

## “Gods At War” - Joshua 24:14-27

Pastor Burt Garwood - January 7, 2018

“Imagine a man who has been coughing constantly. The doctor runs his tests: Lung cancer. He doesn’t tell his patient about the cancer. Instead, he writes a prescription for strong cough medicine and tells him that he should be feeling better soon. And sure enough, he sleeps much better that night. The cough syrup seems to have solved his problem. Meanwhile, very quietly, the cancer is eating away at his body. Cancer is the real problem; coughing is only a symptom.”

- Every week people come to church coughing. They share their struggles. In their minds, they’ve nailed it: They can’t stop coughing.
- The truth is that they’re talking about a symptom. The true illness is idolatry. *“Idolatry is the most discussed problem in the Bible and one of the most powerful spiritual and intellectual concepts in the believer’s arsenal. Yet for Christians today it is one of the least meaningful notions...”* [Os Guinness]

The whole subject of idols seems mostly obsolete.

- God’s command in Exodus 20:3 at the giving of the 10 Commandments was that the people follow no other gods but Him. That command was for then, not for now. Right?
- We don’t know anyone who kneels before golden statues or bows down before carved images. Idolatry seems so primitive. And yet idolatry is the number one issue in the Bible, and that should raise caution signals for us.

The gods are at war, and their strength is not to be underestimated. These gods clash for the throne of your heart, and much is at stake. Everything about me, everything I do, every relationship I have, everything I hope or dream or wish to become, depends upon what god wins the war.

- What if it’s not about statues? What if the gods take identities that are so ordinary that we don’t recognize them as gods at all? What if we do our “kneeling” and our “bowing” with our imaginations, our checkbooks, our search engines, our calendars?
- What if I told you that every sin you are struggling with, every discouragement you are dealing with—even the lack of purpose you’re living with is because of idolatry?

When you read the Old Testament, you get a clear picture that there is our Yahweh God, our Father-God, who created all things. He’s the God of the people of Israel, who freed them from slavery in Egypt.

- At the same time, there other “gods” among the nations, Baal, Dagon, Asherah, Chemosh and the Egyptian gods, of whom Pharaoh himself was considered a god.
- To think that these gods were just a figment of the people’s imagination, captured in images carved from wood or poured into castings from hot metal...you would be wrong.
- Scholars and theologians are not so quick to dismiss these gods as they are to identify them with the demonic hordes at satan’s bidding who appear as gods to the ancient people with a particular display of power.
- Some of it seemed to harmless...like a fertility god who helped you to get pregnant, or a god of harvest or rain.
- It was a real problem for the people of Israel who were supposed to follow only our Yahweh God. Look at what Joshua says...READ: Joshua 24:14-15
- These gods were battling for the hearts of the people of Israel. And Joshua was calling them to make a choice. What does this have to do with us in modern times?

### 1. Understand that all of us are worshipers.

- *“The opposite of theism is not atheism, it’s idolatry.”* [Peter Kreft] The atheist has to have faith in something...even if it’s his personal philosophy on life.
- God is very clear that if you aren’t seeking to know, love and follow him, that you are idolizing someone or something else.
- The truth is there are gods waging a war for your heart. These gods manifest themselves in different forms today. Materialism, addiction, pampering, lust, greed, pride, narcissism, eating, working out, the need for affirmation or love, just to name a few.

### 2. Identify the gods at war for your heart.

- What are you most disappointed with? What we are most disappointed with often reveals where we have put our hope. Where we put our hope reveals our god.
- What do you sacrifice your time and money for? The word “serve” appears seven times in Joshua’s speech. Who or what you serve is revealed by how you spend your time and money.
- Where do you go when you’re hurt? Where we go when we are hurt creates an honest moment of worship. Where do you go for comfort? Are you running to someone or something other than God?

### 3. Make a worship choice today.

- READ: Joshua 24:15. The verb tense Joshua uses for “choose” isn’t just a reference to a choice that they made once upon a time. Joshua is saying “I chose, I choose, I will keep choosing.”
- Choosing this day means we: Appreciate what God has done. READ: Joshua 24:2-13. When we gather for worship we celebrate what God has done for us through Jesus Christ.
- Recognize who God is. READ: Joshua 24:19. He will not share the hearts of his people with false gods.
- Smash all other gods. READ: Joshua 24:23.

If you’ve been trying take cough syrup to treat the sin you’re struggling with and the discouragement you’re dealing with, then choose this day that the Lord God alone will sit on the throne of your heart.

- I’m praying for you over the next 6 weeks, that this sermon series would not go unheard in you.
- That you would ask the Holy Spirit to help you take an honest look at yourself and examine where you might be putting someone or something in your life on the throne of your heart...making that person or thing into an idol...and thereby breaking your relationship with your Father-God in heaven.
- I pray these next 6 weeks will be a time of awakening for you to see just how covert satan really is when it comes to getting you to fall head over heels for the things of this world.
- I pray that you don’t take this lightly...and that you will do something about it, so that your life serves and worships God and God alone.

[Borrowed heavily from Kyle Idleman’s sermon series “Gods At War”, thanks for blessing us Kyle with this.]