

Sermon - Don't eat at Jezebel's table

Something happened thousands of years ago on a hill called Mt. Carmel. It is located by the Mediterranean Sea in what is now the north part of Israel.

Anyway, the king of Israel at the time was a fellow named Ahab; this is what the Bible says about Ahab.

1 Kings 16:30-31, *"Ahab... did more evil in the eyes of the LORD than any of those before him. He not only considered it trivial to commit the sins of Jeroboam, but he also married Jezebel daughter of the king of the Sidonians, and began to serve Baal and worship him."*

Jezebel worshiped the idol Baal, as a matter of fact her father's name was Ethbaal which means, *"Baal is alive!"* After King Ahab married Jezebel he started worshipping the idol Baal also. He and Jezebel also worshipped the idol **Asherah** which was the female idol connected to the male idol **Baal**.

In chapter 18 the prophet Elijah met king Ahab and threw down a challenge. We read about it in verses 18 & 19, Elijah told Ahab, *"You have abandoned the LORD's commands and have followed the Baals. Now summon the people from all over Israel to meet me on Mount Carmel. And bring the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."*

It was an **extraordinary challenge**. Elijah called together the people of Israel and this is what he told them: Verse 22, *"I am the only one of the LORD's prophets left, but Baal has four hundred and fifty prophets. Get two bulls for us. Let them choose one for themselves, and let them cut it into pieces and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. I will prepare the other bull and put it on the wood but not set fire to it. ²⁴ Then you call on the name of your god, and I will call on the name of the LORD. The god who answers by fire—he is God."*

So the prophets of Baal & Asherah went first and prepared a bull and put it on their altar and they prayed to Baal and danced around the altar for hours but nothing happened. So **Elijah had a little fun with them**.

Verse 27, *"At noon Elijah began to taunt them. "Shout louder!" he said. "Surely he is a god! Perhaps he is deep in thought, or busy, or traveling. Maybe he is sleeping and must be awakened." ²⁸ So they shouted louder and slashed themselves with swords and spears, as was their custom, until their blood flowed. ²⁹ Midday passed, and they continued their frantic prophesying until the time for the evening sacrifice. But there was no response, no one answered, no one paid attention."*

Okay, now it is Elijah's turn. Verse 31, *"With stones he built an altar in the name of the LORD, and he dug a trench around it. ³ He arranged the wood, cut the bull into pieces and laid it on the wood."*

Then he said to them, *"Fill four large jars with water and pour it on the offering and on the wood." "Do it again," he said, and they did it again. "Do it a third time," he ordered, and they did it the third time. The water ran down around the altar and even filled the trench.*

At the time of sacrifice, the prophet Elijah stepped forward and prayed: "O LORD, God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, let it be known today that you are God in Israel and that I am your servant and have done all these things at your command. Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench."

Okay, that's pretty awesome but what happened to the prophets of Baal **that ate at Jezebel's table?**

Verse 41, *"Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Valley and slaughtered there."* So that is what happened to the idol worshippers. Aren't you glad we don't worship idols anymore?

But wait a minute, let's take a closer look.

When I say idols, you probably think of carved images, golden statues of Buddha...perhaps images from OT stories pop into your head.

Israel had a long-term problem with idolatry, it even continued into New Testament times and we find Paul giving this warning to the Christians in Corinth: 1 Corinthians 10:14, *"Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry."*

Many of the Corinthian believers had backgrounds in idol worship, and others simply were being drawn into it because idolatry was so rampant in Corinth.

We don't think of idolatry as a common sin today, and we don't hear that word used much. We hear other less-offensive phrases, such as **"misplaced priorities"** or **"skewed perspectives."**

But like it or not, regardless of which century you live in, worshipping anything or any person more than God is called idolatry! Even John wrote in his first epistle (5:21), *"...keep yourselves from idols."*

What is the **definition** of an idol? An idol is anything that takes first place before God; it becomes the false god that we serve. Anything or anyone who comes before God is an idol.

To further explain what idolatry is let's look at 1 Corinthians 10:14 again, it starts out with the word "*Therefore...flee from idolatry.*" Paul is about to give them a principle based on what he said earlier.

And what he was referring to was when **Moses** came down from the mountain with the 10 Commandments and the people had made an idol and were worshipping it. Exodus 32

Paul reminded them how the people had been punished by God and told them that "**these things**" had been written down as a warning for them and, therefore, for us.

"**These things**" refers to when the Israelites refused to follow God; they were following something else. That is idolatry! That's why idolatry is always the core issue when it comes to obedience.

When we choose our own way instead of God's way, we commit the sin of idolatry. Make no mistake – each time we choose what **WE want** instead of what **God wants**, we are worshipping ourselves more than God! That's idolatry.

And you are faced with this decision every day – disobedience is idolatry! **You are saying**, "*I love my sin more than I love God.*" "*I love my way more than I love God.*" "*I love my desires more than I love God.*" It's nothing short of idolatry!

Idolatry is always, first, an inner, spiritual sin of the heart that involves lusting after things selfishly instead of loving God supremely! Look at the remainder of 10:6 ... "*setting our hearts on evil things...*"

Now, if idolatry is a sin of the heart, how can we detect it?

Idolatry becomes visible in things like addictive habits, our hobbies or possessions controlling us instead of us controlling them, unhealthy relationships, rebellious attitudes and divisive words.

When we allow our hearts to love someone or something else more than we love God, right away it shows up in our actions.

There are **four sins** listed here in Paul's example about fleeing from idolatry. These four sins are the sins that dogged the Israelites for years because they refused to follow God at all times. Especially, when they were in a major transition time.

- **False worship** (Ex 32...Golden Calf)
- **Sexual immorality** (Ex 32 The sexual immorality in the way they "worshipped" the calf.)
- **Testing the Lord** (Num 21...questioning God's providence and plan. Who is this Moses anyway?)
- **Grumbling** (Num 16-17...complaining against God and his appointed leadership - many, many times.)

For centuries the Israelites had to deal with these sins on a regular basis. They would let unbelief enter their hearts and they paid dearly for their refusal to obey.

And **it's much the same for us**. Almost anything can be turned into an idol. For instance:

A friend of mine, someone who has visited us here at Baxter, told me about a time when he was working up on the **North Slope**. He heard that some of the workers had started a small church service on Sundays.

So he found out where and when they met and took his Bible and went to the service. He said there were about 20 or so guys there, they sang some songs and then there was a message just like the way most churches hold services.

But then he said a strange thing happened after the service. Some of the men gathered around him and said he couldn't come to their services any more. He was flabbergasted, he hadn't said and done anything and he was dressed the same way they were.

He couldn't figure out what he had done wrong when they told him they had noticed that **his Bible wasn't the King James Version**. Isn't that amazing? They had managed to make the Bible into an idol! Satan must roll on the ground laughing when things like that happen.

I think this is the reason we don't have any **artifacts from Jesus' life** here on earth. Can you imagine if they had found sandals that He had actually worn? They

would be in a monastery on some hill top and people would be making pilgrimages on their knees up the mountain to worship them.

What are some more things that can turn into an idol?

1. A job – nothing wrong with money, success or achievement. But let that creep into your heart to the point where it means more than God, and you'll start short changing your family, missing church, robbing from God, living selfishly. Your actions show your job is your idol.

2. A hobby – a little softball, or a little boating, a little time on the Internet, some TV now and then. But let your heart be taken over by your own desires, and suddenly you spend all your time there, even delaying more important things you ought to be doing because you *"ran out of time"* or *"just couldn't get around to it."* Your hobby has become your idol. Do you watch TV 3 or 4 hours a night but don't have time to read your Bible?

3. A friend – You have a friend, maybe at work, maybe even at a Bible study, but the friendship starts turning too familiar. You know you're getting too close for comfort, but you don't reign it in.

Instead, you start wondering, dreaming; lusting about what life might be like with her or him. Next thing you know your family is destroyed and your marriage ruined **all because sexual lust became your idol.**

Years ago at the other church, a couple came to see me for counseling. I had seen her around the church but I hadn't seen him before. He was looking very serious, she was crying. Over the years she had tried to get him to come to church but he wouldn't come so she brought the children and came without him.

She joined one of the home Bible studies that was going on and she poured her heart out about how sad she was about her husband's refusal to come to church. One of the fellows in the study was very sympathetic and went out of his way to encourage her.

Well, over time they became close and had an on-going sexual affair for 3 years before her husband found out. Now they were in my office and she was crying and he was stunned that she would do that to him and the family.

I don't know if their marriage made it or not, to tell you the truth I don't remember their name and wouldn't recognize them now if I saw them. But if their marriage

did make it what do you think he thought about the church and religion now? You think he would be real anxious to come to church now?

I guarantee you that in a group this size there are people here today that are struggling with the idol of lust. They are having an affair, sex outside of marriage or struggling with pornography.

4. A disappointment – Even this can become an idol. Things have never worked out for you, and the bitterness you harbor is incredible.

What should have been a place for God's grace to carry you through became a ditch in which you continue to **wallow**. Oh, how you love to go over and over it.

God's influence in your life gets less and less as you hang onto and wallow in your disappointment. You are **unwilling** to let things go, you are worshipping at the idol of discontent and "*what might have been.*"

What about you? Are there idols in your life that you are worshipping? Here is a test to discover if there are any idols in your life:

Carefully and honestly **analyze** your habits, hobbies, words, attitudes, and relationships, then ask yourself, "*Do any of these show you love something or someone else more than you love God?*" Think of some of the examples we have talked about, did any make you uncomfortable? If so, why?

How do you defeat the idols in your life?

Idolatry can be resisted by **dedicating** yourself to the Lord, (the spiritual term is **consecration**) and by **running** from it. (**separating** ourselves from it). Like Paul said "*Flee from it.*"

Now what are we talking about? **To consecrate something means to set it apart for God's use.** Dedicating or consecrating ourselves means we are setting ourselves apart for the Lord. Our weekly partaking of Communion is an opportunity for each of us to rededicate, to consecrate, ourselves to the Lord.

Throughout the OT we read about Moses or Joshua or a prophet say, "*Consecrate yourselves to the Lord this day!*" And Paul wrote in Romans 12:1, "*Offer yourselves as living sacrifices, set apart and holy.*"

Consecrate yourselves to the Lord! Accept Him. Turn the throne of your life over to the Lord Jesus Christ. Once we do that, how do we conduct our life? **How do consecrated people live?** Separated to the Lord!

Here's what was happening in Corinth – believers were participating in communion, but also attending pagan ceremonies. (vs. 20-21)

In that day there were sacrifices made to idols and the question was *“Is it okay to eat meat sacrificed to idols.”* The problem, Paul said, is not the meat at the ceremony. The problem is that **you are at the ceremony in the first place**. It was their involvement that opened the door to sin and unbelief.

A few years ago a fellow pastor said he had really enjoyed a **certain movie** so Barb and I went to see it and there was so much swearing and taking the Lord's name in vain that Barb and I walked out.

Then that Sunday a guy in the church mentioned that he and his wife went to see that movie and I told him that we had walked out because of all the swearing and the taking of the Lord's name in vain. Then he told me, **“Oh, I don't pay any attention to that.”** The apostle Paul says maybe the problem isn't just the sinful language, it's the fact that you were there obviously comfortable around it in the first place!

For those who are consecrated to God, this type of **“fence straddling”** is off limits. You can't have one foot in this world and one foot in the Kingdom of God. So he urges them to leave and not go to those idol worship feasts in the first place.

I'm no **prude**, but hearing the Lord's name used as a swear word is more than I can abide. We are to be a light **in** the world, not just **to** the world. We are in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation as ambassadors.

We are ambassadors; however, we are still strangers, pilgrims, and sojourners! We are in a place where, as God's holy people, we must live and act differently. **Feeling comfortable around sin should never be the norm.**

We need to live lives separated from the philosophy and evil practices of the world. If you decide to ignore the idolatry in your life, be aware that God, at some point, will take action. His holy character demands it.

Idolatry arouses God's righteous jealousy and anger and moves Him to take action against our pride. I Cor. 10:22, "Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy?" It's a fearful thing to anger the Almighty God!

How can you stand against the attack of idolatry in your own life and in your family? Here are some ideas...

Begin each day by kneeling down in humble submission to your Lord and Savior! Give yourself daily, wholly and completely to Jesus Christ. When you receive communion each week make it a time that you consecrate yourself again to the Lord.

Pray against the presence of idolatry in your life. Pray that this day you will find your comfort in the Holy Spirit and not the sin you are struggling with. Then pray the same thing **tomorrow** and the **next day** and soon it will be a **week**, then a **month** and then a **year**.

What does your life center around? What is the **primary** focus?

An idol doesn't have to be a bad thing; it can be a good thing.

Some people park their idols in their garage. Some people park their idol at the marina. Some people put their idols in their safe deposit box.

Be conscious of what is important in your life and make sure **you are not eating** at Jezebel's table.

A lot of people are living only for earthly pleasures that cannot satisfy their deepest longings. Millions of people are vainly chasing after money, fame, power, prestige, or pleasure.

Jesus said, "*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.*" (Matt. 5:6)