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Nebuchadnezzar's Idol Threat

Daniel 2:48-3:6

Prayer: *Father, we just again, we thank you for your grace, we thank you for the joy that you represent, we thank you for the gifts that you just abundantly bless us with, and one of the greatest gifts is your word. This morning, Lord, we want to -- we're going to open up that gift and we need your Holy Spirit's presence to make it work, to make it make sense, and so we pray just that, we pray for the presence of your Holy Spirit guiding us as we open up your book, may it be of lasting value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we are back in the book of Daniel. This morning we are joining Daniel after he's told him all of the details of this incredibly troublesome dream that he had, and things are at this point starting to get dicey because Daniel not only gives the king the dream, but he gives him the interpretation as well. This is Daniel 2:44-45, it says: *"And in the days of those kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in*

pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever, just as you saw that a stone was cut from a mountain by no human hand, and that it broke in pieces the iron, the bronze, the clay, the silver, and the gold. A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."

Daniel's interpreting this dream for the king, and he tells him in the interpretation that this stone is going to be cut from a mountain by no human hand and that this stone is going to be a stone that's going to destroy all of the world's kingdom -- kingdoms and ultimately his as well, his kingdom of gold, and we know that the stone that he's referring to was Jesus Christ, because Jesus self-identified as the cornerstone that the builders rejected. We have the benefit of the New Testament which tells us in *Matthew 21*, this, it says: *Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "'The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes'?* Therefore I tell you, the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people producing its fruits. And the one who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces; and when it falls on anyone, it will crush him."

Well, I pointed out last time how history has proven out Daniel's

interpretation to a T. History records exactly what he said, that the kingdoms that all followed Nebuchadnezzar, that is the Medes and the Persians, the Greeks and the Romans, they all had their day just like Daniel described. But Rome, now Rome was the -- once ruled the world, Rome was one of the first to go directly after Christians. You can almost say it was the first to fall on the stone and be crushed because the church that it attacked is still growing and Rome is now famous for what? It's famous for its museums and maybe its pizza. I mean, we've seen dozens and dozens of similar kingdoms face the exact same fate when they went up against that stone. And whether it was the Philistines or the Huns or the Visigoths or Tojo's Japan or Mao's China or Stalin's Russia, they've all been consigned to the dustbin of history, while the stone that the builders had rejected continues to grow, and it grows in spite of the kingdoms that are arrayed against it. I mean today we have ISIS, we have Boko Haram, Al-Shabaab and have all these others that love to crow about how they are going to defeat the cross. Well, we people of the cross just look at history and we know that they, too, will eventually be broken to pieces. As Daniel said: *"A great God has made known to the king what shall be after this. The dream is certain, and its interpretation sure."*

So Daniel knew the dream, Daniel knew the interpretation and Daniel knew his God. And we are not that far removed from Daniel. You

see, as Bible-believing Christians, we already know the end of the story. We know there's going to be one great final battle and in the end, the forces of light and goodness in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ are going to win. But knowing the end of the story doesn't necessarily mean that the chapters that make up the book aren't filled with struggle and conflict and, yes, even crisis. And in a sense as believers, every one of us is a Daniel, and we're all kind of making our way through a series of crises that marks out our own lives. You know, Daniel gets kidnapped from Israel and he refuses to eat the king's food. Daniel's handler says if he doesn't look as fit as the others, there's going to be grave, grave consequences. Well, Daniel asks for a trial period where he can demonstrate that God can keep him fit even as he refuses the king's food, and this is really for Daniel crisis number one. Well, God grants him great health and a great physical appearance. Crisis resolved. And we move on to crisis number two, that's Nebuchadnezzar's edict. Like I said, he had this terrible dream and the wise men couldn't even describe it or interpret it, and so he sends out an edict that all the wise men are going to be killed. Well, Daniel meets with the king and he interprets his dream. Crisis number two resolved. Crisis number three is right around the corner in chapter 3, and it's a real crisis. It's Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, and it's their refusal to bow down to idols. However, the first thing we want to contend with, the first thing

that Daniel has to contend with is what take place after he successfully interprets this dream and its content for Nebuchadnezzar. This is *Daniel 2:46*. It says: *Then king Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him. See Daniel himself has become the object of worship. It goes on to say in verse 47: The king answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." Then the king gave Daniel high honors and many great gifts, and made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon and chief prefect over all the wise men of Babylon. Daniel made a request of the king, and he appointed Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego over the affairs of the province of Babylon. But Daniel remained at the king's court.*

You see, Daniel had to be very, very careful to let Nebuchadnezzar know that the power and the wisdom that he had did not come from himself, that it was God alone who was responsible for Daniel's ability to read Nebuchadnezzar's mind. Daniel was absolutely committed to letting Nebuchadnezzar know that, but the miracle itself, well, it proved too powerful for reason. You see, Nebuchadnezzar heard every single detail of his dream laid out along with his interpretation and it caused him to see Daniel as an idol. Our text this morning says the king *"fell on his face and*

paid homage to Daniel." Now if you think about Nebuchadnezzar, you got to realize this is quite a stretch. This is a man who's convinced he's the ultimate power in the world. This is someone who attacked Daniel's God in Jerusalem, he defeated Daniel's people, he raided the temple of Daniel's God, he stole the very articles that were used in that temple and they're now sitting in the treasury of his God's temple. Well, all of that changes with Daniel's interpretation. Nebuchadnezzar's clearly humbled by the wisdom of Daniel and he thought that he, that is Daniel alone, could provide all of the answers that he was seeking. His response is precisely what you would expect from an idol worshiper. What he did was he bowed to the superior god that he thought he saw in Daniel. Now you have to read between the lines here but it appears that Daniel, like Paul, like Barnabas, like Peter, he's very clearly and emphatically rejecting that kind of idol worship. It's probably something akin to Paul and Barnabas's horror being treated like gods in Acts 14. Let me just read to you what happened there. This is Acts 14:11, it says: *And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying, in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men!" Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the chief speaker. And the priest of Zeus, whose temple was at the entrance to the city, brought oxen and garlands to the gates and wanted to offer sacrifice with the crowds. But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul*

heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd crying out, "Men, why are you doing these things? We also are men, of like nature with you, and we bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God, who made the heaven and the earth and the sea and all that is in them. In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness." Even with these words they scarcely restrained the people from offering sacrifice to them.

Well, this is Daniel's situation as well. In the text Daniel doesn't say so explicitly but we can deduce from Daniel like -- like Paul and like Barnabas, he's trying to redirect Nebuchadnezzar's worship back from himself to God. And we base that on a response to something that Daniel said. Let me just revisit the conversation. This is again *Daniel 2:46*, it says: *Then King Nebuchadnezzar fell upon his face and paid homage to Daniel, and commanded that an offering and incense be offered up to him.* Now, I'm going to assume that Daniel made some kind of response that is not recorded here because the next verse, verse 47 says: *The king answered and said --* what did he answer to? We don't know but you can tell in the attitude that the king has in this answer that Daniel has somehow shifted it. It says: *The king*

answered and said to Daniel, "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries, for you have been able to reveal this mystery." You notice that Nebuchadnezzar's comments have shifted from praise of Daniel to praise of Daniel's God.

Well, I want to speak this morning about the danger that Daniel faced, and it was not just from the catastrophes that he was part of but from the idol Nebuchadnezzar wanted to make him into. See, the danger of being marked for death as Daniel was is pretty obvious. The danger of being marked out for worship, not so much, and being seen as enlightened or even God-like by folks' desire to idolize often pose a real threat to Christians in scripture. Do you remember what happened to Paul after he succeeded in convincing the crowd that he was not indeed the God Hermes? Well, in short order, the crowd turned on him. It was pretty nasty. This is what it says in verse 19. He says: *But Jews came from Antioch and Iconium, and having persuaded the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead.* You know what happened to Daniel and his companions in the very next chapter? Nebuchadnezzar turned on them. This is what it says in *Daniel 3*, it says: *King Nebuchadnezzar made an image of gold, whose height was sixty cubits and its breadth six cubits. He set it up on the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon. Then King Nebuchadnezzar sent to gather the satraps, the prefects, and the*

governors, the counselors, the treasurers, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces to come to the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. Then the satraps, the prefects, the governors, the counselors, the treasures, the justices, the magistrates, and all the officials of the provinces gathered for the dedication of the image that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And they have stood before the image that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. And the herald proclaimed aloud, "You are commanded, O peoples, nations, and languages, that when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, bagpipe, and every kind of music, you are to fall down and worship the golden image that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. And whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into a burning fiery furnace."

So we ask how in the world did Nebuchadnezzar go from truly your God is the God of gods and Lord of lords to whoever does not fall down and worship shall immediately be cast into the burning fiery furnace in less than one chapter? Well, actually the answer to that is rather simple. Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man in the world at that time. What Nebuchadnezzar said inevitably became law. If there's one thing that he didn't need or have any use for, it was subtlety. I mean, people have speculated as to his motive in making the golden statute, this thing that is ninety feet high.

And some say, you know, he took Daniel's interpretation that his kingdom would be the kingdom of gold, he took that to heart and that he wanted to preserve a golden image of himself. Others say that he chose this to place this idol way out in the plains away from the city so that he could have one unifying god to unite all of his people under. We can only guess what his true motive was, but the one thing that we don't have to guess about and the one thing that I guess we can grudgingly say we owed a debt of gratitude to Nebuchadnezzar for is his complete lack of subtlety. See, Nebuchadnezzar had the heart of an idol worshiper. He also had the power to take the desires of his heart and to make them into law. And there's really only two things that separate the heart of Nebuchadnezzar from the heart of all of us. Actually three. There's time, there's distance, and there's power. I mean, Nebuchadnezzar was from another time, he was from a very distant place, and by any and all standards, he had all the power in the world to enact what he wanted to. But make no mistake. His idol worshiping heart is no different than the heart that you and I were born with. You see, the problem with idols is their apparent transparency. We just don't see them. I mean, they are all around us. We pay homage to them, often times we worship them even though they suck the spiritual life right out of our souls.

I once heard a lecture about idols that was given to pastors by Tim

Keller. He made some observations about idols today, and one of the things that he said was that basically nothing has changed when it comes to idols. He said nothing has changed since the days when Paul walked through the Areopagus pointing out there that the idols there had no substance. Keller pointed out that the agents had what they call an Agora. An Agora was a marketplace, a cultural marketplace where thoughts and ideas were disseminated. Well, he went on to say that we have the exact same thing today. I mean, our Agora is no different, it's just got a different name. You see, we call our Agora Hollywood, we call it Harvard, we call it the *New York Times* and we no longer bow down our bodies like Nebuchadnezzar demanded, instead we bow down our souls. Keller said we sophisticated 21st century folks, we laugh at the ideas that idols could control areas like they used to in ancient Greece and Rome. He went on to say that's exactly what they still do here in the United States today. He said the ancients had Aphrodite who was the goddess of beauty who ruled over a whole area. They had Athena who was the goddess of reason who ruled another, and Artemis, the goddess of success and prosperity to ruled yet another, and every area around them was dominated by this particular idol. He went on to say that's no different today. That's exactly what we have today. He pointed out that LA and Hollywood are still dominated by the goddess Aphrodite because what matters there is appearance. He said Boston with Harvard, MIT and

its great medical facilities is the area dominated by Athena, the goddess of reason, and it's the place where intellectual brilliance is the dominating idol. And New York, on the other hand, with its financial centers and Wall Street is dominated by Artemis, the goddess of success. You see, it's been 2600 years since Nebuchadnezzar flat out demanded that his people bow down to idols. 2,000 years since Paul identified idol worship as the controlling influence in the culture of his day but it's really no different.

In his lecture about those idols, Keller made a very bold statement, he said this: "If your congregation doesn't come to grips with the idols that they worship," he said, "you as a pastor will never be able to get through to them." He said, "You'll just be adding layer and layer of spiritual information on them without really affecting their lives." I thought about a scripture.

There's a scripture that defines the danger of coming to the gospel for information instead of transformation, and it's *2 Timothy 3:7*. It describes that mindset. It says this, it says: *Always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth*. See, the truth, this truth that we're going to be talking about, this truth about our own individual idols is not the kind of truth that you save up for Bible jeopardy. It's not something that's just good to know. It's something that is absolutely crucial to know. It's more like learning biblical CPR or self-defense. These are vital truths that

we have to learn if we ever hope to make any progress with our spiritual lives. See, Nebuchadnezzar wasn't at all subtle about the idols he insisted on being worshiped, I mean, it's right there, it's in front of everybody, it's ninety feet tall. It's kind of hard to miss. Would that our idols be so obvious but they're not. They're just as real and they're just as powerful but they know all too well how to hide in plain sight. And so we too need to ask God to show us first what an idol is, second, how idols operate, and thirdly, how we can defeat them.

So first let's -- let's just define what an idol is. And before I do that, let me just say this is more less half sermon, half book report because the lecture that I heard came out a few years back as a book by Tim Keller, it's entitled: *Counterfeit Gods*, subtitled: "The empty promises of money, sex, and power, and the only hope that matters." Wonderful book, I suggest you go out and grab a copy. He does a great job. He does a great job of pointing out the different ways of discerning what an idol is. He says this: When you look at some -- "When you look to some created thing to give you only what God can give you, that is idolatry. Idolatry is anything in your life that's so central to your life that you can't have a life if you lose it. If I have that, I have value. If I lose that, I have no life." See, I think we think of idols as besetting sins or bad habits that bleed away our loyalty

to Christ, and that's only half right. More often than not it's not the apparently bad things that steal away our hearts, because they're too obvious. Not many of us are tempted to fall down at the feet of ninety-foot statues. Especially for Christians, our idols are far more subtle. What our idols are is good and noble things pushed to ignoble ends, and that's what spiritually cripples us. Keller has a list of potential idols, and it maybe shocking to hear what he describes as this list. He says this: The list of potential idols in a believer's life is: Family, children, career, money, achievement, acclaim, social standing, romantic relationships, competence, skill, beauty, political and social causes, and religious activities. See, what he says is all of these good things can become idols for us. He says if you take away what we hold dear, take away our health, our wealth, our families, our careers, if we say I would just as soon die, then you just might be an idol worshiper.

You see, part of the problem of identifying the idols in our life, as I mentioned before, is that they're almost always good things that are pushed until they were out of bounds. And what pushes them out of bounds is the fact that idols never, never satisfy. They constantly over promise and under deliver and instead of seeing that, what we often do is we just double down on our efforts. We try twice as hard to get those things. But it's like

trying to get blood out of a turnip. I mean there's only one who can deliver the hope and the joy and the satisfaction we were designed for because he's the one who designed us in the first place. Jesus Christ laid down his life on the cross not just to rescue us from hell, he did it to redeem our lives here on earth. Jesus constantly preached that we were to repent for the kingdom was at hand. Well, the kingdom isn't just heaven. Eternal life doesn't start just when we die. See, it's all right here and it's right now. And all of life is just training for us for the real one that starts when we breathe our last, and while we're here, we have an enemy who will constantly substitute fool's gold for the real thing, and more often than not, we fall for it. I mean, we look at what our culture considers the successful folks, those who've actually found money or fame and power and we forget only the people who actually get those things really know how little they deliver. They're the only ones who know how little satisfaction they give, and believe me, they're not talking. For most of the world, those things are the carrot at the end of the stick. And yet those who actually have gotten to the carrot and have actually been able to eat it, they're not going to shout to the world what a waste, it didn't deliver.

I think we all experience in one way or another how empty, how unfulfilling worldly satisfaction really is. But what about the

other forms of idol worship that are far less obvious? I mean, what about making my children the living embodiment of my success or failure? What about making my career far more important than God? See, Keller pointed out that one of the things about the ancient gods is what they required is sacrifice. He says that, too, still happens today. You know, if you want to be successful in New York City where the goddess of success prevails, be prepared to sacrifice your family because you probably can't reach the top in the world of finance and still be the husband and father God wants you to be. It's got to go. I mean, I know because I know folks who have made it to the top and it has cost them their family. Ask Tiger Woods how it was that he thought he could serve both Artemis and Aphrodite at the same time and keep his family? And we're shocked when these things just blow up. But you see, God sees them right from the start and he will do whatever it takes to break the hold of an idol on us. What about making my reputation the only thing that really matters? I mean, would God really allow a person's reputation to be ruined? Wouldn't that hurt the gospel? Well, what if your reputation became an idol? I mean, is God willing to sacrifice your reputation in order to purge you of this false god? What if your name was Joseph? What if you, like Daniel, were kidnapped but now things are all going well and now you're running Potiphar's household, you're a big shot and everybody's looking to you. Suddenly you find yourself innocent

but with your reputation in tatters and you're sitting in a jail cell accused of raping Potiphar's wife. Would God allow that to happen to one of his own? He did. I mean Joseph's charges were never really resolved. I mean, he was just needed in Pharaoh's court. And we think how about Jonah? Jonah was somebody who made Israel an idol. Jonah got a three-night all-expenses-paid trip to the belly of a fish. And when he came to his senses, this is what he said in *Jonah 2:8*, he said: *"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs."* He got it. It was, extreme, but he got it. Also we -- don't think the enemy's going to give up enslaving us with our idols without a fight. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego went from being the leading governors in the country to outlaws sentenced to death in a fiery furnace because they recognized the dangers of idols and refused to participate. You see, if you are one of his and your idols are getting the best of you, don't be surprised if God uses some supreme extreme measures like he used with Joseph or Jonah, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to help you to see those idols for what they really are. See, our God who works all things together for good also assures us that this sin will find us out. And if there are idols in our lives, God is at work even now rooting them out and sometimes that's a very painful process.

So how do I know? I mean, how do I know if the good things in my

life have become ultimate things that I now worship as idols? Well, Keller points out three major signs in his book *Counterfeit Gods*. He says this first. "Look at your thoughts." This is what he says. He says: "One way requires that we look at our imagination. Archbishop William Temple once said, 'Your religion is what you do with your solitude.' In other words, the true God of your heart is what your thoughts effortlessly go to when there is nothing else demanding your attention. What do you enjoy daydreaming about? What occupies your mind when you have nothing else to think about? See, if every time your mind goes blank you find yourself thinking about your money, your house, your job, well, the chances are decent that they may have become an idol."

Second, he says look at your spending habits. "Another way to discern your heart's true love is to look at how you spend your money. Jesus said, 'Where your treasure is, there is your heart also.' Your money flows almost effortlessly towards your heart's greatest love. In fact, the mark of an idol is that you spend too much money on it and you must try to exercise self-control constantly. Our patterns of spending reveal our idols. Now it's been said that the book of life that defines your relationship with God most readily is your checkbook. It may be very sobering to do so, but it may well be a worthwhile effort to look over your checkbook or your credit card bills to see where the bulk of your

spending goes. You may find that you are funding an idol.

And lastly he says look at your emotions. "You may regularly go to a place of worship. You may have a full, devout set of doctrinal beliefs. You may be trying very hard to believe and obey God. However, what is your real daily functional salvation? What are you really living for? What is your real -- not your professed -- God? A good way to discern this is how you respond to unanswered prayers and frustrated hopes. If you ask for something that you don't get, you may become sad and disappointed. Then you go on. Hey, life's not over. Those are not your functional masters. But when you pray and work for something and you don't get it and you respond with explosive anger or deep despair, then you may have found your real god. Like Jonah, you become angry enough to die. Look for your idols at the bottom of your most painful emotions, especially those that never seem to lift and that drive you to do things that you know are wrong." He said be willing to stare down your deepest fears and pain as possibly an idol that God is giving you at last the wisdom to see. Ask yourself what occupies my mind, my spending patterns and my most powerful emotions. Now that's excellent but very painful advice.

Just to review the bidding, I said at the beginning of this message we need God to show us first what an idol is. And we found the

surprise here is that more often than not for us Christians idols are good things pushed to ultimate things. Second, we asked how does an idol operate? It operates by taking over the functional control of the place that only God should occupy in our lives. And we identify them by looking at our thought patterns, our spending patterns, and our emotional reactions to unanswered prayer.

Thirdly, we ask -- and this is the most important one -- how can we defeat them? Well, again, Keller suggests what Paul tells us in *Colossians 3:1-5*, and what he says is it's all a matter of feeding appetites. Let me just read to you *Colossians 3*, it says this: *If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: Fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. See, Paul says seek those things which are above. Set your mind on things that are above, not on this earth. And what he's talking about is appetites. He's talking about feeding appetites. Our lives are a series of appetites that grew and changed as we grew and changed, and they grew as we fed them. When I was seven, I wanted to be a cowboy. I mean, that was the most important thing in the world to me. I saw nothing but cowboy

shows on TV. That's what I wanted to be. By the time I was 11, my appetite had changed from a cowboy to an athlete. And by the time I got to college I had an appetite to be a writer, then a scientist, and then I met Janice and my only appetite was to be a husband. In May of 1973 I met Jesus, or should I say that Jesus met me, and from that day forward, he gave me a brand new appetite. And God describes how that happens in *Ezekiel 36*, he says: *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.* You see, from that day forward I had this brand new heart of flesh. I was no longer a slave to my old pattern of living, my old appetites, and now the growth of my new God-given appetite is up to me.

Remember Jonah's words from the belly of the fish, he says: *"Those who cling to worthless idols forfeit the grace that could be theirs."* And what Jonah is saying is he's describing a choice that we make to embrace the grace that God gives us to grow as believers or to remain as milk-fed babies clinging to worthless idols. *Romans 6* says: *But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you have come to obey from your heart the pattern of teaching that has now claimed your allegiance. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.* See, as a

believer now, it's my choice, it's my choice as to what appetite I'm going to be slave to, the idols or the kingdom. *Romans 6:16* says: *Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one you obey -- whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness?* See, in Christ, I now for the first time had the freedom to choose the appetite of obedience. I had lots of other good appetites as well, I had the appetite to be a husband, to be a father, I had an appetite to own my own business and each one flowed from the other previous one, but they all ran on a parallel track with my new appetite for the kingdom of God. But sometimes some of those good appetites compete with the best appetite. And the urgency of those good appetites make them seem at times like they were the best of appetites, but they're not. I said this many, many times, the devil has a playbook for every single one of us, and it is keyed specifically to who we are. The playbook for Christians is not going to be sex, drugs, and rock 'n roll. It's just not. It's going to be something far more dangerous because it's not going to be -- quote -- "bad things." It's going to be good things like family, career, ministry, pushed from a good thing to an ultimate thing. See, it's one thing to come down on obvious sins, it's something quite different to point out the danger in doing good things for the wrong reasons. Jesus was killed by the good people of his day. He was killed because he

called a spade a spade and an idol an idol. And so if I want to conquer my own idols, I first have to order my own appetite so that Christ and his kingdom is number one. I mean, that appetite will set in order all my other appetites. And Paul proclaimed it, he said this in *Philippians 3:7*: *But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I might gain Christ.* Paul's talking about good stuff here. He's saying every good and outstanding thing in my life I count as rubbish. He actually is describing it as dung. He says I count as dung compared to gaining Christ. You see, that's the appetite we want to have. I mean, how did Paul manage to get that appetite? How did he manage to get there? How did he develop this all-consuming appetite for Christ? What I've learned in the 43 years since I've received my new appetite for Christ is that the appetite for Christ and his kingdom works just like any other appetite. It grows by feeding it. James says in *James 4:8*: *Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.* *Psalm 34* says: *Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him!* Jesus said in *John 15:5*: *"Abide in me and you will bear much fruit."* I've said this many, many times, loosely translated, Jesus is saying the more you hang around me, the more I'm going to rub off on you. The more I rub off on you the more your hunger for

me and my kingdom is going to grow because you grow in appetite by feeding it. You know, the more you know Jesus, the more you're going to love him. The more you love him, the more you want to serve him. The more you serve him, the more you realize that this isn't the cotton candy that the world is offering us, this is the real thing. This satisfies like nothing else. The more you *taste and see that the Lord is good*, the more you appreciate God's amazement at our appetite for cotton candy. I mean, how many of us can look in the mirror and honestly say my greatest passion, my deepest appetite is Christ and his kingdom. I mean, that's not God's plan for the exceptional saint among us, the one out of a hundred. That's God's plan for every single person in this building. And if you can't look in that mirror and say that Christ is my deepest appetite, something is wrong. God says you're only cheating yourself. See, God wants more for us than that. God's love is not based on how well you pass the appetite test. I mean, after all, while we were still sinners Christ died for us. And his offer to his children has always been filet mignon, and yet he's saying truth be told, you guys want burgers, you want fast food, some of you want cotton candy. *Isaiah 55:2 says: Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare.* Again, he's just saying the same thing over and over again, you grow an appetite by feeding it, and

this appetite, this appetite for Christ and his kingdom you feed by scripture, by prayer, by fellowship. Every single day, Janice and I pray that our greatest joy and deepest pleasure would be to see Christ high and lifted up. I pray God to feed that appetite, and God has given us the means to feed it. You see, you feed this appetite by making the body of Christ the place where through Bible study or small groups or prayer or worship or bearing one another's burdens you eat what is good. That's why the church is here. I mean, the reason why this local body exists is to proclaim over and over again not what is good but what is best, and that's Christ Jesus and him crucified. I mean, we may not be staring at a ninety-foot idol and a fiery furnace just waiting for us if we don't bow down to it, make no mistake about it, our idols are just as real and just as dangerous. And the way each of us can conquer the idols that we all tend to worship is to grow each of us by growing our appetites, 'cause when you fully embrace what is ultimately good and what is alone ultimately satisfying, then even the multiple good things that we all care about, like family and career and ministry, they all begin to assume their rightful place. God's almost pleading with us when he says listen, listen to me, and eat what is good and your soul will delight in the richest of fare. So I, too, I plead with you, I plead with you to change your spiritual diet.

You know, this morning we just passed out a little survey of what it is that we are trying to approach on Wednesday nights when we get together and just talk about the things of the kingdom. I appeal to you, fill that out, make that a part of your week. Grow your appetite. Do that and you'll be able to say with Paul, I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, I again, I thank you for the love that you have for us, the unconditional love that you have for us. You want only the best for us, and the best is you, the best is Christ and him crucified. Father, I pray that you would give us the means and the ability to grow the appetite that we have for you, the appetite that you gave us when you came into our lives. Give us the grace, the strength, the peace and the wisdom to do just that, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.