

The gods We Worship
Part #2 - "Exposing the Idols"
Jeremiah 2:12-13

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on February 5, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Jeremiah 2.
- The honesty of the words made everyone feel uncomfortable. The only reason they were sung was because Mickey Mantle asked them to be sung. **(SHOW SLIDE 2)** Mickey Mantle, the legendary baseball player who won seven world championships and who sought after every pleasure possible, was dead. These are the words he asked to be sung at his funeral:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** *"Yesterday when I was young,
The taste of life was sweet as rain upon my tongue.
I lived by night and shunned the naked light of day,
And only now I see how the years ran away.
I used my magic age as if it were a wand,
And I never saw the pain and the emptiness beyond.
The game of life I played with arrogance and pride,
And every flame I lit too quickly, quickly died.
Yesterday when I was young,
So many drinking songs were waiting to be sung.
So many wayward pleasures lay in store for me,
And so much pain my dazzled eyes refused to see.
I ran so fast that time and youth at last ran out.
And now the time has come to pay for yesterday, when I was young."*
- Mickey Mantle tried to quench his soul's thirst on sports, fame, money, women, and pleasure. But every one of these things left him dry. His marriage fell apart after countless affairs. Alcoholism destroyed his life and all four of his sons became alcoholics.
 - The Bible declares that under all Mickey Mantle's problems is idolatry – the worship of false gods. In fact, the Bible declares that idolatry is at the root of every problem in the human race from racism to divorce, poverty to pornography, eating disorders to genocide.
- You see, idolatry is not simply bowing before a statue. It is seeking the soul's satisfaction in anything but God. It is misplaced worship. It is exchanging God for anything else. So we set up idols in our hearts when we take good things and make them into ultimate things. But the idols can never satisfy our souls.
 - So here is what I want to do this morning: I want to help you understand why the human soul seeks after idols. Once we see why we worship idols then we can expose the idols for what they are - cheap substitutes for God that cannot satisfy. Then we will conclude by showing how Jesus is the only one who can truly satisfy our souls.
 - We will trace this under three headings: the thirsting soul, the parched soul, and the satisfied soul.

THE THIRSTY SOUL

- The first heading then is **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** the thirsting soul.
 - These verses teach us something essential to what it means to be human. **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** To be human is to possess a soul thirst for something that will satisfy the deepest part of our being. This thirst is the assumption under everything in verse 13.

READ 13 - they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

- We have turned away from God who is the living water and tried to dig cisterns in search of something else to satisfy our thirst. To be human is to thirst. To be human is to seek to quench that thirst. This is a rather obvious fact.
- Why will you sit for an hour to drink in a flaming sunset? Bears don't do that. Why do you spend huge amounts of money to experience museums, roller coasters, or sporting events? It is because to a certain degree it satisfies your thirst.
 - No penguin ever said, ***"I feel so empty. I'm getting off this ice and experiencing the world."*** Only humans thirst and seek to quench that thirst.
- The next rather obvious thing to point out is that **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** nothing in this world can satisfy our thirst. Even when our souls are drinking deeply from music, art, or nature we are never totally satisfied. In fact, the most satisfying things in this world only stir up in us a deeper thirst. When I stood gazing out over the Grand Canyon I was awed and deeply satisfied and yet the glory of the Canyon awakened in me a desire to see something which would stun and satisfy my soul to its core and would not disappear when I walked away.
 - None of this is controversial. The poet Wallace Stevens states what thoughtful people, Christian and non-Christian, have always said, ***"even in contentment I feel the need of some imperishable bliss."***
- The fact that nothing in this universe can satisfy us tells us something else about ourselves – that our soul's satisfaction must come from outside the universe.
 - C.S. Lewis calls us to consider our other desires. For every other desire you have there exists something that can satisfy that desire. There is no desire that does not have a corresponding satisfaction. Your hunger for food corresponds with the existence of food. Your desire for sex corresponds with the existence of sex. Your desire for relationship corresponds with the reality of love and friendship. Lewis puts it this way:
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** ***"A man's physical hunger does not prove that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation in a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exists."***¹ So what about this deep soul thirst that nothing in this world can satisfy? Lewis then pulls it all together with these words:
(SHOW SLIDE 8) ***"if I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probably explanation is that I was made for another world."***²
- This is exactly what God is saying in this passage. He assumes that human beings thirst. And then notice how God describe Himself in verse 13. **READ 13 - they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.**
(SHOW SLIDE 9) God is the only water that can satisfy the thirst of our souls.
 - To a people living in a semi-arid country where water is scare and often undrinkable this is a powerful description. Imagine a traveler dying of thirst in the desert stumbling upon a fresh water spring. What a treasure! What joy this traveler would have as he threw himself down to drink deeply. It would utterly satisfy him.

¹ Alan Jacobs, *The Narnian: The Life and Imagination of C. S. Lewis*, 46.

² C.S. Lewis, *A Mind Awake: An Anthology of C.S. Lewis*, 22-23.

- To be human is thirst. To be human is try and satisfy that thirst. The fact that nothing in this world can satisfy that thirst points us outside this world. God alone can satisfy our soul's thirst.

THE PARCHED SOUL

- Now we are ready to see what drives our idolatry. Having unfolded 'the thirsting soul' let's turn in the second place to **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** the parched soul.
 - Jeremiah lived in a time of spiritual decline. He was the last prophet before the entire nation of Israel collapsed and they were forced into exile in Babylon. The people wanted to know why everything was falling apart. The book of Jeremiah is a collection of sermons that God speaks to the people through Jeremiah.
- Right here in the first sermon God gives the answer: the reason their lives collapsed was because of their idolatry. That is clear from verse 11. ***READ 11 - Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.***
 - And then God calls the stars and planets to bear witness to the insanity of his people. ***READ 12-13 - Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.***
- The two sins are clearly laid out. First, they have turned away from God, the living stream who can satisfy their souls. This is insanity. Imagine you lived in a desert next to a fresh water spring. You would not give a moment's consideration to moving away from that spring.
 - But they have compounded this insanity with further madness. The planets stand aghast. The stars cannot believe this lunacy. The moons are horrified. Not only have they turned away from a fresh water spring, they have tried to dig their own cisterns.
 - In ancient times, if you did not have the luxury of a fresh water spring on your property, or the even the basics of a well, you had to dig a cistern. A cistern was a pear-shaped hole in the ground covered in plaster that would collect runoff water from the roof or ground. But as one commentator tells us, ***"The best cisterns, even those in solid rock, are strangely liable to crack...and if by constant care they are made to hold, yet the water collected from clay roofs or from soil has the colour of weak soapsuds, the taste of the earth or the stable, is full of worms, and in the hour of greatest need it utterly fails."***³
- Do you see why this is so shocking? Israel is like a family that owns a fresh water stream on their property. But they choose to turn away from it. But they, of course, still need water and so they start digging a cistern.
 - But this is insanity! They have traded the best water for disgusting worm filled cistern water. And then, to their dismay, the cistern leaks and cannot even hold the stale water. Their parched mouths are left with nothing but sludge. And yet instead of running back to the fresh water stream, they dig another cistern. Every cisterns fails and they are left dying of thirst.
 - ***READ 12-13 - Be appalled, O heavens, at this; be shocked, be utterly desolate, declares the LORD, for my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken***

³ W.H. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 287.

me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

- The Bible declares that this is what the entire human race has done. Every problem in the human race can be summed up in one word: exchange. We have exchanged God for idols, which is like exchanging a stream for a cracked cistern. This is how God puts it in verse 11. **READ 11** - *But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit.*
 - This is how Paul sums up the problem of the entire human race in Romans 1:
“[Humanity] exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator.”
- Now this should teach us two critical things. This is the heart of the message. The first thing we learn is why we worship idols. Here is the answer: **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** we worship idols because we are trying to quench the thirst that results from abandoning God, the living stream. To be human is to thirst and when humans turn away from God they have to find something else to try and quench their thirst. So we take good things like people, pleasure, and accomplishments and elevate them to the ultimate thing in our life because we hope they can satisfy us.
 - Dr. Neil Williams writes, **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** *“The reason we resort to idolatry is not hard to find. When we fall away from God, we experience great lack, need, deficiency, and alienation. In order to fulfill our lives we resort to idolatry. We serve, love, desire, trust, fear, and worship other things apart from God to give pleasure, significance, acceptance and respect.”*⁴
 - So behind all your idolatry is the thirst of your soul. Every idol is a cistern that you have dug in an attempt to satisfy your dry mouth.
- The second critical thing we learn here is that **(SHOW SLIDE 13)** idols will leave our souls dry because they cannot hold water. When we try to satisfy our soul’s thirst in vacations, money, sports, or sexual experiences, we inevitably find that they do not satisfy. Exchanging God for anything else is always a bad deal.
 - Some very famous British theologians have taught us this lesson better than anything else. These theologians call themselves *The Rolling Stones*. They dug many cisterns like fame, women, money, and drugs hoping to find water to satisfy them. And yet, in one of their most famous sermons, they sing, *“I can’t get no satisfaction.”*
 - Here is the shocking thing though: when we discover that our cisterns cannot hold water do we run back to the living stream? No, we try digging another cistern. When sex does not satisfy we turn to something like popularity. When that does not satisfy we turn to something like accomplishments. Hence, the endless cycle of disillusionment as we exchange one thing after another for God never finding water.

EXAMPLES OF BROKEN CISTERNS THAT WE DIG

- Those who have dug the deepest cisterns always testify to how much they fail. Take career success for example. **(SHOW SLIDE 14)** Career success is a good thing to be sought after but if it becomes the thing you try to satisfy your thirst on it, then career success will prove to be a broken cistern. Those who attain elite status in their fields all testify that it is a broken cistern.

⁴ Dr. Neil Williams, *Gospel Transformation*, 59.

- Take Tom Brady for instance. He is the quarterback for the New England Patriots. He has won four Superbowls and this afternoon will go for his fifth. After he won his third Superbowl he did an interview on 60 minutes.
 - Brady said, **(SHOW SLIDE 15)** *“Why do I have three Super Bowl rings and still think there’s something greater out there for me? I mean, maybe a lot of people would say, ‘Hey man, this is what is.’ I reached my goal, my dream, my life. I think, ‘God, it’s got to be more than this.’ I mean this isn’t, this can’t be, what it’s all cracked up to be.”*⁵ Empty cisterns that cannot hold water.
- Or take relational intimacy, the desire for friends or marriage. **(SHOW SLIDE 16)** Relational intimacy is a good thing that should be sought but if you try to quench your soul in another person they will prove to be an empty cistern.
 - I cannot tell you how many people have come to me in tears after having casual sex with someone. They say, *“I know I should not have done it but I am just so lonely.”*
 - So it is not sex that is the idol – it is relational intimacy and sex is the means to try and satisfy the good desire to know and be known. But the soul is left parched because casual sex is a cistern that cannot hold water.
 - Wilt Chamberlain, the famous basketball player, claimed to have slept with almost 20,000 women. But he confessed the following in his biography: **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** *“Most men would think it a great achievement if they could make love to a thousand different women. But I’ve come to believe the greater achievement would be to make love to the same woman a thousand times.”*⁶ He is reported to have said, *“I would trade them all for one woman who loved me.”*
 - Our yearning for sex only points to a deeper yearning namely, to be loved – a desire that can only be ultimately met in God. That is why G.K. Chesterton said, *“every man who knocks on the door of a brothel is looking for God.”* God alone is the living stream who can satisfy your longings for relational intimacy.
- Let’s show one more. Having turned away from God, our society has to explain reality. So we exchange a worldview with God as our loving Creator and dig a new way to explain reality. **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** We call it naturalism. Carl Sagan sums up naturalism in his trademark slogan, *“The universe is all there is or ever was or ever will be.”*⁷ So it is people who do not believe in any God.
 - But naturalism is a cistern that cannot hold water. It utterly fails to satisfy the thirst of our souls. Naturalism says that the universe is meaningless. But everything is meaningless then it follows then that your life is also meaningless.
- G.K. Beale tells a story about what happens when a person follow naturalism to its logical conclusion. Beale writes, *“I once had a philosophy professor who was an atheistic existentialist. He was consistent in living out his beliefs. He believed that life was without meaning and he committed himself to the idol of irrationality. He believed that since there is no God, there is no meaning in life. So he said, ‘Why should I listen to the authority of the university? There is no God who set up any authorities, including university authorities.’ So he would come to class every once and a while. He would say, ‘let’s go to the pub or maybe to my house. And maybe we won’t meet for three weeks, and we’ll see how it goes.’ Eventually, the university fired him. And then a few years later, I read a newspaper headline regarding him: ‘University Professor Commits Experiment in Suicide.’ Because life had no meaning,*

⁵ http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2005/11/03/60minutes/main1008148_page3.shtml

⁶ Robert Cherry, *Wilt: Larger than Life*, 346.

⁷ Ronald Nash, *Life’s Ultimate Questions – An Introduction to Philosophy*, 38.

he thought that perhaps in the act of suicide he would find some irrational, mystic meaning. So he slashed his wrists, and as he was dying, he was taking notes. And he said, ‘These notes are for my students. And in case I find no meaning in this suicide, and I doubt I will because there is no meaning in anything, maybe they will find some irrational, mystic meaning in my thoughts as I am dying and taking notes.’ He devoted himself to the idol of irrationality, became irrational and was destroyed by it.”⁸

- Now of course the average person does not commit suicide because they reject God and embrace naturalism. But that is the logical end of naturalism. This professor just dug deeper than your average person.
 - Do you see it then? We were created with a thirst that only God can satisfy. But we turned away from God the living stream and our thirst only increased. So we sought to satisfy our thirst by digging our own cisterns. We tried to satisfy ourselves in people, things, pleasure, and ideologies. But these cisterns could hold no water and all of humanity has been left with parched souls.

THE SATISFIED SOUL

- It is right here that the gospel comes in with good news. We are now ready for our third heading: **(SHOW SLIDE 19)** the satisfied soul. Although God has every right to leave us to the futile task of digging endless cisterns until we die of thirst, He did not do this.
 - God became a man. One day Jesus stood beside a well. He was speaking to a woman with a parched soul. She had been through five husbands trying to quench her soul’s thirst. When she refused to give Jesus a drink after he asks for one Jesus picks up Jeremiah 2 and says to her *“if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water...Everyone who drinks [the water of this well] will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”*
 - What is the water that Jesus gives? He tells us in John 7:37. There Jesus stood up in the middle of the feast and said in a loud voice, *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture said ‘streams of living water will flow from within him.’”* So whoever places their faith in Jesus will receive this water. What is it? John 7:39 says, *“By this he meant the Spirit.”*
 - Oh what good news to parched souls! The only thing that can fill your soul is God and Jesus promises that God himself will come to dwell in whoever believes in Him.
- This whole series and this message call for one big response: **(SHOW SLIDE 20)** turn *from* broken cisterns *to* Jesus. Turn from idols to God.
 - Have you come to Jesus and said, *“Jesus, I want this living water. I turn away from my idols and will look to you to satisfy my thirst?”*
 - In 1648 the Puritan Jeremiah Burroughs wrote this: **(SHOW SLIDE 21)** *“the reason why you have not got contentment in the things of this world is not because you have not got enough of them – that is not the reason – but the reason is, because they are not proportionable to that immortal soul of yours that is capable of God himself.”⁹*
- Going further back to 397AD, Augustine famously said, **(SHOW SLIDE 22)** *“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.”*
 - Do you know this rest? Do you know this satisfaction? Are you delighting yourself in the Lord? *“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture said ‘streams of living water will flow from within him.’”*

⁸ G.K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 307.

⁹ Burroughs, Jeremiah, *The Rare Jewel Of Christian Contentment*, 91.