

Becoming Like What We Worship

The Loss of Meaning and the Problem of Idolatry: part 3

March 12, 2023

Isaiah 6

The principle: If we worship idols, we will become like the idols, and that likeness will ruin us.

1. When we think of idolatry, our minds think of uneducated and superstitious people bowing down to little statues. We scoff at them, declaring that we are too sophisticated to do such foolishness.

DAY 1: Isaiah 6:1-7

2. Israel's sin, from beginning to end was idolatry As Paul wrote, they exchanged the glory of God for something else.

The holiness of God (Isa. 6:1-4)

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. ² Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. ³ And they were calling to one another:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory."

⁴ At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

3. Imagine you were in Isaiah's shoes. King Uzziah had been a good king for most of his reign. His death was discouraging to the people. It is still on Isaiah's mind.

4. Against this backdrop of grief, God gives Isaiah a vision.

5. What would you have thought and felt if you had seen this vision of God, especially in the face of grief?

Isaiah's unholiness is forgiven (Isa. 6:5-7)

Isaiah 6:5 "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty."

⁶ Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. ⁷ With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for."

6. God's holiness makes Isaiah's sin painfully apparent.

7. Isaiah is made holy by God, not by Isaiah's actions. There is nothing in this story that intimates that Isaiah could have cleansed his tongue, words, and mouth. Once he confessed his sin, the forgiveness and cleansing was done by God. Isaiah was *declared* holy.

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

DAY 2: Isaiah 6:8-13

Isaiah 6:5 and I live among a people of unclean lips...

1. Isaiah is very cognizant of his nation's sin.

Isaiah's commission (Isa. 6:8-10)

Isaiah 6:8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"

2. God is on the move, ready to confront His people with their sin, but it takes a mouthpiece. Isaiah accepts the assignment and call.

Isaiah 6:9-10: Judgment for idolatry

3. God gives Isaiah the essence of the message he is to deliver to the people.

Isaiah 6:9 He said, "Go and tell this people: "Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving."¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed."

4. What does God point out about the nature of the hearer's eyes and ears? Are they opened? Closed? "Glued" shut?

5. The plight of the people is such that nothing short of sarcasm will awaken them to their true stubborn blindness and deafness.

The expected effects (Isa. 6:11-13)

Isaiah 6:11 Then I said, "For how long, Lord?"

And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted and the fields ruined and ravaged,¹² until the LORD has sent everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken.¹³ And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land."

6. Though Isaiah is to deliver the message, the likelihood is that most of the people will hit bottom before they will soften and repent.

7. The ultimate end will be an invasion, a terrible defeat and removal from the land to Babylon as slaves.

8. What strikes you from today's devotional?

Day 3: Drivers of idolatry

Isaiah 2:8 They worship the work of their hands.

*Psalm 115:4 But their idols are silver and gold, **made by human hands**.⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see.⁶ They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell.⁷ They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats.⁸ Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.*

1. What drives idolatry in the human heart?

a. Idolatry is the attempt to gain “leverage” with God or false gods. It is akin to superstition. It is the foolish belief that I can get what I want by doing good, being good, being religious, being sincere, being kind or a hundred different trusts.

Zech. 4:6 ...Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts.

b. Idolatry is the attempt to “make it happen” by one’s own efforts, knowledge, intentions, will power, etc.

c. Idolatry is driven by misplaced trust, foolish trusts.

Isaiah 44:20 ...a deluded heart misleads him; he cannot save himself, or say, “Is not this thing in my right hand a lie?”

2. What are your real greatest hopes for satisfaction? What is the object of your real trust to find real life?

Someone? _____

Something? _____

An outcome? _____

A feeling? _____

3. Do the three points under #1 resonate with you? Do you see yourself “trying to make it happen” by your own efforts? How?

4. In our modern world, worshipping an idol is not bowing down to a little statue. We “worship” an idol whenever we set our hope in what we think the idol (person, thing, outcome, or feeling) can deliver for us—satisfaction, importance, value, validation, acceptance, etc.

5. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 4: Consequences of idolatry

*Psalm 115:4 But their idols are silver and gold, made by human hands. ⁵ They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but cannot see. ⁶ They have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but cannot smell. ⁷ They have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but cannot walk, nor can they utter a sound with their throats. ⁸ **Those who make them will be like them, and so will all who trust in them.***

1. What we revere (worship) we will replicate. When we worship someone that cannot see or hear wisdom, we become devoid of wisdom. When we worship something that is lifeless, we become lifeless.

2. Idolatry eventually leaves us devoid of meaning.

a. Idolatry is futile. Their “precious things” are of no profit.

*Isaiah 44:9 All who make idols are **nothing**, and the things they treasure are **worthless**.*

b. Idolatry will bring shame.

*Isaiah 42:17 But those who trust in idols, who say to images, ‘You are our gods,’ will be turned back in **utter shame**.*

*Ezekiel 6:9 Then in the nations where they have been carried captive, those who escape will remember me—how I have been grieved by their adulterous hearts, which have turned away from me, and by their eyes, which have lusted after their idols. **They will loathe themselves** for the evil they have done and for all their detestable practices. ¹⁰ And they will know that I am the LORD; I did not threaten in vain to bring this calamity on them.*

c. We become blind and deaf (to God’s direction, instruction, God’s will, God’s power, etc.)

Isa. 42:18 Hear, you deaf; look, you blind, and see! ¹⁹ Who is blind but my servant, and deaf like the messenger I send? Who is blind like the one in covenant with me, blind like the servant of the LORD? ²⁰ You have seen many things, but you pay no attention; your ears are open, but you do not listen.”

3. All of these consequences add up to what we call a “lack of self-esteem,” a “poor self-image,” despondency, a loss of meaning and a cluelessness about why this is happening. When we ask ourselves, “What’s wrong with me?” we fail to see or understand. Our idols fail us.

4. What strikes you from today’s devotional?

DAY 5: Principles of idolatry and the loss of meaning (Lifeless)

Habakkuk 2:18 “Of what value is an idol carved by a craftsman? Or an image that teaches lies? For the one who makes it trusts in his own creation; he makes idols that cannot speak.

*¹⁹ Woe to him who says to wood, ‘Come to life!’ Or to **lifeless** stone, ‘Wake up!’ Can it give guidance? It is covered with gold and silver; there is no breath in it.”*

²⁰ The LORD is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him.

1. He who **trusts** in his own handiwork.... There is only emptiness on the other side. In contrast is the “living God who is in His holy temple.

If we worship idols, we will become like the idols, and
that likeness will drain and ruin us.

2. You will become as **lifeless** as the idols you worship. That is the judgment for idolatry. People are punished by the means of their own sin.

3. It is the same principle with regards to eternity. “You did not want to worship me and love my people while you were here on earth. You shall have your wish and stubborn commitment to yourself throughout the next life.” Unbelieving and stubborn people are given what they most want.

4. By trusting idols, they were saying that the Lord did not have eyes to see or ears to hear their blasphemous worship of things. They were treating the true God as a false idol and the truly false idols as the true God.

Psalm 94:7 They say, “The LORD does not see; the God of Jacob takes no notice.” ⁸ Take notice, you senseless ones among the people; you fools, when will you become wise?

⁹ Does he who fashioned the ear not hear? Does he who formed the eye not see? ¹⁰ Does he who disciplines nations not punish? Does he who teaches mankind lack knowledge? ¹¹ The LORD knows all human plans; he knows that they are futile.

We resemble what we revere, either for ruin or restoration.

5. They thought the worship of their idols would lead to increased prosperity, enhanced life and happiness. Ironically, it had the opposite effects. (Prov. 14:12). “You like idols, do you? You will become like your idols, and that likeness will devastate you.”

6. What strikes you from today’s devotional?