a world filled with idols and spiritual distractions.

Duration: 45:32

Scripture: Proverbs 1:20-21, Matthew 5:13-16, Matthew 23:13-36, Mark 6:30-44, Luke 10:25-37, John 4:1-42, Acts 17:16-21

Topics: "Radio"

Description

In this sermon, Tim Keller discusses the experience of the apostle Paul in Athens as described in Acts 17:16-21. Paul was distressed to see that the city was full of idols, and he engaged in reasoning and dialogue with both Jews and Greeks in the synagogue and marketplace. Keller emphasizes the importance of intellectual integrity and understanding Christianity in its own terms, rather than fitting it into modern categories. He highlights how Paul's encounter with the truth of Jesus Christ transformed his perspective, enabling him to see the idolatry and false salvation that people sought through their idols. The sermon encourages listeners to have a similar analysis of the world and to experience the transformative power of the gospel.

Transcript

Welcome to From the Pulpit and Classic Sermons. Each week we bring you a different message from some of history's greatest speakers in the Christian faith, and powerful sermons from modern preachers too. This week we have Tim Keller with his message, A World of Idols.

Acts 17, 16 to 21. While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there.

A group of Epicurean and Stoic philosophers began a dispute with him. Some of them asked, what is this babbler trying to say? Others remarked, he seems to be advocating foreign gods. And they said this because Paul was preaching the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.

Then they took him and brought him to a meeting of the Areopagus, where they said to him, may we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting? You are bringing some strange ideas to our ears, and we want to know what they mean. All the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there spent their time

doing nothing but talking about and listening to the latest ideas. This is God's word.

Now in our series here that we've been doing in the morning on the church, last week we came to talk about how the gospel, the essential message of Jesus Christ, changes us on the inside, how it revolutionizes us on the inside. And if we end there, I think modern people can really get into that. They say, that's great.

Surely you notice that the newspaper articles are telling you that the supposedly secular city is filled with people who want to be spiritual, and spirituality is a big thing. And people want now in a way that is surprising a lot of folks. People are reaching out and saying, I need spirituality.

But when I listen, and this is an oversimplification, of course, but when I listen to people talk about it, from what I can tell it goes like this. By spirituality they mean I want an inward center. I want an inward peace.

I want an inward... I want to be suffused with a sense of meaning and the sacred. I need that inward strength so that I can reach my goals, so that I can follow my agenda. Now the problem is that Christianity doesn't actually fit into that model, and we mustn't listen to the Christian message in a way that, you know, tries to work it in.

It doesn't fit in that model, because Christianity, though, on the one hand, is definitely inward transformation. It's a whole new agenda. It's not a way of helping you get to your agenda.

It's a whole new agenda. Put it this way. I think most people think of religion like this illustration.

Most people think of religion like this. Imagine you're in a room. It's a party.

There's 20 people at the party, and you're supposed to get out there and mix, and you just don't have it. You don't have the energy. You don't have the love.

You don't have the confidence. And so you say, how am I going to do that? And God comes up, and He touches you. And now you go out into the party.

Now you can meet people. Now you have joy. Now you have energy, you see.

Now you're ready to mix and do the things you want to do. That's not how Christianity understands what the touch of God means. Christianity would say, yeah, you're at a party, and you look out there.

There's 20 people, and you're sitting here, and you're real upset because you just don't have what it takes. And God comes up and touches you, and you feel inwardly renewed. But when you look out there, now you see 80 people, 60 people who were invisible now are visible.

And you see in the former approach, the difference between a person who's been touched by God and a person who is not touched by God, this person who's touched by God is out there meeting people, and the person who's not touched by God is sort of sitting there, needs inward strength. But Christianity would say, you don't just get it when God touches you kind of inward strength, but you get a whole new way of seeing everything. Everything.

You can't listen to music the way you did before. You can't relate to other cultures the way you did before. You can't look at yourself the way you did before, but you can't relate to other people the way you did before.

You relate to your government different. You relate to your neighborhood different. You relate to your job different.

Everything changes. And actually, the difference between a person who's been touched by God and a person who's not touched by God is not a matter of just inner energy. It's a matter of worldview.

I'll go further. It's a matter of sanity. Because if you haven't been touched by God, you look at the people who have, and they're walking around, and they're getting joy out of parts of the room that look to you like thin air.

And they're filled with joy because they're hearing and they're seeing something, and you don't see it at all. And they're avoiding areas that you walk right through, and then you fall down, and you say, what happened? Christianity does not just inwardly change you, but it transforms not just inside, but it transforms the way in which you relate to every part of the world. Now, to understand that is important for everybody here.

If you're a Christian, you say, yeah, I've heard you say that. What is that? How do I do that? And I will try to give you some principles today. What does it mean that Christianity transforms absolutely everything about my life? Modern people think religion is for the private world.

Christianity will never do such a thing. Christianity says, when you're touched by God, it's deeply personal, but it's not at all private. It changes everything.

So if you're a Christian, you need to know that. Now, if you're not sure you're a Christian or you're sure you're not a Christian, okay, if you're not sure what you believe or you're sure you don't believe, here's my suggestion to you. Please listen.

It's very important, and here's why. I can say this without fear of contradiction. I can definitely make this case, but I don't have the time to.

The vast majority of people who don't believe in Christianity have radically inaccurate ideas of what Christianity is. The vast majority of people who say, I've had it with Christianity, or I'm not interested, or I'm just indifferent to Christianity, they don't know what they're indifferent to. And what that means is--that's very dangerous--it means you don't know what you're rejecting.

And I would think there's nobody here that wouldn't want to know what it is they're indifferent to. No intellectual integrity. It's very dangerous.

And therefore, if you're here, you need to listen to understand what Christianity is. It's a very important way of understanding it, because almost always we take our modern categories, and we take our modern views, and we hear Christian lingo, or we hear Christian talk, and we work it into our category, say, oh, it's just like that, but it's not. Now, the best way to understand how Christianity doesn't just change you on the inside, but changes your relationship with everything in the world, is by looking how Paul reacts in this very famous place in time.

Saint Paul--let's just take a look under these headings. Where he went, how he felt, what he saw, and what he did. Okay? Where he went, what he saw--pardon me--where he went, what he felt, you know, how he felt, excuse me.

You know, I've gotten my--you know, went, saw. Went, felt, saw, and did. First of all, where he went.

Look, we're just going to look at these first few verses. In verse 17, he went not just to the place where people were worshipping the Jews and the God-fearing Gentiles, not just the place where the God of the Bible was worshipped, but he went into the marketplace day by day. That's where he went with his faith, into the marketplace.

Ah, what do we mean? Well, you know, one of the problems we have here is this word marketplace is just not going to evoke the reality because we don't have such a thing anymore. Not really. It's the agora, the marketplace in Athens.

Now, what do we know about that? First of all, you have to remember this. Athens was the cultural capital of the world at that time. Yes, it had been--it wasn't the power capital anymore because Rome had taken over Greece, but it was still the intellectual capital.

It was still the cultural capital. And in the midst of Athens, there was the marketplace, the agora. And one commentator puts it this way, on or just off the marketplace were temples, law courts, state offices, public archives, libraries, shops, concert halls, dance halls, gymnasiums, theaters, and galleries.

Now, who was there? Everybody. And it's because there was no technology, really, everybody was there. You had the town officials and judges deliberating.

You had artists creating. You had the stock market right there. Businessmen and--businessmen, I guess, were making all their deals.

You had the media because you didn't have newspapers, and therefore, you had to go face to face and listen to the heralds. You had the philosophers debating. Why? You didn't have journals.

You know, you couldn't work out your particular field of thought through journals debating back and forth. You had to go to the marketplace. You had to have face to face debates.

You didn't have a stock market. You didn't have computers. You didn't have telephones.

You had to go and actually make the deal. Everything happened in the marketplace. We have nothing like it anymore.

And therefore, this was the public space. This was the center of what set all--because it wasn't just wares. The marketplace was not just a place you shop for food.

This is not a shopping mall. This was a place you shopped for everything. This was the marketplace of ideas.

This was the marketplace of philosophies. This was the marketplace of business. This was the marketplace of everything, the marketplace for art.

This was the marketplace for everything. Everything happened here. And because it was Athens, maybe there's only three marketplaces in the whole Greco-Roman world, probably Rome and Athens and Alexandria.

These are the three marketplaces that most had effect on the culture and society of the whole Greco-Roman world, and Paul goes there with his faith. Paul goes there. Now, this doesn't make sense to modern people because our idea is religion is something--your faith is something for your private world.

It's something that keeps you happy and gives you inner peace, but you do not bring it to the marketplace. Now, of course, that's not at all what the Bible does. That's not what the Bible says at all.

In Proverbs chapter 1, there's a great place where Paul must have known this when he did this. Back in Proverbs chapter 1, what do we read? God says, my truth is just for the insides. It just helps you in your private life.

It gives you meaning. No. What does the Bible say? Wisdom cries aloud in the streets.

In the market, she raises her voice. At the head of the noisy streets, she cries out. At the entrance to the city gates, she makes her speech.

Now, you see why. The reason that this was a shock and is a shock today is because we're pagans again. See, paganism says everybody's got their own little territorial god.

You know, there's a god of Ephesus. There's a god of Athens. There's a god for, you know, for business people.

There's a god for fishermen. There's a god for this. Everybody's got their own god.

And because everybody's got their own god, that's fine. But you don't tell somebody, you know, the god, if you're worshiping the god of the fisherman, you don't go and tell the businessman how to live. And if you're worshiping the god of Ephesus, you don't tell the god of, you know, the Athenians how to live.

And therefore, everybody's got their own god, and that's how we see it again today. But if there's a god who's not the emanation of some aspect of creation, if there's a god who is the creator of everything, just now think. This is just logic.

Let's not talk about what's narrow or not. This is just logic. If there is a god who's created everything, then that god would have to be lord over every area, including the marketplace.

You wouldn't have, you couldn't keep this god in a private place. And so Paul moves on out with his faith into the marketplace, into the world of ideas, into the public realm. He raises his voice.

He talks every day, day by day. In other words, he says, shoppers. In a place where people shop for everything, he says, shoppers, this is the way.

Turn away from the empty. Turn away from the ephemeral. Turn away from the superficial.

Turn away from the partial. Turn to the substantial. Turn to the permanent.

All that is not eternal is eternally out of date. I guess that was C.S. Lewis, but maybe Paul said it first. That's what's going on here.

The Athenians were just one of the latest fad, and Paul says all that is not eternal is eternally out of date. All that is not substantial, all that is not universal, he said, you know, put it aside. Shoppers, this is the way.

And therefore, he was lifting up Christianity in the public place. Now, that's the first point. Your faith is for every part of your life.

It's for the way you work. It's for the way you relate to other cultures. It's the way you participate and get enriched through art, the way you watch a movie.

It's part of everything. Now, let's move on. You're going to say, well, how do I work that out? But let's just, for a second, let me just remind you this first point, and that is that that's the way to do it.

Put it this way. Somebody's going to say, and I, you know, I thought about this. I said, well, the trouble is Paul is a preacher.

And so when Paul takes the faith into the marketplace, we see what he's doing here. But how does that help me? I'm not a preacher. And that is a problem.

Let me give you another example, though, just to show you that the principle, though it has to be worked out in everybody's particulars, the principle is the same. In 2 Kings chapter 5, there's this great story of Naaman, who was the military prime minister of Syria. And he was a pagan, but he was also a leper.

And he comes to Israel, and he finds healing through the God of Israel and through the prophet Elisha. And then we get to the place where he says to Elisha, now I know there is no God except in Israel. And then what happens? Now, what's he going to do? He's discovered the true God, and he's received his healing, both on the outside, really, and on the inside.

Now, what is he going to do? Now, there's two things Naaman does not do. And you can go back and read them and what he does do, and I'm going to tell you. But it's worth pondering, and the reason it's so shocking is because virtually none of us get this balance down.

The first thing he doesn't do is he doesn't say, Elisha, let me stay here. There's nothing but dirty pagans back there, idolaters. And he says, you know what my job is? As the military prime minister, every week I have to go with the king, the king is on my arm, and I have to go into the temple of Rimmon.

And there the king bows down and I bow down. I can't do anything like that. I can never set foot in that temple anymore.

I know the true God. Therefore, can I stay here with just believers? He doesn't do that. Nor on the other side does he say, well, you know what? No problem.

I now have my healing. God has touched me, and it won't make any difference. I'll go back.

I'll do my job. There won't be any difference. I can keep it to myself.

There's no reason to rock the boat. He doesn't do that either. He neither avoids his culture nor capitulates to his culture.

He neither runs away from his culture, nor does he privatize his faith away from his culture. You know what he says? And this is something that I think both believers and non-believers are shocked at when they hear. What does he say? He says to Elisha, the prophet, he says, may the Lord forgive me.

This is Naaman talking. May the Lord forgive me when my master, the king, goes into the temple of Rimmon to bow down and is leaning on my arm, and I bow there also. May the Lord forgive me.

Here's what I will do. Give me enough dirt as two mules can carry so that your servant will never make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other God but the Lord. Now, I love this because it's so absolutely particular that nobody can dare copy it.

You're just going to have to go to the principle. It's so easy to be wooden when it comes to the Bible and miss the principle. Here's what he's saying.

He is saying, I am going to do my job. I'm the prime minister, and that's part of my job. But when I go in there, I'm going to have some dirt from Israel, and my servants are going to spread it, and I'm going to kneel down so that everyone who sees knows that I am sacrificing the God of Israel.

Now, somebody would say, oh, is that superstition? No, no, no, no, no. The dirt is not superstition. It's a witness.

It's a symbol. It's a witness. Here's what he's saying.

He's saying, I'm going to do my job, but I'm going to let everyone know, and that's my way of showing people. People are going to ask me about it. I'm going to tell them that I don't serve the way I used to serve.

Everything I'm doing, I'm doing out of honor for the true God. I'm still the prime minister, and that will affect the way he does his work, and I'll get to that in a second. But here's the point.

He neither privatizes his faith, nor does he run away and stay away. He doesn't engage. He doesn't run from his culture, and he doesn't capitulate to his culture.

He took his faith into his public life. He took his faith into the marketplace. Now, somebody's going to say, oh, see, nobody's going to do that.

You're going to have to work it out yourself. That was his way. Paul's doing his way.

You have to do your way. I don't know why in the world people say, oh, yeah, you're Christians. You believe the Bible.

You like pat answers. Pat answers? The Bible doesn't give you pat answers. Bible creates problems for you.

Don't you feel it? If you take the Bible seriously, are you walking out here saying, oh, I have to do--you don't even--you say, oh, my gosh, I now see what I've got to do, but I'm going to have to work it out. I'm going to have to be creative. I'm going to have to have wisdom.

It's going to take me all of my life to figure out how to do this. Pat answers. I'll tell you what a pat answer is.

A pat answer is to say there's no truth. A pat answer is to say there's no truth, so basically whatever feels good, you can just sort of go with the flow. That's a pat answer.

That takes no creativity. That takes no innovation, you see. There's no calling.

There's no pressure. There's no intensity. That's a pat answer.

Another kind of pat answer, of course, is on the other side and saying if you want to witness in your public life, here's exactly what you do. Every one of you, 2,000 of you, take these five things. That's the other pat answer.

Bible doesn't do either. Paul goes into the marketplace. That's where he goes.

Now, somebody's going to say, okay, tell me, how do I do this? And the answer is there's three, but they're mainly principles. Here's what you get. First of all, look at Paul Felt.

He was greatly distressed. Now, the first thing I'm going to tell you by way of practical application is this. The Bible, when you go to the Bible, some of us are so practical that we're impractical, and we miss what the Bible says.

In general, when you ask the Bible for guidance, when you say, I need guidance. I need to make this and that decision. I need to know whether I should go to school or not go to school.

I need to know whether I should marry this person or not marry this person. I need to know this. I need guidance.

How do I do it? And in general, the Bible does not tell you how to get God's guidance. It tells you the kind of person that discerns the will of God. Now, we don't like this.

We're very Western. You say, how can I face death? How can I face suffering? How can I have the wisdom? How can I understand these things? And the Bible continually says, here's the kind of character. Here's the kind of heart.

Here's the kind of person that works through these things. And you say, but I need this tomorrow. And it says, wait a minute, the kind of person, character, you're talking about reflection.

You're talking about prayer. You're talking about habits of heart. You're talking about time.

And I need this tomorrow. How Western. How sad.

So let's get started. It probably means that you won't be ready for tomorrow. But if you don't get started now, you won't be ready for next year or the year after that or the year after that.

And most of you are young. Now look, the first thing we learn here is Paul had deeply complex feelings. John Stott, a commentator on the book of Acts in this passage, he says, the reason we can't speak the way Paul speaks is because we can't see the way Paul sees, and the reason we can't see the way Paul sees is because we don't feel what Paul feels.

The feelings, now I know this is going to be incredible for some of you to hear a Presbyterian talk about feelings, but the first principle is you must have the feelings Paul had if you're going to be effective in the marketplace. Now the trouble with this word, it's a word that is kind of hard to translate, and every translation will do it differently. If I give it to you in the Greek, the literal Greek doesn't help much because it's the word *paroxysmus*, from which we get our word *paroxysm*, which means a seizure.

And that tells us something about the depth of the feeling. It doesn't really tell us about the nature of the feeling. A lot of people think it means he was just simply angry.

That's if you do a careful study, that this word tends to be associated in the Old Testament, in the Greek Old Testament, with places where it talks about how God feels when He sees people worshipping idols. But when God says, this provokes me, when He talks about His feelings, He says, the reason I am so provoked, the reason I am so distressed is because I am a jealous God. Now people really react to the places in the Bible where it says God is jealous because when we think of jealousy, we think of the kind of selfish jealousy.

We think of the proud jealousy that says, I don't like you because you've got something I want. But there's a healthy jealousy, there's a pure jealousy, there really is. In fact, the biblical word for jealousy, the idea of a jealous God, I think we know it, but it is so profound because it shows us that love is not just sweet feelings but thunderous feelings.

If you love somebody and you see them ruining their life, or if you love somebody and you see somebody wooing them in the wrong direction, you don't just say, oh, you get mad. Listen, the opposite of love is not anger. The opposite of love is indifference.

And anybody who's ever been deeply in love, just filled with love for somebody or something, knows that there's a sweetness, you're melted, you're filled with compassion, and you're filled with indignation all the time, all the time. If you've loved children, if you've loved a spouse, if you've loved parents, it's both. And you see, the reason that God says, I am continually provoked in my heart when I see you worshipping idols, that's because that's the complexity of love.

On the one hand, He's outraged at the dishonor, but on the other hand, jealousy means, I love you. I want you in my arms. I don't want you in the arms of that.

And when Paul was filled with... See, this is all in this word, greatly distressed. Paul has a deeply, deeply complex and very strong mixture of both indignation and compassion, and it's both, it's both, it's both. And you've got to have both.

See, on the one hand, you can see the compassion, because the word... What did he do out there in the marketplace? Did he get up? Did he say, you dirty idolaters? It says he reasoned, he dialogued. And he did such a good job, actually, that he was invited in to talk to the Areopagus, which was... These were the philosophers. These were the culture brokers.

And if you go ahead, and we didn't do it, if you read, you'll see that his speech starts off very civilly, very, very respectfully. So there was compassion. There was gentleness, but there's also indignation.

And here's why Paul was effective. If you're not filled with indignation, you will not have the courage to do what he did. And if you are only filled with indignation, you won't have the gentleness.

You won't be able to give people the impression that you care about them. You won't be able to get into their questions. You won't be able to understand them.

They won't feel respected. They'll turn you right off. Do you remember the place in John chapter 11 where Jesus comes to Mary and Martha, whose brother Lazarus just died? One of the most astounding insights is that I got when I listened to a tape on this once, was that Jesus walks up to Mary, and Mary says, If you

had been here, he'd be alive.

And he wept. That's all Jesus did. He just wept.

And Martha comes up to him and says the same thing. If you had been here, my brother, he'd be alive. And Jesus says, I am the life.

In one case, he's filled with tears. In the other case, he gives a stern lecture. And here's why.

Jesus Christ is a man just as much made of truth as of tears. And that's not true of the rest of us. We've all got our temperaments.

Some of us are full of sweetness, and some of us are full of thunder, but nobody does them both good. Some of us are great at the ministry of tears. Some of us are great at the ministry of truth.

And here's what I want you to know, that if you are only one or the other, if you're only indignant or compassionate, you won't change anybody's life, and you'll go out in the marketplace, and you'll be utterly ineffective. Oh, what's the solution? Let me just say something to both Christians and the people who are not sure where they stand. First of all, Christians, I want you to know something.

If you go by your natural proclivity, if you follow your natural temperament here, you will be ineffective, and you won't make good choices in the marketplace. You know, 98 percent of everything we say publicly, 98 percent of all our public expressions of Christianity in the public realm are either obnoxious or cowardly, and Paul was neither because he was filled with holy, loving jealousy, and we're not. We're either too afraid to open our mouths, we're too cowardly, or else when we do, we're obnoxious.

We're filled with either indignation or compassion. You say, well, how in the world do we overcome that? And the answer is this. Paul told the Corinthians when he first--this is how Paul must have done it.

Paul said to the Corinthians, when I first came to you, he said, I was filled with fear and trembling, which is, by the way, the first right thing, but he says, and I resolved to know nothing but Christ and Him crucified when I was among you. Paul looked at the cross. He burned it into his heart.

Now, somebody says, why? What does that mean? I'll tell you why. The cross is the only spot in any religion that shows us, on the one hand, a God so utterly and completely and relentlessly and absolutely and infallibly holy that He has to pour out wrath and divine justice on evil and sin, and at the very same time, the cross shows us a God who is so absolutely and completely and utterly and relentlessly and perfectly and infallibly loving that He'd do it on His own Son rather than lose us. And if you don't have a cross in your understanding, if you say, well, I don't understand the cross or I don't believe in the cross, if you don't have a cross in your religion, you will either have a moralistic religion or a relativistic religion.

You will either have a God who's very demanding and that's it, you know, live up or else, or you'll have a God who's so completely accepting but whose love for us cost Him not a thing. And moralistic or relativistic view of God, a thundering, thunder religion or sweetheart religion, never has changed anybody, never. Only the cross, only the gospel, that Jesus Christ had to die, God's that holy, and Jesus Christ had to die, He's that loving.

And when that is burned into Paul's heart, it turns him into the thing that basically we're not. Now, you say, I thought you were going to tell me how. No, I said sometimes we're so practical we're impractical.

The Bible says this is the kind of person who will make smart decisions out there, a person filled with holy jealousy, loving zeal, somebody who thinks so highly of God and so highly of people that he wants them in each other's arms, and he's outraged, and he is brokenhearted until he sees it. That's what you've got to do. Now, I said I want to say something here to people who aren't sure you believe.

Do you know fanatics? I guess you do. I understand the latest polls show that 75 percent of Americans would not like to have a fundamentalist living as their next-door neighbor. And, you know, considering what I think most people think of when they think of the word fundamentalist, I probably would say the same thing, you know.

I would probably check the same thing. But here's what I want you to think of. Surely you've been turned off by Christians who are clumsy in their expression, who are harsh, who are, you know, sounded condemning and so forth, and you see people say, I'm a Christian, and they do things like that.

Now, what do you think the solution is? You're absolutely right to be turned off. You're absolutely right to be upset. What do you think the solution is? And the reason I'm bringing this up is because I'm using this as a little learning tool for you.

I think what's very typical is people say, yeah, the gospel, yes, Jesus Christ, that's fine, that's fine, but don't go overboard. That's fine, the gospel, cross, Jesus, fine, but be more moderate. Don't go overboard.

Fanatics are people who go too far. No. See, this shows that you don't understand Christianity.

I'm not saying you've got to accept it here today. I wish you would, but I do insist you understand it. Anybody who says they're a Christian and is harsh or condemning, their problem is not because they're too fanatically devoted to the gospel, but they're not fanatically devoted enough, because the real gospel that I just gave you, the only place, the only religion, the only spot that we see a God who is not more fundamentally holy than fundamentally loving, anybody who understands the real gospel, that turns you into somebody who's both thundering and sweet, somebody who is absolutely gentle because, look, look at Jesus, somebody who's a fanatic in the sense of being harsh, you know, the person you're worried about, that person isn't too much like Jesus.

They're not enough like Jesus. They see the Jesus who says, I'm Lord of heaven and earth, but they don't see the Jesus who says a bruised reed, I will not break, a low burning candle, I will not snuff out in my ministry to you. They, you see, they see a moralistic or relative, they don't see the whole picture, and you know what? Martin Luther King understood this.

Martin Luther King stood up against racism, and how did he do it? Boy, every New Yorker loves Martin Luther King. I wish they'd listen to him. What did Martin Luther King say? Did he get up and he say, you know the trouble with racism, how we can deal with racism? People are too religious.

You're overly religious, you know, you're overly into this Christianity. We need to get rid of that. That will get rid of bigotry.

Absolutely not. What did he say? He said racism is not in line with the gospel. He said to the churches of the South, he says, you're not being true to the gospel.

He said, get more gospel oriented. He said, go to Jesus more, be more fanatically like Jesus Christ. You see, he understood.

Anybody who looks harsh, and probably they are, and condemning, and you say they need less of religion, maybe they need less of various religions, but not of Christianity, they need more. And if you think a person who is absolutely sold out for the gospel, if you think a person who is in a sense obsessed with what Jesus Christ has done for us on the cross, is a boring person, if you think that person is insensitive, is harsh, is going to always make you feel small, you haven't met one who really has. It's not that they're too fanatical, they're not fanatical enough.

Those are the people who are effective in the marketplace, okay? And secondly, I said the first thing, if you want to be effective there, you've got to feel what Paul feels. Why did I just spend so much time on it? Because I think, frankly, the rest will take care of itself, but not quite. Then secondly, you have to see what Paul sees.

Where did he go? The marketplace. What did he feel? Holy jealousy, deep complexity, indignation, and compassion. Then, what did he see? He saw idols under everything.

Now, you say, well, of course he saw idols. He was distressed because he saw idols. Heck, you go to Athens today, you'll see idols everywhere.

There's Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty. There's Ares, the goddess of power and war. There's Apollos, the god of music and art.

There's Bacchus, the god of fraternities. And you can go to all of these, and you say, well, of course, they were out there. There were statues.

You know, everybody could see them. There were statues. They were all there.

It took you a minute, didn't it, yeah? I thought about it. Anyway, but that's not what the word see is. See, the text could easily have said see.

It could have used a simple Greek word for see, blepo, or something, you know, just take a look. But it's the word that Luke uses to describe what Paul was doing there is the word theoreo, the word to theorize, to get underneath. Now, what the gospel will do, and this is actually the key to working out how to be a Christian in the public world, Paul saw that underneath all the art, underneath all the business, underneath all the government, underneath all the philosophy were idols, that the real problem with the world is not the bad things, but the good things that have become the best things.

And he saw what we should see, and this is how it changes the way we do things, that under every personality are idols, under all psychological problems are idols, under every culture is idols, under all moral problems are idols, under all social problems are idols, under all intellectual problems are idols. Now, you know, I'm going to do a Q&A afterwards, and if somebody really wants to press me on this, I'll spell it out. But let me, first of all, he, theoreo means he saw underneath everything.

And this is how a Christian does it. Naaman, when he went back, and he says, I'm going to go into the temple of Rimmon, but I'm not going to sacrifice to Rimmon. Somebody says, oh, that's awful, but you see, boy, he was smart.

What is the god of Rimmon? It was the god of Syria. What are we talking about here? Here's what's going on. They were worshiping their country.

Rimon was the god of Syria. They were worshiping Syria. The reason there's so much bloodthirstiness in the old days was because everybody had their own god, and therefore they saw themselves as superior to other people.

And here's what Naaman said. Naaman says, what I'm going to do is I'm going to go back, and I'm going to be the prime minister, and I'm going to serve my country, but I will not worship my country. Now, it's very typical of Christians to make a big difference, a big mistake here.

Some people know that they've made an idol out of their career. See, it's one thing... Apollos is the god of art, right? Is there anything wrong with art? No. Is there anything wrong with worshiping art? Yes.

And how do you worship art? When you say, this is my whole meaning in life, and artistic acclaim is, for me as an artist, what gives me an identity. Is there anything wrong with business? Is there anything wrong with competition? Is there anything wrong with a party? Bacchus? But when that's where I get my integration point, where that's where I get my meaning, where that is the thing I live for, and my dear friends, everybody... The gospel shows us that everybody is worshiping something. You don't use the word worship, but you're living for something, and let me put it to you this way.

Everybody has something that if they lose it, means they won't even want to live life anymore, and whatever that is, is the thing you're worshiping. Now, here's what Paul did. Paul said, I can get out now, and I can recognize and understand how everything changes.

You're a Christian, and you suddenly realize now that you're saved by grace and not through your being an artist, what are you going to do? You can run away and say, oh my gosh, the art world, oh my word, look at all these people. So look at that. Look at all the hubris.

Look at the people who get their very definition from being artists. Look at how they look down their nose at everybody else who's not. Look at how they live and die by what the critics say.

Look at all that. I want nothing to do with that, so you pull on back. Naaman didn't do that.

On the other hand, he didn't just go back and say, well, now I have peace in my private life. He says, I will serve my country, but I will not worship my country. I will serve in my career, but I will not worship my career.

If you have to run away from something that used to be an idol, you're actually still enslaved to it. You shouldn't just be emancipated. You've got to be even emancipated from your emancipation.

It's not enough just to say I'm free from that, meaning I can't even be involved in it anymore. You've got to say Jesus Christ is my glory, is my beauty, is my goodness, is my righteousness, is my love, is my meaning. And then what happens? You're going to do things differently than other artists.

You're going to dance differently than other dancers. You're going to do business differently than other businessmen and women, because like Naaman, you're going back into the temple, but you're letting people know visibly and in your heart everything you're doing is for God. God comes first.

Do you think that Naaman was as bloodthirsty as he would have been before? Do you think he was the racist he was before? How could he be? Because now he had the God who was the God of all human beings. His life wasn't broken into pieces the way paganism does it, but his life was united in a whole.

Dear friends, Paul saw idols under everything.

If you want to understand the intellectual trends in your field, see the idols. If you want to understand what's going wrong with your field, see the idols. If you want to understand dysfunctional families, see the idols.

I watched *The Great Expectations* the other day, the 1946 version, the good one. And here's Mrs. Havershaw, and she is miserable. Why? Because she's made an idol out of marriage.

And here's Pip, and he's miserable. Why? Because he made an idol out of Estella. And Estella is miserable.

Why? Because she's made an idol out of her emotional independence. She will not give her heart to anybody. And why has she got that as an idol? Because Mrs. Havershaw raised her up that way because she hates men because of her idol of marriage to wreak vengeance on the male gender with Estella, the beautiful Estella.

That's life. Idols beget idols beget idols. And Paul said, with the gospel I could look underneath and I could see everything.

Suddenly I figured it out. And I knew how to go about everything differently. I listen to music differently.

I respond to my neighbors differently. I do my job differently. Everything's new.

Now, I did say the last thing is what Paul did. See where he went, how he felt, what he saw, the idols, and what he did. He preached Jesus and the resurrection.

And I guess this is probably--this is just a sec--60 seconds on this. What did Paul actually bring out in the marketplace? First of all, he brought out the objectivity of Christianity. He was willing to get up in the marketplace and say, resurrection.

He was willing back then to become utterly vulnerable. He based the truth of what he was teaching about Jesus Christ to a historical event. There's that great place where he's talking to Festus and Agrippa.

I love it. And Paul says, Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and they scoff, and he turns to Festus and says, ask Agrippa. Agrippa, of course, was Jewish, and he was in Palestine.

He'd been there for years. Festus was a pagan from elsewhere. Festus says, come on, resurrection from the dead.

What does he do? He turns to Festus and says, ask Agrippa. He says, he knows about these things, for these things were not done in a corner. And what he means is, Paul says, there's no religion that made itself so vulnerable, no religion that came up and said, the reason you want to know it's true is because hundreds of people saw Jesus Christ physically raised from the dead after he'd been crucified.

Paul was willing to get into the marketplace with that. He was willing to come up and do apologetics, they're called. That's the old term.

He's willing to come out and say, Christianity isn't true because it's relevant. It's relevant because it's true. Christianity isn't true because it changes your life.

It changes your life because it's reality. And that's what he said. He got out in the marketplace and was willing to say, come on, ask me why this is true.

Other religions don't want to do that. They say, well, you'll find peace within. You know, golly, a dirty sock will give you peace within, I suppose, if you smell it long enough and you think good thoughts.

I mean, you can, peace within, people get peace within. He doesn't do that. He lifts up the objectivity in the marketplace.

But the other thing he does is he lifts up Jesus subjectively. I love the way he puts it, don't you? He was preaching the good news of Jesus, not Jesus Christ, Jesus. How personal.

John Donne said, take me to you, imprison me, for I, except you enthrall me, never shall be free, nor ever chaste, except you ravish me. Paul was jealous. And what Paul wanted was to you to be in love with Jesus and for you to know how much Jesus can be in love with you.

Paul was willing to pick that up and pull that up, and it's not just the objective, but the subjective, and say, the only way you'll be free from idols in your life is if you're ravished with him. Jesus, Jesus, Jesus. You have to experience him.

That's what Christianity is. It's not just an abstract truth or just a mystical experience. It's an experience of truth because the truth became a person, and now relationship is the way in which the truth comes in, and my whole life has changed and everything else has changed.

Do you understand that? Are you the kind of person who feels the way Paul felt? Are you the kind of person who is able to see what Paul saw, able to do that kind of analysis, now seeing everybody trying to save themselves through idols? So the gospel gives you that kind of analysis. You're no longer up there looking and saying, yes, there's the religious and the irreligious, the good and the bad. No, no, no, there's the people who are trying to save themselves through idols and the people who have finally given themselves to Jesus.

That's the only two kinds of people in the world. If you're here and you're not sure if you're a Christian, you say, I'm kind of neutral, you have, you Christians have faith. I wish I had that kind of faith.

My dear friends, you have already got incredible faith. You couldn't have, you couldn't be living without putting your faith in something. It's not Jesus, that's all.

What is it? It's your career or it's sexual attractiveness or it's partying, it's Bacchus or it's Ares or it's Aphrodite or it's Apollos or it's something. And all I can tell you is those gods, if you fail them, will never forgive you. And if you get them, they'll never satisfy you.

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