



SERMON STUDY GUIDE | PART 1: The Idolatry Trap | 2.25.18 | FIND SERMONS ONLINE: THESTORY.CHURCH/STUDYGUIDES

How do we react when things go wrong? When it all hits the fan, how does it change the way we behave toward and think about ourselves, other people, and God? The story of Israel’s destruction resonates with us because, oftentimes, we can trace our pain back to our own bad decisions. At that point, we’re faced with a tough decision: to turn on God and blame Him for our troubles, or to be humble, repent from our mistakes, and run back into the loving arms of God.

We’ll think about these questions through the lens of the Old Testament prophet *Ezekiel*. He’s been called “The Prophet of Doom,” and he even called himself “The Funeral Director,” but there’s so much more to Ezekiel than just judgment and death. He spoke to God’s people during some of their darkest days, calling them back to God by way of humility and repentance.

The Idolatry Trap

Often times, we underestimate the power that idols have over our lives. Even while we’re sacrificing everything at their altar, including our own souls, we tend to justify those idols and forget all about God. Pastor and author Timothy Keller writes: “Anything can be an idol, and everything has been an idol.” This is key for us to remember today, because the idols that snare our souls are things that appear harmless, like career and achievement, or social standing, or romantic relationships. There are things that have the power to separate us from God, without us even noticing it. The prophet Ezekiel is unpopular because he calls people back to the truth of God - he is reminding them that there’s only one thing that can satisfy our deepest longings, desires, and needs: God. That is why idolatry makes it into the 10 commandments! We can’t allow things other than God to capture our hearts, our passion, our commitment, and even our imagination. The reason Ezekiel is still so relevant for us today is because not much has changed from the time when he prophesied to the people of Judah in 597BC. In Ezekiel’s time, Babylonians also created gods of virtually everything: “They had sex gods, work gods, war gods, money gods, nation gods -- for the simple fact that anything can be a god that rules and serves as a deity in the heart of a person or in the life of a people” (*Counterfeit Gods*, xvii). **God is calling us to guard our hearts through worship and humility.** Worship allows us to re-discover the greatness of the God we serve, and it shows us that He is mighty and able to deliver us from our idols. Also, worship gives birth to true repentance, and it satisfies our souls.

Ezekiel 9:9-10

“The sin of the people of Israel and Judah is exceedingly great; the land is full of bloodshed and the city is full of injustice. They say, ‘The Lord has forsaken the land; the Lord does not see.’ So I will not look on them with pity or spare them, but I will bring down on their own heads what they have done.”

What barriers do we find when trying to learn from the Old Testament, and to embrace it as the word of God?

What kind of context/people is Ezekiel prophesying to? What is happening that is causing mayhem among the people of Judah?

How did Babylonians view their gods/idols, and why did the Judeans choose those idols over the God of Israel?

An important reminder: Do not make an idol for yourself—no form whatsoever—of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters under the earth. Do not bow down to them or worship them, because I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God. Exodus 20:4

Be honest here: what are some of the idols you've worshipped?

How did those idols take a hold of your heart?

The Heart of Worship

Psalms 59:16

But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress.

Romans 12:1-2

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

How do we return to God and leave behind idolatry, and what role does worship play in that process?

Finding redemption: How does worship lead us towards true repentance?

Remember how God delivers and redeems the people of Judah: Ezekiel 11:18-20

"They will return to it and remove all its vile images and detestable idols. I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. Then they will follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws. They will be my people, and I will be their God.