

Christians Who Worship An ■Idol-god■ And Not Our Heavenly Father

by Zac Poonen

This sermon emphasizes the importance of examining our hearts to identify and uproot hidden sins and idols that hinder our relationship with God. It highlights the need to have a correct understanding of God's character, focusing on Psalms 115 to address the concept of idols and the attributes of a true God who hears, speaks, and acts on our behalf. The message stresses the significance of seeking God wholeheartedly, believing in His love, forgiveness, and active involvement in our lives, as seen through the example of Joseph in the Old Testament and the parable of the prodigal son.

Scripture: Psalms 115:4, Psalms 66:18, Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28, Genesis 50:20, Luke 15:20, John 17:3, Isaiah 49:15

Topics: "Heart Examination", "Idolatry and God's Character"

Description

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Transcript

I'd like to turn to a verse in the book of Psalms, Psalm 115. Very often we think of sin, you know, we heard about judging ourselves in terms of actions we have done, which we are aware of, you know, we are tempted and we yield to it and it's maybe a word spoken or something we did. But a lot of our sins, if you trace it to the root, you know, John the Baptist said that in the new covenant, Jesus has come with an axe to the root of the tree.

I see the old covenant was like a pair of scissors that cut off the fruit whenever it came. And we can keep cutting off the fruit as it comes, and the tree can look nice to other people who watch us, what a Christ-like person. But if the root is not dealt with, we aren't really becoming Christ-like.

And if you deal with the root, one of the big advantages is these little fruit will stop coming. So that root is in our attitudes and our understanding of what God is like. That needs to change.

So in Psalm 115, I thought of this in relation to idols. Now, we all are pretty sure we don't worship any idols, but we need to examine ourselves a little more on that. It says here, in verse 4 of Psalm 115, their idols, the idols of the people in the world are silver and gold, the work of man's hands.

And here are some characteristics of idols. They cannot speak, verse 5, they cannot hear, and they got hands, but they don't do anything with those hands. Let's think of those three things.

An idol cannot hear, cannot speak, cannot do anything with his hands. And if we have a God who does not hear when we pray, when was the last time you got an answer to prayer, and who does not speak to us, you don't hear God speaking to you. The Bible is a dry book, and you don't have a God whose hands are working on your behalf.

That is an idol, even if you call it Jesus Christ, because he doesn't seem to hear your prayer, he doesn't ever speak to you, and his hands are just there, he never does anything for you. That's exactly one of the marks of an idol. So that's something we have to think about and say, I don't want to worship a Christ who is an idol.

Jesus Christ rose from the dead, otherwise we are worshipping a dead Christ, a dead Christ who cannot hear, cannot speak, cannot do anything. But because he's risen from the dead, we must have a deep assurance in our heart when we pray that he hears us, and not only hears us, but he will answer. It's the fact that he answers is the proof that he hears.

He doesn't always answer in the way we expect, like I've often said. If your conscience is clear, and you don't have anything disturbing your conscience between God, you and God, and between you and others, you can be absolutely sure that God will answer your prayer, without a doubt. Because Psalm 66 and verse 18 says, it's only when there's sin in the heart, Psalm 66 18, that the Lord will not hear.

Then your God is an idol. He's an idol because you've got some sin that you've not set right. Then it's like an idol who doesn't hear.

The Lord will not hear. If I regard anything in my heart as I said, it may not be some particular sin you're thinking of, and you've thought of doing. It could be an attitude towards somebody you don't like.

It could be towards your mother-in-law. It could be towards some brother or sister in the church who, for some reason, you don't like. Maybe you don't like his face, or you don't like the way he behaves, or the way he speaks with a squeaky voice, or some stupid thing like that, that the devil will make you disturbed with, and disturb your relationship with God.

If I regard sin in my heart, my God becomes like an idol who doesn't hear, doesn't answer, doesn't do anything on my behalf. So that's why it's important to make sure our attitudes towards people are right, like we heard about judging ourselves and cleansing ourselves, so that we don't end up worshipping an idol. I'm absolutely convinced that the Jesus Christ that many Christians worship is an idol.

It's not the real risen, living Christ who said, I've got all authority in heaven and earth. Go into all the world and make disciples and teach them to do everything I commanded you. If you really believed that Jesus had all authority in heaven and earth, you would never be anxious about anything.

Anxiety is an indication that the Jesus I worship doesn't have all authority in heaven and earth. Think if you knew the most powerful person in this country, whoever it is, and you have a problem, and you mention it

to him and say, don't worry, I'll deal with it. You sleep peacefully, because you're convinced that the most powerful person in this country will do it for you.

So if we come to Christ like that, and believe that he's risen from the dead, the apostles often said, we are witnesses of his resurrection. I thought about that, you know, because very often I find Christians are witnesses of his crucifixion. We proclaim that Jesus died.

Jesus died, Jesus died, that's the gospel. No, the gospel is Jesus rose from the dead. He conquered death, he's defeated death, he's living.

And because he's living, if you just say he died, he may be died for your sins, but he's not hearing, he's not answering. But he's risen from the dead, and so he hears. That must be our testimony.

I have a God who speaks to me. I mean, I'm not particular that he should call me up on the phone. Your father can write a letter to you.

God can speak to me through the scriptures. But he does speak to me, it's not a dead book. If the Bible is a boring book to you, I want to say to you in Jesus' name, the Christ you worship is an idol, not the real Christ.

If you really are in touch with the living Christ, he will speak to you through the Bible. I've experienced that for 62 years. There's never been a situation in my life in all these 62 years since I came to know the Lord, where there was no answer in the scripture.

If you don't read the scriptures, of course, you won't know. When the devil tempted Jesus to everything the devil tempted him with, he had an answer, not from his mind, from scripture. When the devil said something, you know, it's written this.

Devil said something else, Jesus said, no, it's written like this. And the devil said something else. Then when the devil saw Jesus quoting scripture, the devil quoted scripture.

Do you know the devil can quote scripture to you? He quoted it to Jesus. Jump off the roof of the temple, it's written. Aren't you the one who keeps quoting it is written? Well, it's written that his angels will charge over you.

And Jesus said, it is also written. Don't tempt the Lord your God. The whole truth is not found in one scripture.

The whole truth is found in it is written, which the devil may quote to you, but knowing it is also written, it's like the two wings of a bird. If you have only one wing, you just keep going around and around and around. So that is, that's why it's so important to know the scriptures and to hear the Lord speaking to us through it.

I can think of numerous situations where the Lord led me very clearly. And when the Lord called me to leave my job, 56 years ago, and everything that the Lord promised to me, then I seen it fulfilled in these 56 years. He's a God who speaks.

And the Lord clearly told me who I was to marry. I see the results from that in all these 54 years we've been married. God is interested in every little detail of our life.

If I really seek him, it's those who don't seek him. Those who seek him will find him. And Jesus said, and the Lord says, if you seek me with all your heart, you will find Jeremiah in chapter 29.

Jeremiah chapter 29. It's one of my favorite passages where the Lord says, I have plans for your life. I wish you would take this as a personal word to you this morning, if you have never taken it before.

Jeremiah 29 verse 11, I have made plans for your life. And those plans are for your welfare. Your welfare means to do a lot of good for you.

Not for calamity means none of those plans will do evil for you. I mean, it may be a tough route through which the Lord leads us. For example, you want to train your son to be a top quality engineer or doctor or some scientist like that.

You're going to tell him that you're going to go through some tough courses, but at the end of it, you'll be such a knowledgeable person. You'll be very useful to society. You'll be able to earn a good living.

So the Lord says, they are for your welfare. It may be a tough route that the Lord calls us to go through, but it'll give you a future and a hope. I have a plan for you.

But if you want to fulfill that, you have to call upon me and pray to me. And I'm not an idol. The Lord says, I'll hear you.

I will listen to you. And, but why is it we feel he doesn't listen? You will seek me and find me only when you search for me with all your heart. That means when I am number one in your life, not your job, not your own plans, not your wife, not your husband.

I am number one in your life. You seek me with all your heart. I will always hear you.

Take that as a rule. And I will be found by you. And I will restore your fortunes.

It's an amazing promise. We must take these promises to our heart. So that's how we prove in our life that the God we worship is not an idol.

He hears us. He answers us. He works on our behalf.

For example, when it says God works all things for good in Romans 8, 28, the good is that we might become a little more like Christ, like it says in the next verse. And there are Old Testament stories that are given to us to show us how God did that on behalf of his servants. I mean, Joseph's example is the classic example in the Old Testament, right in the very first book of the Bible.

A young man who really feared God, 17-year-old young man who had dreams about God and all. It's amazing. And it's not just that God picked up a 17-year-old.

He listened to his father. His father told him about the God of Abraham and Isaac. And Joseph listened to that.

And he had a response. It's a wonderful thing when you teach your children about God and you find a response in them, such a response that the dreams he had at night at the age of 17 were of God and the things that are going to happen in his life in the future. What type of dreams do the average 17-year-old boy see today? It shows how far, even among Christians, have drifted from God.

Encourage your children to read the Scriptures. Tell them the Scriptures. Tell them how God can work on their behalf.

Enable them to have faith in the living, risen Christ and not in an idol who just preaches a lot of theories. The result is that whatever happened to Joseph, it ultimately worked for his good. And to such good that even when his brothers who tried to kill him came to him, he could do good to them.

Have you seen the Romans 8 28 of the Old Testament? You know Romans 8 20 is a well-known verse among scriptural Christians. God makes all things work together for good to those who love him, who are called according to his purpose. Here is the Romans 8 28 of the Old Testament.

In Genesis chapter 50, where Joseph told his brothers when they apologized for having tried to get rid of him. You know when finally they discovered Joseph was next to the pharaoh and they came to him for food. And he said to our father, Genesis 50 and verse 16, he says, Jacob, our father charged us before he died, say to Joseph, please forgive, I beg you, the transgression of your brothers and their sin, for they did you wrong.

So please forgive the transgression of these servants of God. And Joseph said, don't be afraid, verse 19. Here's the Romans 8 28, Genesis 50 20.

You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result. That's a wonderful verse. He didn't have a Bible.

He didn't have a Romans 8 28 to go by. But because he had this forgiving attitude towards people who had tried to kill him and get rid of him. And because of that, he spent 13 years as a slave and in prison.

Imagine all that from the age of 17, he's sent out and slave up to the age of 30. And you know that it is because of these evil 10 older brothers who treated him so well. He sees them one day, and he not only blesses them and gives them food.

He, it's amazing, without the Holy Spirit, without a knowledge of Christ, he could have such his attitude. I want to say that brothers, that when you read some of these Old Testament stories, we should really hang our head in shame and say, Lord, here's a man without any knowledge of Christ without a Bible, without the Holy Spirit, who could such a have a loving, forgiving attitude towards someone. He didn't worship an idol.

He worshipped the true and living God. How much more we, if I don't have that attitude towards people who hurt me and harm me, then I need to ask myself whether I'm worshipping an idol, not the real living Christ. So that's the application of thou shalt not worship idols.

See if it'll apply to your own life. And I'll say one more thing. When we, the God we worship is not the real God, and think of God as a father.

It says in John chapter one, the true and living God is the one that Jesus revealed. In John chapter one, in verse 18, it says, no one has seen God. And it's because no one has seen God that people make idols.

All the idols in the world are made by people who haven't seen God. They think God must be like this or like that. And they worship the sun and the moon and animals and all types of things.

But Jesus came and explained the father. He has explained the father and said, God is a father. No one has seen God at any time.

And so they make all these idols or they make a God who's so merciless and hard. And Jesus said, no, he's a father. He's a loving father.

And I feel that a lot of Christians have not seen him as a loving father. And you can see that in the attitude they have towards their own children. I mean, earthly fathers also love their children.

But when we know God is a father, it changes our whole attitude towards people. God is very merciful, forgiving, long-suffering, and all the qualities of a father. He's also one who disciplines.

He doesn't love his children so much that he allows them to go astray. And a father who just loves his children so much as to allow them to go astray, buy and give them whatever they want, he hasn't seen God as a father. God doesn't give us whatever we want.

Any father who buys and gives his children whatever they ask for, he hasn't seen God at all. Because God does not give to his children everything they ask for. He gives them what is good for them and at the right time.

So Jesus explained the father. And we need to ask ourselves whether we have seen God as a father who loves us and cares for us. Do we feel that God is always looking at us with anger? He's always angry with me because I'm not perfect.

How can he look at me with love when I myself see so many wrong things in me? He must be seeing 101 other wrong things in me. That's the amazing thing. That's why Jesus often had to use stories to illustrate the love of God.

I believe that many of us need to go back again and again to the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15, the picture we all often have up there in the back. It's a very true picture of God. And I believe it's very, very important for Christians to keep that picture of God before us, of the prodigal son who has messed up his life, ruined the father's name, taken the father's property and wasted it all, and then comes back.

And this is the picture, the Jesus picture to the father. Luke 15. He got up, verse 20, from that far country.

He came to his father. And listen to this. While this boy was a long way off, his father saw him.

How is that? Have you thought about that? You stop and you come to a verse like that and say, how did the father see him at a long distance, long, I mean, way at the end of the road, I don't know, one mile away? Did he send a telegram? Or there was no message that I'm coming? How did the father know? I'll tell you. I have a feeling that father was looking out of the window every now and then. When will my son come back? When will my son come back? That's a picture I have of my heavenly father.

If you have slipped up and fallen away and disgraced his name, done something wrong, messed up your life, my dear brother, sister, I want to tell you how God looks at you who have messed up your life. He's waiting every day to see when you will come back. And when he sees you, even turning around and coming towards him, even with the faintest, Lord, I'm sorry for what I did and I repented.

It says here he ran. It's the only place in the whole Bible where you read that God is running. What's he running for? He's not running for a righteous, wholehearted son of his who's done everything right.

That you can understand. God goes for such people. He does.

But he's running to meet a person who has ruined his name, wasted his money, done everything wrong, everything possible that's wrong, and left saying, I'll never come back to you. That's the one he's running for. I want to ask you, do you honestly believe? Is this the God you worship? Or are you worshipping an idol? An idol who's always frowning at you.

One little slip up and he jumps on you. It's an idol, my brother. That is an idol.

It's not a God that Jesus Christ. Jesus explained the father. The father who runs to welcome.

A father who doesn't want to see you go to hell. A father who doesn't want to see you ruin your earthly life by pursuing things that will not bless you. And when he comes back, and you know the son has got his speech ready.

He had prepared his speech. And his speech is in verse 18. I will say to him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, number one.

Number two, he's got all his points. I've sinned in your sight. Number three, I'm not worthy to be called your son.

Number four, make me as one of your hired men. He's got a speech ready. And he comes to the father and says, I've sinned against heaven.

You're saying I'm no longer worthy to be called. And the father says, stop. I don't want to hear any of this.

Imagine God stopping a man saying, I've seen your heart. You want to come back. And I'm delighted that you've come back.

I don't care what you did, how you messed up your life. I want to give you the best robe. Quickly bring out the best robe, verse 22, and put it on him.

And put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. I have a feeling that the father had a ring on his hand. And he had another son, an older son, and he never gave it to him.

Think of that. He kept it to give to this younger one. And he said, let's celebrate immediately.

He went there hoping to be a servant and he was made the main person in the house. Now the elder son, we read about that also. He came there and he was very disturbed that the father was making a big fuss over this sinner.

And these are two contrasting attitudes. The elder son worshipped an idol. That's a picture of a person who's hard.

How can you ever accept this man? This man is such an evil person. He's lived with prostitutes and all that. And you come and you celebrate when he comes back.

And what good has he done even after he's come back? He just came today. And that elder son's attitude shows the attitude of Christians who have not seen the father that Jesus spoke about. Sometimes we read through these passages so quickly that we don't see God as he really is.

I want to urge you, my brothers and sisters, understand the father that God, that Jesus revealed. I'll tell you why it is. Many of us believe that you have eternal life.

Well, I want to tell you what eternal life is. John 17 and verse 3. This is eternal life. Let me paraphrase these words, that you don't worship an idol, but that you know the only true God revealed by Jesus Christ whom he sent.

If you have not seen the true God revealed by Jesus Christ, I don't care who you are, I don't care what denomination you're from, you are worshipping an idol, a God who is not the one Jesus revealed. Jesus said, if you being evil fathers know how to give good things to your children, how much more will your heavenly father give only good things to those who ask him? Your children have to worry about food, Jesus said. Look at the birds in the air.

Your father feeds them. He's concerned if one sparrow falls into the ground and dies. Do you believe in a father who watches a sparrow falling into the ground and dying? Do you believe in a God who's a father who has numbered the hairs on your head? That's what Jesus said.

We forget all these verses, and the result is we think of a God who's very hard, and you know what the result of that is? We are very hard on other people. We become like the elder brother towards other brothers and sisters in the church. When we see something wrong, you see something wrong in your husband or your wife, and you're exactly like that elder brother.

Why? Let me tell you lovingly, you're worshipping an idol. Get rid of that and say, pray a prayer today, and read the Bible again, read the Gospels again. I've been reading the Gospels a lot these days, just the four Gospels, and say, Lord Jesus, please show me clearly the God you revealed as a loving father who says in Isaiah 49, 15, can a mother forget her sucking child? Yea, they may forget, but I will not forget you.

Amen.

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