

Text: Jeremiah 2:9-13
Title: “Broken Cisterns”

Let's open our Bibles to Jeremiah 2. If you open your Bibles to the middle, hang a right and go two or three books you'll find Jeremiah. Now if you go to our website you will find a collection of the sermons I've preached over the past weeks and months. Also on our website you'll find some biographical information about me. Well think of the book of Jeremiah in that way. Jeremiah was a prophet and preacher in the OT. You'll find some biographical information about him in these chapters and there's also a collection of sermons that God gave Jeremiah to preach to the people of Judah and Jerusalem (the remnant of the nation of Israel). **Read Jeremiah 2:1-2, 9-13.**

One of the big issues God has with His people all the way through Jeremiah is the issue of idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:27 - They say to wood, ‘You are my father,’ and to stone, ‘You gave me birth.’ They have turned their backs to me and not their faces; yet when they are in trouble, they say, ‘Come and save us!’

Now what is an idol? Jot this down in your notes:

DEFINITION – An idol is anyone or anything that takes the place of God as the ultimate source of meaning, fulfillment and security in my life.

So the people of God no longer turn their faces to God to worship Him only. Instead they turn their faces to these images that they have made with their own hands that represent gods whom they think have powers to make them safe and happy. So there's something they love and worship and sacrifice for and value more than God. With their faces turned to these idols they have turned their backs to God. And this is a huge offense to God. And it's not just in Jeremiah; it's all the way through the Bible. So let me spend some time giving you:

1. THE BIBLICAL EXPLANATION

Jeremiah 2:9 - “Therefore I bring charges against you again,” declares the LORD. “And I will bring charges against your children’s children.

In the first part of this chapter the Lord recalls a time when His people loved Him exclusively. But now they have become unfaithful to Him, like a wife forsaking her husband and chasing after other lovers. And the picture here is of God filing charges against His people for the crime of spiritual adultery. Why is the Lord so indignant over this that He would bring up charges against His own people? The answer is found in the covenant He established with His people. Turn to Exodus 20:1-6. The basis of God’s covenant with Israel was the Law or Ten Commandments.

Read Exodus 20:1-6. The Lord is making a covenant with Israel through Moses. God will be their God and He will guide them, guard them, provide for them and forgive them of their sins. Israel’s part of the covenant is that they are to obey the commands God gives them here. And the very first command is that they are to have no other gods above Him. And the second command is that they are not to make idols or images they set up representing these gods to bow down and worship. And then God gives the rest of the commands. Many scholars believe that actually the entire list of commands is about the exclusive worship of the Lord. The root issue to all the other commands is the sin of idolatry. At the root of misusing God’s name, and breaking the Sabbath, and dishonoring your father and mother, and murder, and sexual immorality/adultery, and stealing and lying and coveting is idolatry ... worshipping something or someone other than God.

And why is this such an offense to God? Exodus 20:5 says that God is a jealous God. Now I remember as a young Christian reading about the jealousy of God and it confused me. The jealousy I understood was the jealousy that I felt when my girlfriend talked to or hung out with another guy. How could a great God have such feelings? But then I learned that God’s jealousy is not petty and selfish. His jealousy is righteous and holy. He knows He is truly the only One who deserves our deepest and strongest affections. And He knows we were created to find our greatest joy and meaning in treasuring Him. So He is moved to wrath when the worship of any idol steals that from us.

And in Jeremiah 2, God brings up these charges against His people because with all of His holiness He will zealously *insist* on His rightful position at the center of the universe, and in the hearts of His people. And with all of His power God will *resist* anything that encroaches on His position as Lord.

And as the Lord brings His people to court He calls the nations as a witness to this grievous crime against heaven.
Read Jeremiah 2:10-11.

“Worthless idols...” Now the Bible gives us an ugly description of what this idolatry looked like in Jeremiah’s day. Make a note to go home this afternoon and read II Kings 23. It describes the noble efforts of a godly king named Josiah to rid Judah of her idols. Think about how holy was the worship of God when the Temple in Jerusalem was first built by King Solomon. Every square inch of that grand Temple was dedicated to the worship of God. And there in the center of the Temple complex was the Holy of Holies where the Ark of the Covenant was positioned, signifying the glory of God. This holy mountain was ordained by God exclusively for the worship of His glory by His people.

Fast forward three hundred years to Josiah’s (and Jeremiah’s) day and this is what you would find. Inside the Temple were all sorts of paraphernalia used to worship the pagan gods and goddesses of the nations around Israel. There were lewd objects dedicated to the worship of the pagan goddess Asherah. Sacred chariots and horses dedicated to the worship of the sun god were parked outside the entrance to the Temple. In rooms adjacent to the Temple male and female prostitutes offered their services as an act of worship to the fertility gods. All over Jerusalem and in the outlying areas there were shrines where pagan priests helped people offer some incense to the pagan god Baal. And while they’re there they might engage in a little sexual immorality as an act of pagan worship.

One day a priest discovered a copy of the Law of the Lord buried under junk in the Temple. When that holy scroll was brought to Josiah he read the Ten Commandments that I read earlier and he was appalled at the idolatry. So he went through the Temple, throughout Jerusalem and the surrounding areas smashing and burning all these objects of pagan idolatry that had infiltrated and replaced the true worship of Almighty God. And Jeremiah probably comes on the scene as this spiritual housecleaning has taken place. But there’s a problem; the idols are gone from

the Temple in Jerusalem, but they're not gone from the hearts of the people. It's one thing to smash our idols; it's another thing to root idolatry out of our hearts.

ILLUSTRATION – It's sort of like crabgrass in your yard. You work real hard on a Saturday mowing and trimming your grass. It looks all neat and manicured. But you get up the next morning to go out on your patio to drink your coffee and you look out and there are shoots of crabgrass that grew two or three inches overnight. Those heads are popping up everywhere. You never win the battle with crabgrass until you get at its roots. It has to be killed at the roots. And the same thing is true of idolatry.

Jeremiah 2:11b - But my people have exchanged their Glory for worthless idols.

The Lord is to be our Glory, our greatest treasure and our first love. But when we commit idolatry we exchange our first love for God for something less than God. And this is at the root of our sin nature. Romans 1:23 says that in their depravity people “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.” And the Lord calls the heavens as a witness against His people. **Read Jeremiah 2:12-13.**

So by engaging in all this idolatry the people of God have committed two terrible sins. First, they turned their back to God, the source of the true water of life. And, second, they turned their faces to lifeless idols which are like broken cisterns that can't hold water. A cistern was a hole in the ground that collected rain water. Over time the water would leak out through cracks in the cistern. And the water that remained became stagnant and dirty. Why would you want to drink nasty water out of a cistern when you could have a drink of cool, clean water that came from a fresh, flowing spring?

So that's a biblical explanation of idolatry in Jeremiah's day. Now what in the world does all this mean for us today as people who trying to figure out this life we are called to live in Christ? So let's talk about ...

2. THE PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

Go back to the definition of an idol that we gave earlier:

DEFINITION – An idol is anyone or anything that takes the place of God as the ultimate source of meaning, fulfillment and security in my life.

PHOTO ILLUSTRATIONS – When we think about idols today we might tend to think of a Buddhist's shrine in Thailand (PHOTO) or the Hindu god Ganesh (PHOTO) in India. But our American Idols look different. They might look like this: IPHONE, CAR, CASH, BLUEBELL.

An idol is something or someone we love and desire more than God. It's something we turn to for satisfaction in the place of God ... something we depend on to provide for our needs in the place of God ... something we give priority to in the place of God ... something we talk about and look at more than God ... something that takes more of our time, energy and money in the place of God. An idol is whatever I give my best to. Even something good can become a god.

So when does a good thing become a god thing? If we're all real honest we have to admit that there are times when mentally and emotionally we go into a dark cave to worship our idol ... when we feel insecure, when we hurt, when we've been rejected, when we're lonely, when we feel threatened, when we're unhappy, or when we feel empty. An idol can take the shape of:

- **A PERSON** – When a spouse or a child or a boyfriend or girlfriend becomes the source of meaning, fulfillment and security, we are setting ourselves up for a crash because no human being has the ability to provide that for us. We will become emotionally dependent, jealous and controlling over them.
- **PLEASURE** – When eating food, or sexual stimulation, or comfort becomes the source of meaning, fulfillment and security in life you discover those pleasures are never enough. You have to have more pleasure, more food, more sex, more comfort. And what follows is addiction.

- **POSSESSIONS** – When money or some possession that money buys becomes the source of your meaning, fulfillment and security you will find yourself compulsively worried about your stuff rather than trusting God. And your life is consumed with collecting and protecting your stuff.
- **A POSITION** – Professional success is a god to many of us. If that position becomes the source of your meaning, fulfillment and security you will be driven to work obsessively to keep what has become your life, and you distance yourself from your family and friends. And that position is for your glory, not for God's. And if you lose your job you think your whole life is lost.
- **POPULARITY**– If your meaning, fulfillment and security is found only in the acceptance and approval of others you become a slave to them. And you do whatever you have to do to please others. You're more concerned about pleasing people than you are about pleasing God.
- **POWER** – When we're insecure, rather than trusting God we obsessively try to control the people and circumstances around us. But we know we really don't have the power to control everything leaving us even more insecure. And closely tied to that is the idol of...
- **A PREFERENCE** – Your opinion is your god. Your meaning, fulfillment and security in life is tied to your having everything exactly like you want it. Everyone must agree with you. Don't mess with the way I like my coffee or the way I like to keep my house or the way I like to worship.

Ask yourself some questions: **What are you most afraid of?** Can you trust God or are you gripped with the fear of getting sick, or being left out, or not being seen as cool, of losing your job? Behind that fear you may find an idol. **Where do you run for comfort when you're stressed?** Do you run to God or do you run to alcohol, or food or pornography? **What do you complain about most?** You're continuously frustrated about something because you value it so much that when it's not there you complain about it rather than committing it to the Lord. **What really makes you angry?** Is it an eternal value like the name of God, justice or righteousness, or is it just that you aren't getting your way? **How do you want others to think about you?** As a follower of Jesus or something else like

your profession, or your political persuasion, or your marital status, or what neighborhood you live in? **What do you think about all the time?** If you could have one wish what would it be? For God to be glorified in your life, or to win a million bucks, or to have a mate, or to have a lover other than your mate? **When you look at your bank statement or your calendar what do you sacrifice the most for?** Is it the Kingdom of God and His righteousness or is it other things? Those “other things” are idols. **Who or what do you treasure so much that if it were taken away you feel your life would be ruined?** Is it Jesus, or something or someone else?

John Calvin said all of our hearts are idol factories, meaning our hearts are constantly creating new idols. Anytime we turn our face to an idol we’re turning our back to God. We’re forsaking the One who is life-giving water to us to drink from a shallow, stagnant pool in the bottom of a broken, dirty, leaking cistern.

We are the bride of Jesus and He is jealous over us in that He’s not going to just let us go off pursuing other “lovers” or other “loves” without coming after us. He will not allow us to bow to our idols without confronting us. I John 5:21 says, “Keep yourselves from idols.” We have to battle this constantly. So here’s what the Scripture calls us to do as NT followers of Jesus.

Colossians 3:5-6 - Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Just like King Josiah did, idols must be removed, sometimes smashed. Sometimes it means breaking up with a boyfriend or girlfriend, or quitting a job, or giving up a club membership, or selling a possession, or cancelling satellite TV subscription, or whatever. But that’s not enough. Something has to happen in our hearts. It starts in the heart where we crave, desire, enjoy, and are satisfied by anything that we treasure more than God.

OUTLINE - The victory comes when you trash your idols and treasure Christ.

You see, this is the work of the Gospel in our lives. Paul wrote about the impact of the Gospel on people in the Thessalonica:

1 Thessalonians 1:9b-10 - They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.